

**Forging the Shaft of the Spear of Victory:
The Creation and Evolution of the Home Fleet
in the Prewar Era, 1900-1914**

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ABSTRACT

The Royal Navy's main—but not only—weapon at the beginning of the First World War was the Grand Fleet, whose pre-war title was the Home Fleet. The Home Fleet was brought into being in April 1907 after a controversial and confusing series of communications between Sir John Fisher at the Admiralty, the Cs-in-C. of the three main battle fleets, and Admiral Francis Bridgeman, who was Fisher's choice to command the new organization. The initial motive for this reorganization was a financial one: the new Liberal government demanded economies in naval expenditure on top of those introduced by Fisher for the now-ousted Conservatives. During the internal discussions on the proposed Home Fleet in the fall of 1906, three new motives were introduced:

- 1) A desire to improve on the existing reserve force structure.
- 2) Furtherance of a trend towards centralized Admiralty control of war operations replacing the previous independence of fleet and station commanders.
- 3) The shift from a primarily anti-Dual Alliance strategic posture to a primarily anti-German one.

This combination of financial and strategic motives would set the stage for future Admiralty policy throughout the remainder of the Prewar Era. The developments related to these motives ensured the Home Fleet would not remain in its initial form for long. Attacks on the Home Fleet from within the Navy resulted in the accelerated demise of the Navy's previous first-line organization in home waters, the Channel Fleet, and shifting geostrategic paradigms reduced the importance of theatres outside the North Sea. Despite efforts by advocates of both those who wished to reduce naval expenditure and advocates of new technologies such as the submarine, the dreadnought-based Home Fleet remained the principal defence of the realm in July 1914, and was likely to remain so into the immediate future.

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List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
C.-in-C.	Commander-in-Chief
CCAC	Churchill College Archive Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge
C.I.D.	Committee of Imperial Defence
C.O.S.	Chief of Staff
D.N.C.	Director/Department of Naval Construction
D.N.I.	Director/Department of Naval Intelligence
D.N.O.	Director/Department of Naval Ordnance
D.O.D.	Director, Operations Division, Admiralty War Staff
I.C.A.	Inspecting Captain of Aircraft
IHR	<i>The International History Review</i>
IJNH	<i>The International Journal of Naval History</i>
JRUSI	<i>The Journal of the Royal United Services Institution</i>
JSS	<i>The Journal of Strategic Studies</i>
LHCMH	Liddell Hart Centre for Military History, King's College, London
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
NHB	Naval Historical Branch, HMNB Portsmouth
N.I.D.	Naval Intelligence Division
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
NMRN	National Museum of the Royal Navy, HMNB Portsmouth
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
S.N.O.	Senior Naval Officer
T.B.	Torpedo Boat
T.B.D.	Torpedo Boat Destroyer
TINA	<i>Transactions of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects</i>
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

INTRODUCTION

Just after the end of the First World War, the Admiralty produced a secret memorandum that included the following paragraph:

‘The war has been fought and the final decision reached on land; but the land campaign was rendered possible only by reinforcements and supply from overseas. The armies of the Western Front, where the main offensive lay, have to a great extent been transported thither across the seas. The passage of allied troops to the Dardanelles, Salonika, Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia depended entirely on the security of our sea communications. The campaigns of East Africa, Samoa, New Guinea, South West Africa and the Cameroons, and of Archangel in the far north rested on the same foundation. All these depended on the supremacy of the allies at sea – guaranteed by the Grand Fleet – and on the carrying power of the British Mercantile marine. The Navy and Mercantile of Great Britain have, in fact, been the spearshaft of which the Allied armies have been the point.’¹

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, the Grand Fleet’s first wartime commander, felt strongly enough to express similar sentiments in his book *The Grand Fleet*, where he stated that ‘*our Fleet was the one and only factor that was vital to the existence of the Empire*, as indeed to the Allied cause.’² The context for these quotes must be remembered. Contrary to prewar expectations there had been no great decisive battle at sea, no ‘Armageddon’, to use Lord Fisher’s evocative term.³ The closest approximation of such a battle was the Battle of Jutland, which was inconclusive and a disappointment to the extent that a Midshipman from the dreadnought *Neptune* recounted that when ‘we heard that our seamen going to hospital had been jeered at and “boo’ed” by some shore folk, it was almost too much’.⁴

¹ Admiralty, ‘The British Naval Effort: 4th August 1914 to 11th November 1918’, 24 December 1918, ADM 167/57, Admiralty MSS, TNA. Quoted in Eric Grove, *Royal Navy Since 1815*, paperback ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 142-143.

² Italics original. Admiral Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa, *The Grand Fleet 1914-1916: Its Creation, Development and Work*, reprint ed. (Ringshall: Ad Hoc Publications, 2006), p. 255.

³ Fisher used this term often. One example is Lord Fisher to A.J. Balfour, 23 October 1910, Add MS 49712, A.J. Balfour MSS, BL.

⁴ Quoted in H.W. Fawcett and G.W. Hooper, *The Fighting at Jutland: The Personal Experiences of Forty-five Officers and Men of the British Fleet*, abridged ed. (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd.: 1921), p. 102.

Compared to the Army's much more visible experiences on the Western Front, the Navy's role in the hard-fought victory of 1918 could be easily diminished, necessitating reminders of its unglamorous but essential roles such as Jellicoe's, or Churchill's famous remark that the Grand Fleet C.-in-C. 'was the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon.'⁵ Even when the importance of the Grand Fleet's contribution to the Allies' cause is recognized, it is not without reason that Professor Eric Grove describes it as 'an unspectacular strategy of containment'.⁶ Sweeps out of Scapa and a ceaseless patrol against German merchantmen and commerce raiders between the Shetlands and Norway were rarely the stuff of high drama, especially to 'those who wished to break out of the strait-jacket of trench warfare and costly offensives in Flanders and northern France.'⁷ The importance of the defeat of the U-Boats, and the Admiralty's supposed incompetence regarding that campaign—whose effects hit the British public more directly than any other German naval effort—further obscured the Grand Fleet's steady strangling of German trade and war industries. The Royal Navy's sterling performance twenty years later in the Second World War distorted discussions of the Grand Fleet's performance even more, such that even today revisionist opinions are still perhaps more guarded than they might be. It is quite reasonable for the distinguished maritime historian Professor N.A.M. Rodger to warn that 'it may be that the contrast between the navy's performances in the

⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, ii, new ed. (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1939), p. 1015. The paragraph leading up to this statement deserves quotation as well:

'The standpoint of the Commander-in-Chief was unique. His responsibilities were on a different scale from all others. It might fall to him as to no other man—Sovereign, Statesman, Admiral or General—to issue orders which in the space of *two or three hours* might nakedly decide who won the war. The destruction of the British Battle Fleet would be fatal. Jellicoe was the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon.'

⁶ Eric Grove, in Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁷ Paul Hayes, 'Britain, Germany, and the Admiralty's Plans for Attacking German Territory, 1906-1915', in Lawrence Freedman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (eds.), *War, Strategy, and International Politics: Essays in Honour of Sir Michael Howard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 95.

two wars has been overdrawn.’⁸ After all, he states immediately afterward, the Royal Navy in the First World War ‘had all the advantages but few of the opportunities’.⁹

It has been tempting to blame the Admiralty, and many have done so. It has been taken largely as truth that their thinking was dominated by senior officers’ ‘old theories on the application of naval force.’¹⁰ Opinions to the contrary have always been argued over hotly. As a result, Michael Dash felt the need practically to apologize for his own research on British submarine policy; since, after all, the French took the lead in submarine deployment at the turn of the twentieth century and it was German U-Boats that were the scourge of shipping in 1917-18. Dash thought that ‘It may seem perverse, then, for this study to concentrate on *British* submarine policy.’¹¹ One popular author has a great deal of bad, and nothing good, to say about the Admiralty of the period.¹²

No small wonder then that one of the most recent works on the period notes that ‘[a] belief has thus persisted that the Navy’s plans for war were puerile, ill-informed, and based on the whims of senior officers such as Fisher.’¹³ This statement can just as easily be applied to the contemporary Admiralty, and it often has been.

Many astute naval historians have recognized why this should be so. For instance, N.A.M. Rodger wrote:

‘It is an ingrained assumption of many writers that Britain is always in the lead.... If anything goes wrong it must therefore be the fault of someone in Britain – usually someone in Whitehall. Even sophisticated scholars find it hard to accept

⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, ‘The Royal Navy in the Era of the World Wars: Was it fit for purpose?’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 97, no. 1 (February 2008), p. 284.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nicholas A. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution*, paperback ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 5. Hereafter *JFNR*.

¹¹ Emphasis original. Michael Wynford Dash, *British Submarine Policy 1853-1918*, Ph.D. Thesis (King’s College London, 1990), p. 7.

¹² Geoffrey Regan, *Geoffrey Regan’s Book of Naval Blunders*, paperback ed. (London: André Deutsch, 2001).

¹³ Shawn T. Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887-1918* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), p. 2.

that British leaders might ever have been at the mercy of events which were out of their control or forces more powerful than they could master.’¹⁴

Similarly, Nicholas Lambert declared:

‘Even today ... it is still not recognized that the core histories of the pre-1914 period were written without recourse to systematic examination of financial, economic, technological, administrative, or personnel records. Or that when writing these narratives their authors placed theory ahead of fact and description.’¹⁵

Finally, Andrew Lambert¹⁶:

‘It is assumed that the world’s navies were reactionary, or at best unduly conservative in their handling of technical change in the nineteenth century. This, it has been argued, was symptomatic of large hierarchically structured bureaucracies opposed to change in any area, from uniform regulations to weapons procurement. This view is reflected in the work of historians of the liberal progressive school for whom conservatism in technology, as in politics, is the mark of an unthinking and bigoted reactionary. They contend that, had the world’s navies been more adventurous, technical progress would have been more rapid, and more economical. As the largest and among the best documented, navies the Royal Navy has often been criticized for technological conservatism throughout the long nineteenth century (1815 – 1914). This line has been adopted in studies of the introduction of steam power, iron ships, the screw propeller, armour plate, turrets, and a number of other important new systems.’¹⁷

Having accepted these statements, the problem becomes illustrating how the Navy and the Admiralty were not moribund creatures of habit only reluctantly dragged into the light of progress and change. This matter is intimately tied up with the historiography of the Prewar Era, which will now be explored in some detail.

The Royal Navy’s history during the decade prior to the First World War is one marked by rapid changes. Numerous reorganizations ranging from root-and-branch reforms to almost entirely cosmetic changes took place, many (but not all) were initiated by one remarkable man:

¹⁴ Rodger, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

¹⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ No relation to Nicholas Lambert.

¹⁷ Andrew Lambert, ‘The Royal Navy, John Ericsson, and the Challenges of New Technology’, *IJNH* 2, no. 3 (December 2003), p. 17-18.

Admiral Sir John Fisher. Fisher, in fact, dominates the period. The great Arthur Marder wrote in the opening of his famous five-volume *magnum opus* *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* that ‘[f]rom October 1904 to January 1910 the redoubtable ‘Jacky’ Fisher dominated the Navy as it has never been dominated by a single individual. Thereafter, until his restoration in October 1914, he exerted a powerful influence on naval policy behind the scenes.’¹⁸ This, and the influence of Fisher’s most famous creations—H.M.S. *Dreadnought* and all her subsequent progeny—justified Marder’s terming the entire period from Fisher’s promotion to First Sea Lord through the scuttling of the Kaiser’s *Hochseeflotte* in 1919 as the ‘Fisher Era’. Indeed, Admiral Fisher and his *Dreadnoughts* are still seen as icons of the prewar period.

This *ad perpetuum rei memoriam* is not a new phenomenon. Even in his own time, Fisher was considered to be a remarkable man and the *Dreadnought* was considered to be a remarkable creation. Fisher’s biographical sword-bearer Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon began his biography by stating that ‘Lord Fisher of Kilverstone was a great man; in fact, history will probably record that he was the most remarkable Englishman that this century has so far seen.’¹⁹ Fisher’s ‘New Testament’ battleship was an equally remarkable symbol for Edwardian Britons, and *Dreadnought* symbolism flourished as far afield as the Suffragette movement, where Sylvia Pankhurst’s faction published a journal titled *The Woman’s Dreadnought*.²⁰ This very ubiquity, both of Fisher and of *Dreadnought*, has had much to do with the manner in which the historical narrative of the turn-of-the-century Royal Navy’s policies has developed. And what is more, this

¹⁸ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, i (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. vii. Hereafter *FDSF*.

¹⁹ Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Admiral of the Fleet*, vol. 1, Kessinger Publishing reprint ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929), p. v.

²⁰ Lucy Delap, ‘*The Woman’s Dreadnought*: Maritime Symbolism in Edwardian Gender Politics’, in Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert and Jan Rüger (eds.), *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 95-108.

narrative has become mature enough a subject to support a historiographical corpus of considerable depth and sophistication.²¹

At the admitted risk of generalizing too much for the sake of categorizational pigeonholing, the study of the Fisher Era—a period which henceforth will be described as the ‘Prewar Era’ in what is perhaps a vain effort to allow other men their place on stage with Fisher the *prima ballerina*—can be grouped into three different phases. Calling them ‘generations’ is perhaps appropriate, because these phases can be said to loosely follow the careers of three generations of historians. Admittedly this is a somewhat artificial structure to employ, since some historians can fall into more than one ‘generation’ depending on how their publications are approached. In addition, certain specialist histories of vital importance must be excluded from categorization entirely. For instance, the extensive technical histories written by the late D.K. Brown do not fit easily into any of the three generations due to their general independence from the main historical narrative of the Prewar Era. This independence results from Brown’s especial focus on the marine engineering and architecture of the period rather than high Admiralty policy; however, specialization of subject does not necessarily preclude a work’s inclusion. Jon Sumida and John Brooks’ gunnery-focused monographs are both products of an identifiable generation of scholarship—and in Sumida’s case his work defines the generation to which it belongs. This brief discussion is meant to illustrate that, while imperfect and in some places simplistic, the generational categories discussed below are at least a useful starting point for a study of the Prewar Era. Broadly, the three generations are i) Foundational Works, ii) Revisionist Works, and 3) Post-revisionist Works.

²¹ Two major historians of the period—the aforementioned Arthur Marder and Captain Stephen Roskill—now have their own biography *cum* historiographical review of their work: Barry Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts: Arthur Marder, Stephen Roskill and Battles for Naval History* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2010).

Generation I: The Foundational Works

Arthur Marder's *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* marks the zenith of the first generation of historiography regarding the prewar Royal Navy. A marked feature of this generation was the firm belief that 'Radical Jack' Fisher and the myriad reforms he instituted as a member and then as the head of the Board of Admiralty—in particular those reforms concerned with the *Dreadnought* and the redeployment of the Navy's battle fleet strength—were due to Fisher's awareness of the German *Kaiserliche Marine's* transformation into the greatest threat to British naval preponderance, and thus to Britain's command of the sea itself, for at least a century.²² That transformation was driven by a man considered every bit Fisher's Teutonic equal, Admiral Alfred Tirpitz.²³ One historian has described Tirpitz as 'ruthless, clever, domineering, patriotic, indefatigable, aggressive yet conciliatory, pressing yet patient, and stronger in character than the three chancellors and seven heads of the Foreign Office who were destined to be his co-actors', words which can with appropriate modification equally apply to Fisher.²⁴ Another made this comparison explicit, stating that 'John Arbuthnot Fisher was England's sufficient if not quite stable answer to Alfred Tirpitz.'²⁵ From this it is hardly a leap to reach the conclusion that the subsequent Anglo-German naval rivalry was, to some extent, a duel of wits between these two visionary men—an international strategic arms race distilled to a personal duel. When writing of

²² Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-43; E.L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

²³ For the similarities between these two men see Paul M. Kennedy, 'Fisher and Tirpitz: Political Admirals in the Age of Imperialism', in Gerald Jordan (ed.), *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century 1900-1945: Essays in honour of Arthur Marder* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1977), pp. 45-59.

²⁴ Holger Herwig, *'Luxury' Fleet: The Imperial German Navy 1888-1918*, paperback ed. (London: The Ashfield Press, 1987), p. 34. For Tirpitz generally, see Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). Still valuable is Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1965).

²⁵ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command*, paperback ed. (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 340.

Fisher's reforms, Marder claimed that '[e]conomy and efficiency or war readiness were the motives underlying Fisher's great reforms'²⁶ and that

‘The war readiness of the Fleet was absolutely essential in view of the rapidly developing German naval challenge. It was Fisher's settled conviction that the Germans would bide their time until they could catch the Royal Navy unprepared, since they could not hope to match it in numbers. At the selected moment and without warning they would make war on England and attempt to wrest from her the mastery of the seas. He worked and planned for a sufficient and efficient navy with that conflict always in mind.’²⁷

This view was supported by the memoirs and early biographies of many of the notable figures of the period including those of both Fisher and Tirpitz, as well as another ‘foundational’ work, 1935's *Great Britain and the German Navy* by E.L. Woodward, (later Sir Llewellyn Woodward).²⁸ To understand the subsequent historiography of the Prewar Era, Marder's and Woodward's output as well as their methods and sources need examination.

Woodward produced one of the earliest scholarly treatments of the Anglo-German estrangement and subsequent the arms race. ‘The subject cannot be ignored’, Woodward wrote in his introduction, ‘yet, curiously enough, no English, French, or American writer has made a special study of this important question.’ He attributed this to the fact that until only a few years earlier, ‘the relevant documents on the British side were not published’ in sufficient quantity for ‘a scientific treatment of the negotiations between Great Britain and Germany’ to be anything besides ‘impossible’.²⁹ Woodward regarded the publication of Gooch and Temperley's *British Documents on the Origins of the War*—a process complete up to 1913 when he commenced *Great Britain and the German Navy*—as providing sufficient material for his own purposes, at

²⁶ Arthur J. Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, ii (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 18. Hereafter *FGDN*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁸ Jon Sumida, ‘Sir John Fisher and the Dreadnought: The Sources of Naval Mythology’, *The Journal of Military History* 59, no. 4 (October 1995), pp. 619-638.

²⁹ Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

least when combined with the already-released official French, German, and Austrian collections. Every study that has come afterward has reacted to *Great Britain and the German Navy* in one way or another, either accepting it as a basic narrative of the period or attempting to correct that narrative.

Following only a few years after *Great Britain and the German Navy* was *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, the first major work of a man later described as ‘the premier historian of the Royal Navy’.³⁰ *Anatomy* was written partially as a reaction to Woodward’s work, who Marder felt ‘relies too much on the published documentary sources and treats British public opinion very superficially’, and that *Anatomy* was intended as ‘the first reasonably complete study of British naval policy in all its ramifications in the vital pre-dreadnought era.’³¹ The result remains a crucial history of the period even today, largely because Marder had been the first scholar able to access material from the Admiralty’s own archives, as well as some notable private material and correspondence with surviving figures from the period including former First Lord of the Admiralty the Earl Selborne, and Fisher’s nemesis Admiral Sir Reginald Custance.³²

The success of *Anatomy* led Marder to produce further works, each built around new primary sources that he was able to secure access to owing to his ever-increasing reputation as a specialist in the period. *Portrait of an Admiral* and the three volumes of *Fear God and Dread Nought* were created from the diaries of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond and the private correspondence between Admiral Fisher and the wide-ranging group of personalities.³³ All these

³⁰ John S. Galbraith quoted in Henry Cord Meyer, ‘Arthur J. Marder, 1910-1980’, *Military Affairs* 45, no. 2 (April 1981), p. 87.

³¹ Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905*, reprint ed. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), p. v.

³² Gough, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10; Marder, *op. cit.*

³³ Arthur J. Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral: the Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952); Idem, *FGDN*.

works were generally well received, notwithstanding some of Richmond's contemporaries being uncomfortable with Marder's uncritical praise of that radical Admiral,³⁴ and remain extremely influential, for better or worse. In all these works Marder followed a basic philosophy:

‘I bring no theories of history to my research and writing, nor do I arrive at any startling conclusions. I am essentially a narrative historian. I want to tell a story and to tell it well, and with a liberal infusion of the personal, the human, component, for at bottom, to quote Sir Lewis Namier: ‘The subject matter of history is human affairs, men in action, things which have happened and how they happened.’ ... One aspect of this outlook is my conviction that the writing of history must include a sense of how events appeared to the participants, bereft of the knowledge possessed by historians and others writing long afterwards.’³⁵

This simplicity of approach is one reason why the foundational works—and especially Marder's—have endured to the point of becoming the historical orthodoxy—ignoring the obvious but usually unstated fact that the foundational works, being the oldest, have thus had the greatest opportunity of reaching public consciousness. So while the Prewar Era has always been acknowledged as being ‘important and complex’, so too was the ‘superficial outline of events’ always considered ‘in most respects, clear enough’,³⁶ and as a result the works of Marder and Woodward have remained the popular view of the period.

Despite the popularity of the ‘foundational’ interpretation with the broader public, that interpretation is now recognized as being, at the very least, narrow and incomplete by the majority of naval historians. Paul Kennedy writes of Fisher's redeployment of British capital ship—a term which Fisher himself detested³⁷—strength that ‘it has been pointed out that the pace

³⁴ See Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer to Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, 19 September 1952, quoted in Barry D. Hunt, ‘Richmond and the Education of the Royal Navy’, in James Goldrick and John Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan Is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, CT: Naval War College Press, 1993), p. 67.

³⁵ Quoted in Gough, *op cit.*, p. 23.

³⁶ Ruddock Mackay, ‘Historical Reinterpretations of the Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1897-1914’, in Gerald Jordan (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁷ In a fragmentary letter Fisher complained about the use of the term in a ‘silly’ *Times* article:

‘Capital’ ships... is a most silly name! Who is going to draw the line?

‘About Battleships there can be no mistake[.] It's thick armour alone that puts them in that category.’

of this reorganization of British naval policy from an anti-Dual Alliance to an anti-German posture should not be exaggerated'.³⁸ Many go further still than this.³⁹ Nevertheless the German-centric interpretation of the era has not yet disappeared from contemporary historical accounts of both the Prewar Era and the First World War itself, and the same is true of those First Sea Lords of the Prewar Era not named Fisher. Hew Strachan repeats the common contention regarding these men: 'The combination of frequent change and weak appointees ensured that the professional leadership of the Royal Navy lost its direction in the four years preceding the war.'⁴⁰

Yet the facts do not, and in most cases cannot, entirely support this interpretation, and in some cases they suggest strongly that completely different motives and rationales were at work.⁴¹ The second generation of historians to focus upon the Prewar Era, the Revisionists, recognized that much in the old narrative structure could be challenged.

Generation II: Revisionist Works

History does not stand still, and neither does the historical narrative. Some of the most important works to be written in the field of historical studies are those meant to revise an existing narrative. This is as applicable to the Prewar Era as it is to any other field. Where Marder and Woodward began, others followed and in the process discovered additional details with which to broaden understanding of the period. By 1977 Fisher biographer and major early revisionist figure Ruddock Mackay could safely declare that 'new evidence has latterly been

'Tell [Private Secretary to the First Lord Vincent] Baddely [*sic*] I hope the First Lord won't swallow "capital" ships! It would be endless argument!' Fisher to Unknown, 29 December 1907, MSS 254/930/20, Baron Tweedmouth MSS, NMRN.

³⁸ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*, paperback ed. (London: The Ashfield Press, 1987), p. 279.

³⁹ Matthew S. Seligmann, 'Switching Horses: The Admiralty's Recognition of the Threat from Germany, 1900-1905', *IHR* 30, no. 2 (June 2008), pp. 240-242.

⁴⁰ Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Volume I: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 380. These 'weak appointees' are Fisher's three prewar successors: Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, VC, Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman, and Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg.

⁴¹ Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 236-238.

brought to light by research on a scale requiring periodic reassessments of the subject as a whole.’⁴²

Greatly assisting this process was the public availability of governmental archives, which had previously been closed to the scholastic community at large. While Marder had been given exceptionally privileged access to the Royal Navy’s own historical archives several years before they were to be publically released under the 50-year rule, he was still largely at the mercy of the Admiralty in terms of what official material he could or could not use. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the First World War and the increasing number of personal document collections being released to the public through museums and libraries meant that historians could now draw from much deeper wells of primary source material than those previous works.

Additional developments in historical scholarship meant that revisionists approached the subject of the prewar Royal Navy from different directions than had previously been used. Resultantly, older truisms such as the Royal Navy being constitutionally resistant to any sort of new technologies were challenged. Professor Bryan Ranft wrote that Mahan’s argument that the slowness apparent in the changing of tactics to mean the advance of technology could not be attributable to the ‘professional conservatism’ of senior naval officers as this ‘is too simple a cause to be satisfying.’⁴³ For the Revisionists, simple monocausal explanations were no longer adequate for many events during the Prewar Era. Paul Kennedy, in ‘the first detailed reconsideration of the history of British sea power’ since Mahan’s epochal *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* placed the Royal Navy’s rise and eventual ‘decline’ over the centuries ‘within a far wider framework of national, international, economic, political, and strategical

⁴² Mackay, ‘Historical Reinterpretations’, p. 32.

⁴³ Bryan Ranft, ‘Introduction’, in Brian Ranft (ed.), *Technical Change and British Naval Policy, 1860-1939* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), p. ix.

considerations without which the terms “sea power” and “naval mastery” cannot properly be understood.’⁴⁴

It was in this period of rapid expansion of both source availability and scope that Jon Sumida made his mark by studying both the origins of *Dreadnought* and her cruiser equivalents the *Invincibles*, and Arthur Hungerford Pollen’s work on fire control machinery and their relation to subsequent British construction policy. The ultimate result of Sumida’s investigations was *In Defence of Naval Supremacy*, described by one reviewer as an ‘extraordinarily impressive piece of detective work which will change the way in which historians look at British pre-1914 naval policy.’ A brilliant culmination to Sumida’s research, *In Defence* is also one of the most important, and possibly *the* most important, pieces of scholarship produced by the second generation of historians studying the Prewar Era. It further contains, in the introduction to its second addition, a statement that might almost be considered a manifesto for the revisionist generation’s collective work:

‘The present monograph on what has been called “the *Dreadnought* Revolution” of the early twentieth century deals with national security decision making as a multi-level process that was influenced heavily by budgetary pressure, technical uncertainty, flaws in bureaucratic organization, and the vagaries of chance. Such an approach differs sharply from previous treatments of British naval policy, which have for the most part focused on the actions of a few senior officers and politicians, paid scant attention to finance, greatly oversimplified the technical issues, ignored administrative context, and largely factored out the role of happenstance. This book, as a consequence ... not only depart[s] from established accounts, but taken collectively raise[s] serious doubts about their fundamental narrative and interpretive integrity.’⁴⁵

The degree in which the various historians of the Revisionist approach share the above view is, naturally, as varied as the number of their various published works. Ruddock Mackay, who was

⁴⁴ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, Penguin ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p xxvii. The original edition was published in 1976.

⁴⁵ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914*, paperback ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. xviii. Hereafter *IDNS*.

one of the first to challenge the premise that Fisher's reforms were directed primarily against Germany in his thorough and groundbreaking biography *Fisher of Kilverstone*, wrote with great sympathy for the preceding generation:

'Inevitably, the present writer is much indebted to the works of Professor Arthur J. Marder. However it should doubtless be mentioned here that some sources for Fisher and his times were not available when Marder was collecting material for his volumes... Moreover, even so remarkable a researcher as Professor Marder could not be expected to see every document in the collections which he investigated.'⁴⁶

Others have been far less kind, in some cases bordering on abusive. H.P. Willmott, well-known for his eccentric and unconventional views on naval history, felt confident enough to declare with a very much undue smugness that Marder's corpus was 'slavish worship of Fisher by an author who was hooked on the Carlyle portrayal of history as the deeds of great men'.⁴⁷

Regardless of their feelings toward those who came before them, many of the major Revisionist monographs and articles have come to take an honoured position alongside the best of the preceding generation. Attempting to write a history of the Fisher Era without reference to books like *In Defence* or Nicholas Lambert's *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* leads, almost inevitably, to the creation of an unbalanced and incomplete result.

One of the most obvious lapses that result from disregarding the Revisionist accounts of the Prewar Era is a persistent misconception of the battleship *Dreadnought* and the resultant '*Dreadnought* Revolution' mentioned by Sumida. As another historian put it, 'the dreadnought revolution appears clearer in retrospect than at the time: the basic facts that appeared in 1905-6 were less simple than those now taken by us to constitute the revolution.'⁴⁸ The illumination of Fisher's intended function for the *Dreadnought*—or at least a clearer understanding of Fisher's

⁴⁶ Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

⁴⁷ H.P. Willmott, *Battleship* (London: Cassell, 2002), p. 39.

⁴⁸ Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., 'The Origins of the *Dreadnought* Revolution: A Historiographic Essay', *IHR* XIII, no. 2 (May 1991), p. 246.

intentions—is one of the major accomplishments of writers such as Mackay, Sumida and Nicholas Lambert. Rather than a weapon designed to hobble Germany’s naval expansion⁴⁹ and that was intended from the start for long range gunnery, *Dreadnought* was largely a prototype for the ships Fisher truly saw as the future of the Navy’s capital ship construction: the large armoured cruiser—later to become better known as the battlecruiser. The development of this interpretation is largely the work of Sumida, beginning with his 1979 article in *The Journal of Modern History*⁵⁰ and continuing after *In Defence* in the form of several more articles on prewar development of gunnery tactics.⁵¹ Fisher had in fact ‘preferred the battle cruiser to the dreadnought battleship from the start and was later convinced that foreign dreadnoughts could be trumped by battle cruisers equipped with a fire-control system proposed by Arthur Pollen.’⁵² Fisher’s intentions were to give the Royal Navy a qualitative edge over their foes, which would be more economical by far than the quantitative advantage required by the two-power standard which served as a political benchmark for the Royal Navy’s strength at the start of the twentieth century.⁵³ Put another way, a Royal Navy composed largely of battle cruisers and submarines—another technological development Fisher strongly advocated—would be cheaper and more cost effective than the traditional force structure of battleships and the various species of cruisers.⁵⁴

The idea of Fisher’s interest in submarines and battlecruisers being in part a manifestation of his desire to make the Royal Navy a more economic armed service and to ultimately produce

⁴⁹ A view which Marder himself had conclusively declared a myth with ‘not a scrap of evidence’ to its name. Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 67.

⁵⁰ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, ‘British Capital Ship Design and Fire Control in the *Dreadnought* Era: Sir John Fisher, Arthur Hungerford Pollen, and the Battle Cruiser’, *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 4 (June 1979), pp. 205-230.

⁵¹ Sumida, ‘The Quest for Reach: The Development of Long-range Gunnery in the Royal Navy, 1901-1912’, in Stephen Chiabotti (ed.), *Tooling for War: Military Transformation in the Industrial Age* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1996), pp. 49-97; idem, ‘A Matter of Timing: The Royal Navy and the Tactics of Decisive Battle, 1912-1916’, *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 85-137.

⁵² Sumida, ‘Capital Ship Design and Fire Control’, p. 207.

⁵³ For discussion of this standard see Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, pp. 18-21 and Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 105-116.

⁵⁴ Sumida, ‘Naval Mythology’, p. 620.

an asymmetrical force structure—to use a very anachronistic term—has received fullest development in the studies of Nicholas Lambert. The primary thesis of these works is that at the turn of the century the Navy faced a major financial crisis because the willingness of the Treasury and successive governments to fund new construction dropped as the cost of new capital ships—both conventional battleships and, after the development of sufficiently strong and light steel, armoured cruisers—rose dramatically. Fisher’s goals and reforms as First Sea Lord were dedicated towards economizing the annual naval estimates. To achieve this goal he was willing to take the dramatic step of employing torpedo craft, especially submarines, in Home Waters as a ‘flotilla defence’ against much-feared but far-fetched ‘bolt from the blue’ invasions of or raids on the British Isles by an enemy power. That power was initially France but this quickly changed when Germany came to be seen as principal threat in Europe. The heavy units previously kept in home waters were thus available to be deployed elsewhere should the situation call for it, and both the major redeployment of the Fleets in late 1904 and the re-establishment of the Home Fleet in 1907 were intended to be steps on this road. While this effort did not fully succeed, after leaving the Admiralty in 1910 Fisher was able to convince Winston Churchill of the validity of this plan, and when the latter became First Lord in 1911 he attempted several times to revive the ‘flotilla defence’ approach in response to repeated political crises involving the naval estimates in 1912 and 1914. Churchill had even managed by the summer of 1914 to bring the Sea Lords around to a radical policy of increasing submarine construction by substituting them for some of the capital ships funded under the 1914-15 Estimates a few days before the outbreak of war called off all bets.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Nicholas A. Lambert, ‘British Naval Policy, 1913-1914: Financial Limitation and Strategic Revolution’, *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 3 (September 1995), pp. 595-626; *idem*, ‘Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904-1909’, *The Journal of Military History* 59, no. 4 (October 1995), pp. 639-600;

The above summary does not perhaps entirely do justice to the many points Lambert makes and neglects several major themes, such as the intensive cooperation between the Admiralty and the private shipbuilding and heavy armaments firms; however it is sufficient for present purposes. Like Sumida's work, Lambert explicitly challenges the previously-held view that the Admiralty was 'in the grip of a conservative, even reactionary, group who had been obsessed with battleships' who ultimately left the Navy at the outbreak of war using 'an outdated strategic doctrine better suited to a navy from the age of sail than a fleet in the age of steam'.⁵⁶ Also like Sumida and the other Revisionists, Nicholas Lambert uses a myriad of primary sources to advance his argument, many of which are not widely known or were unavailable to the historians of Marder's day. The result is that *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution, In Defence of Naval Supremacy*, and other key Revisionist works often challenge the older conventional assumptions regarding the motives and intentions of various figures from the Prewar Era. In fact, Revisionists often stress that they rely on extensive dissection of their primary sources, with the implication that they are most always convinced that those sources contain more and often different information than their face value can suggest, or at any rate more than was previously ascribed to them. This is especially true of Admiral Fisher. In Revisionist eyes, Fisher was very evasive (to say the least!) regarding his true motivations even in his publications intended for internal use by the Admiralty, to such an extent that 'even scrupulous assessment of all the prints [issued by Fisher] would have yielded only fragments of Fisher's actual line of thinking'.⁵⁷ The difficulties in understanding Fisher's 'actual line of thinking' led many of Marder's successors 'to seek sanctuary in the older accounts... whose main elements are familiar, plausible, relatively

idem., *JNFR*. *Idem* (ed.), *The Submarine Service, 1900-1918* (London: Navy Records Society, 2001), also contains much comment along the same lines.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Lambert, 'Financial Limitation', p. 596.

⁵⁷ Sumida, 'Naval Mythology', p. 631.

simple, and consistent with existing presentations of imperial and military policy, and diplomatic parliamentary affairs.’⁵⁸

While primary source material such as manuscript collections ‘are essentially the flesh and blood’ of history,⁵⁹ extant sources certainly give cause for concern of the kind shown by the revisionists. Fisher most of all. His memoirs and later letters often contained statements totally at odds with actual fact, a tendency for which he made no apology.⁶⁰ In addition he was known for dissembling, and is recorded as claiming that he ‘never in all my life have ever yet explained, and don’t mean to.’⁶¹ The trouble is by no means restricted to Fisher, although it is not always of the same variety. ‘Experience has shown, however, that unforeseen disasters may overtake private papers unless their future is explicitly cared for’, is how one director of the National Maritime Museum summarized the matter.⁶² The principal players in the Prewar Era often destroyed their more controversial letters and documents before passing them on for preservation, so that for every officer like Sir Herbert Richmond who left vivid accounts of controversial occurrences, there were many more like Sir Henry Oliver who out of a sense of gentleman’s probity disposed of his wartime diaries.⁶³ Other individuals left collections focused on a few incidents in their long careers.⁶⁴ In some cases, such as Sir Arthur Wilson and Sir George

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 620.

⁵⁹ F.G.G. Carr to Admiral Sir Angus Cunninghame Graham, 1 December 1966, ANCG II 4/4, Admiral Sir Angus E.M.B. Cunninghame Graham of Gartmore and Ardoch MSS, CCAC.

⁶⁰ For one example, see Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-67.

⁶¹ Quoted in Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, *From 1900 Onward* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1940), p. 323.

⁶² Carr to Cunninghame Graham, 1 December 1966, *ibid.*

⁶³ ‘I kept a diary for many years until 1918 but before I went to Sea from the Admiralty during the War in March 1918 I destroyed it as there were very free remarks in it about others.’ OLV/12, ‘Recollections. Volume I.’, f. 1, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry F. Oliver MSS, NMM.

⁶⁴ Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman’s papers are almost entirely focused on his tenure as First Sea Lord, with especial emphasis on his forced retirement. Sailor-historian Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge’s papers focus on his *fin de siècle* commands in Australia and China. Prewar Director of the Admiralty War Staff’s Mobilisation Division Sir Alexander Duff left next to nothing on his prewar work, preferring instead the papers on his wartime anti-submarine work. Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge MSS, NMM; Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman MSS, IWM; Admiral Sir Alexander Duff MSS, NMM.

Callaghan, no papers at all were left behind.⁶⁵ Not for nothing did Arthur Marder write a relative of one flag officer, Admiral Sir Alexander Bethell, ‘There should be an Act of Parliament forbidding flag officers to destroy primary source material of value to the historian!! But, alas, they all do it.’⁶⁶ Official archives fare little better, with one work citing as ‘a general rule’ that perhaps ‘1 per cent of the paper produced by government departments survives in archives’.⁶⁷

These facts taken together more than justify the caution exhibited by Revisionists in taking the accuracy of their sources for granted, and in many cases it is the extreme care taken in interpreting sources as well as the large quantity of materials cited that make the most important works of the Revisionists as monumental as they are. One review of *Naval Revolution* concludes rightly that ‘[t]he history of the Royal Navy before 1914 will never be the same again.’⁶⁸

This status as indispensable parts of the historical corpus, however, does not prevent further reinterpretation of the Prewar Era any more than it did for those historians who followed Marder’s generation.

Generation III: The Post-revisionist Works

While the foundational interpretation of pre-1914 Royal Navy development still holds sway in popular historical accounts, the Revisionist generation has supplanted it among specialists to the point where their views, perhaps inevitably and perhaps ironically, make up the current academic orthodoxy. The passage of time since their publication—more than thirty years in the case of Jon Sumida’s original 1977 article on the battlecruiser and Pollen’s apparatus—has enabled them to be digested and accepted. Time has also greatly reduced the likelihood of further

⁶⁵ Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 207; Sumida, *op. cit.*, p. 633.

⁶⁶ Marder to Agatha Marsden-Smedley, 4 April 1963, Bethell 12, Admiral The Hon. Sir Alexander E. Bethell MSS, LHCMH.

⁶⁷ D.K. Brown and George Moore, *Rebuilding the Royal Navy: Warship Design since 1945*, Seaforth reprint ed. (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2012), p. 7.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Till, ‘Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution’, *The Journal of Military History* 61, no. 1 (January 2000), p. 217.

large primary source collections appearing, although some collections remain in private hands.⁶⁹ Thus the members of the third generation of historians to approach the Prewar Era are largely devoted to either filling in gaps in the historical record using already available material, or going over the works published by the previous two generations with a very fine comb. While the term 'Post-revisionist' might imply fundamental disagreement with the members of the previous generation of historian, this is largely not the case in practice, and 'Post-revisionist' is used here more for lack of a better expression. Having said this, in certain areas this third generation scholarship, perhaps inevitably, contradicts earlier work by either one of both of the preceding generations and in some cases, the results have been unpleasant for all involved. It should be noted, however, that there are just as many occasions where third generation research has reaffirmed the conclusions reached by the previous generations.

One of the major figures among Post-Revisionists is John Brooks. Like Sumida, Brooks concentrated on the question of how the Royal Navy handled issues regarding fire control prior to 1914, and in particular the choice of Captain Frederic Dreyer's systems over those offered by Arthur Pollen and what are assumed as the subsequent results of that decision on British accuracy of fire during the battle of Jutland. Brooks took issue with several claims about the Dreyer Table, and the result was *Dreadnought Gunnery at the Battle of Jutland*, a spirited defence of Dreyer's work.⁷⁰ Instead of a systematic conspiracy by various serving officers to 'crab' Pollen's equipment in favour of Dreyer's, it was mostly Pollen's extravagant promises and difficult attitude during discussions with the Admiralty that proved to be the downfall of his own system. This, incidentally, is confirmation of a point made by Professor Andrew Lambert: the

⁶⁹ For instance, in the late 1990s several letters from Admiral Sir William May were still privately held, for which see Lambert, *op cit.*, p. 359n161.

⁷⁰ John Brooks, *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland: The Question of Fire Control*, paperback ed. (London: Routledge, 2005).

Admiralty was much more willing to accept new technologies when they could be obtained from established manufacturing interests rather than typically much smaller individual concerns, no matter how skilled the latter might be.⁷¹ *Dreadnought Gunnery* is also a textbook example of how Post-revisionist narratives function. They take the work of revisionists and subject them to additional analysis of the sort the Revisionists themselves applied to their own predecessors, and as a result they tend to both confirm certain aspects of the revisionist work and correct other aspects, or at least provide a new perspective on them.

Another Post-revisionist is Matthew Seligmann, whose major work focuses on British intelligence efforts in Germany, in particular the work of Naval and Military Attachés.⁷² As Seligman observes most sagely, ‘Nicholas Lambert makes a strong case for financial considerations rather than the German threat being the motivation for the redistribution of the fleet. I regard his case as compelling, but am not convinced the two considerations are mutually exclusive’.⁷³ Other Post-revisionists are engaged in work that could legitimately fall into the Revisionist rubric. An example is Nicholas Black’s work on the Admiralty War Staff during the First World War.⁷⁴

This is an appropriate moment to note that these works only tangentially discuss the creation and evolution of the Grand Fleet in the years prior to the war when it was known as simply as the Home Fleet. Jellicoe’s *The Grand Fleet*, which has been quite unfairly called an ‘insipid apologia’,⁷⁵ includes only a few of the major details, leading Professor Grove to lament

⁷¹ Andrew Lambert, ‘The Royal Navy, John Ericsson, and the Challenges of New Technology’, *International Journal of Naval History* 2, no. 3 (December 2003).

⁷² Matthew S. Seligmann, *Spies in Uniform: British Military & Naval Intelligence on the Eve of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷³ Matthew S. Seligmann (ed.), *Naval Intelligence from Germany: The Reports of British Naval Attachés in Berlin, 1906-1914* (London: Navy Records Society, 2008), p. xv.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Black, *The British Naval Staff in the First World War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 559.

this exclusion.⁷⁶ Both Fisher's biographer and cupbearer Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon and the great historian of the period Professor Arthur Marder discuss the creation of the Home Fleet, but their accounts, while valuable, leave something to be desired by modern standards. Marder in particular is now out of favour. Once regarded as the 'Olympian adjudicator of the Anglo-German naval race',⁷⁷ from the publication of Ruddock Mackay's biography of Admiral Fisher onwards to the present day, 'Marder's arguments have come in for detailed and sustained criticisms.'⁷⁸ As a result, 'few historians now accept his analytical framework.'⁷⁹ Bacon, meanwhile, while still considered a valuable source, is considered too partisan towards Fisher. This is unsurprising since even during Fisher's term as First Sea Lord Bacon was seen by fellow naval officers as being Fisher's factotum, and Fisher himself once explained during a minor argument with Controller Sir Henry Jackson and Director of Naval Construction Sir Philip Watts that 'I don't want them to imagine I've put Bacon on to them'.⁸⁰

With these objections borne in mind, the closest there is to a detailed modern account of the Home Fleet's birth and subsequent development comes from Nicholas Lambert's widely praised *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*.⁸¹ However, as will be shown, Lambert's general approach to the Home Fleet—and in fact to the heavy units of the prewar Royal Navy in general—is in places unsatisfactory and often focused in such a way as to produce what can just possibly be described as an inaccurate interpretation of events. Lambert's insistence that Fisher was striving to replace the battleship with flotilla craft as the guarantor of British security in Home Waters, and that his reforms were likewise in pursuit of this objective, has meant his

⁷⁶ Eric J. Grove, in Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare* (New York: The Viking Press, 1988), p. 120.

⁷⁸ Seligmann, 'Switching Horses', p. 240.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁸⁰ Fisher impishly continued that 'instead I've put Mr. Parsons on them surreptitiously!' Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher to Tweedmouth, 22 February 1907, MSS 254/432, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁸¹ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-164.

treatment of the Home Fleet is based on the assumption that the torpedo-armed vessels were its centrepiece, not the battleships and armoured cruisers. This was also the reason Fisher declared to the First Lord of the Admiralty at the time of the Home Fleet's creation that the new organization would be a '*real fighting fleet of the first quality* and peculiarly adapted for the first onslaught of war'.⁸² Lambert's contention is that the Home Fleet was 'peculiarly adapted' because it was built around the torpedo instead of the heavy gun.

Such a narrative is tempting. It challenges both Fisher's reputation as an enthusiastic but generally erratic strategist, and the idea of an Admiralty that shut its eyes and ears to the advance of technology, as the 'self-serving, politically naïve and technologically determinist accounts left by nineteenth century engineers, who wished to portray themselves as high minded servants of humanity' would have it.⁸³ Unfortunately, the 'flotilla defence' theory of the Home Fleet's origins is, it will be shown, incomplete. This also means very attractive theories based on Lambert's work, such as Professor Grove's assertion that the Home Fleet was 'a conservative reaction to [Fisher's] radical ideas of torpedo-armed flotilla defence and battle cruiser squadrons for more distant work', must also be abandoned.⁸⁴ The result is that, once again, a satisfactory account of the genesis of the Grand Fleet is, one might say, conspicuous by its absence.

Research Tasks and Methods

It is this absence that this thesis means to fill, at the same time answering the general question of what Fisher and the Admiralty intended from the new organization. This is not an easy question to answer, since those intentions changed rapidly even before the Home Fleet was

⁸² Emphasis original. Fisher to Tweedmouth, 27 October 1906, MSS 253/52, Box 2/21, Captain Thomas Crease MSS, NMRN.

⁸³ Andrew Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Grove, in Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Professor Grove has as a result of the research done for this thesis abandoned this theory.

formally created in 1907. The Home Fleet (or properly, the Home Fleets) of 1914 were vastly different from what was initially proposed in the summer of 1906. To understand fully the processes at work that created this difference, the previous events and developments that led to the creation, as well as the subsequent expansion and development of the Home Fleet and the Admiralty's intentions for its use in an Anglo-German war shall be examined in detail, and hopefully in as thorough a manner as is possible. To achieve this goal a large number of primary sources have been employed. This includes many that have been previously cited but perhaps not used to full advantage, as well as several that have escaped serious usage in previous studies, and others that have never been cited at all. Before considering how this question will be approached in this study, however, it is worth considering briefly how the Home Fleet developed

A Brief History of the Home Fleet

Professor Marder wrote that the Home Fleet 'was a logical development of the policy of concentration at home which had been initiated in December 1904.'⁸⁵ Contrary to the arguments put forward by members of the Revisionist school, this venerable assessment is more or less right. However, Marder's discussion of the Home Fleet does not tell the whole story.⁸⁶ A major reason for the Home Fleet's creation was indeed the growing maritime strength of Imperial Germany. Germany replaced the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance as the Royal Navy's most likely opponent after the *entente cordiale* and the destruction of most of the Russian Navy during the Russo-Japanese War. With this change in Britain's strategic position, the Admiralty had to re-orient themselves away from the Channel and the Mediterranean and towards the North Sea and the

⁸⁵ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, i (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 71. Hereafter *FDSF*.

⁸⁶ This is not a criticism of Marder any more than pointing out problems with the work of Nicholas Lambert is a criticism of that historian.

Baltic. This reorientation began in the middle of 1905, although there were those in the Admiralty that had been forecasting such a change in policy for some time.⁸⁷ It is here that Marder's analysis requires serious revision, as the revisionists are generally correct that Fisher's initial reforms were oriented against the Dual Alliance and not Germany.⁸⁸

At the same time, Germany had not been entirely ignored, although it took time for the Admiralty to begin specific planning for an Anglo-German war.⁸⁹ Untangling the exact details of this reorientation is difficult enough, but an added complication arises from British domestic politics, specifically the Liberal Party's landslide victory in the General Election of 1906. Committed to reform and retrenchment, the new Cabinet demanded naval economies on top of those Fisher had introduced for the previous Tory administration (economies that were, not incidentally, the great and primary reason Fisher was made First Sea Lord in the first place).⁹⁰ It is against this background that the initial proposal for the Home Fleet was put forward in the summer of 1906. Initially this plan was simply a consolidation of the existing reserve divisions together with a reduction in active capital ship strength. The controversy this ignited was increased when Fisher added an active-duty division to the planned Home Fleet based in The Nore that would include Fisher's revolutionary dreadnoughts.

Opposition intensified because of the activities of the bombastic and almost pathologically insubordinate Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet. For all its prestige, Beresford's new command had been stripped down to a small core of armoured vessels while the Home Fleet was being built up

⁸⁷ Seligmann, 'Switching Horses', pp. 239-258.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*; Norman Friedman, *British Destroyers: From the Earliest Days to the Second World War* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2009); Fairbanks, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-272; Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

⁸⁹ Grimes, *op. cit.*; Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*; Seligmann, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91; Rhodri Williams, 'Arthur James Balfour, Sir John Fisher and the Politics of Naval Reform, 1904-10', *Historical Research* 60, no. 141 (February 1987), pp. 80-99; Idem, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915* (London: Yale University Press, 1991).

gradually and, Fisher argued, discretely. Beresford's campaign against Fisher was only partially due to disagreements over the Home Fleet; Beresford had his eyes on Fisher's purple day and night.⁹¹ It was a battle that culminated in the final abolition of the Channel Fleet and Beresford spearheading a Cabinet enquiry into Admiralty policy which despite the serious nature of the matters being discussed often veered towards the farcical.⁹²

In the fallout from this affair, Fisher determined that it was time to hand over the Admiralty to a suitable successor, and with the support of and ultimate personal intervention from King Edward VII, convinced the retired Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson, VC, to return to active service as First Sea Lord. Wilson, who was obstinate and taciturn—even obstructive—by nature, undertook no major changes of strategic policy during his term of office, although to extrapolate from this that he achieved little of consequence is incorrect. Indeed, it was under Wilson's aegis that the Royal Navy began to develop naval aviation in earnest.⁹³ This lack of apparent zeal for reform coupled with a disastrous showing at a crucial meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, proved a death sentence for Wilson and First Lord Reginald

⁹¹ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹² The most recent (and fairest) treatment of this story is Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford's Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2009). Another work on the subject is Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher's Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000). However, Penn's work suffers from obvious favouritism towards Fisher, to the extent that some relevant quotations are taken out of context.

⁹³ As First Sea Lord, Wilson was responsible for a proposal which ultimately resulted in the conversion of the cruiser *Hermes* into the Navy's first aircraft carrier. D.K. Brown, *The Grand Fleet: Warship Design and Development 1906-1922* (London: Caxton Editions, 2003), pp. 74-75.

A chapter detailing the Royal Navy's history with aviation was written for this thesis, but had to be cut for length. The primary conclusion drawn in it was that the Admiralty had shown great interest in developing an aviation component, but its ultimate form, the Royal Naval Air Service, was a difficult child. The R.N.A.S. as a result was only partially integrated into the Navy's overall strategy in July 1914, although good progress was being made in using wireless-carrying aircraft for coastal maritime patrols integrated with what became the wartime Local Patrol Fottillas. This was especially true in terms of coordination with the fleet, although the Admiralty had tried hard in that direction. The failure of H.M. Airship *No. 1* (better known by its unofficial nickname of 'Mayfly') soured the Admiralty on large airships at a critical moment which may have had disastrous consequences, although the poor state of British industry's capabilities for the manufacture similar airships cannot be overlooked according to Professor Grove. There certainly seems to have been an earnest effort made to employ smaller non-rigids for the same duties as the Germans used their rigid Zeppelins. Financial stringencies also played a role in the lack of development of aircraft-carrying ships capable of fleet work, as will be seen briefly in Chapter 7.

McKenna's careers at the Admiralty. Replacing them were the unassuming but talented Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman and a young Cabinet highflyer named Winston Churchill.

Sir Francis Bridgeman had been specially chosen as the Home Fleet's initial Commander-in-Chief in 1907, and by 1911 had a better knowledge of that force than any other man in the Navy. His broad support for Fisher's policies was another strong item in his resume, especially since he retained the respect of both Fisherites and Beresfordians. Despite this wealth of practical seagoing experience, Bridgeman was not in his element as a member of the Admiralty, though this was a trait shared by many flag officers of the period. Bridgeman and Churchill, despite a poor working relationship that ended in the former's scandalous departure from the Admiralty after thirteen months in office, managed to accomplish a great deal together. A Naval Staff, something long objected to (especially by Fisher and Wilson) was brought into being, although it was perhaps inevitably imperfect in form and function.⁹⁴ The Home Fleet was also reorganized on a greater scale than had been undertaken since its absorption of the Channel Fleet in 1909—which included a rearrangement of command responsibilities, which found favour with influential fleet commanders.⁹⁵

At the same time the Navy's old basis for strategic planning—the seizure of advanced bases for flotilla craft to enable tripwire-like observational blockades of enemy naval bases—was at last replaced by a more 'passive' strategy of distant blockade which had originated from the pioneering 1907 studies which formed the basis for new War Plans specifically targeted against Germany.⁹⁶ Crucial in this change of strategy was the last pre-war Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral Sir George Callaghan, who alongside his staff objected to the older

⁹⁴ However its failure has often been overstated by partisan sources. For a thoughtful defence of this organization, see Nicholas Black, *The British Naval Staff in the First World War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009).

⁹⁵ Prince Louis of Battenberg, Memorandum, 25 January 1912, f. 36, CHAR 13/8, Chartwell Trust MSS, CCAC.

⁹⁶ Grimes, *op. cit.*

strategic schemes as being unsuited for operations against a German fleet with powerful torpedo boat strength and a rapidly growing submarine force.⁹⁷ Callaghan's concern over enemy torpedo craft—and not just submarines—was a major driving force in the development of the Home Fleet's strategic planning and tactical doctrine.⁹⁸ As a matter of interest, Callaghan was no deep theorist. Instead, like Bridgeman, he was a practical sailor. A prewar Home Fleet staff officer recalled that he was 'of the old sea-dog type like Charlie Beresford and A.K. Wilson.'⁹⁹

This concern over enemy torpedo craft, combined with the problems of controlling an armada the size of the 1914 fleet with only signal flags and spotty wireless telegraphy, led to the rigid and much-derided Grand Fleet Battle Orders. These gave Jellicoe (and subsequently Sir David Beatty) reliable control over the entire fleet at the expense of flexibility farther down the chain of command, although this loss of flexibility is sometimes exaggerated.¹⁰⁰

Bridgeman's replacement was Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, whose relationship with Churchill has been criticized for its lack of internecine conflict—Fisher referred to Battenberg derisively as 'the Jelly Fish' on at least one occasion.¹⁰¹ Tempting as it may be to accuse Battenberg of being unfit for the job after the disastrous beginning of the First World War at sea, a more nuanced view of his relationship with a difficult First Lord is required. Battenberg, though often libelled by colleagues for his German origins, was nonetheless widely admired for his intelligence. The truth of the matter seems to be that Battenberg was very good at keeping

⁹⁷ Commander Roger Backhouse, 'North Sea Problem. Lines of Observation. Remarks by Flag Commander.', n.d. [1913?], T94632, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Backhouse MSS, NHB; Callaghan, 'Employment of Destroyers in a Fleet Action.', 18 March 1914, H.F. 0184, T94616, Backhouse MSS; Idem, 'Destroyer Flotillas Attached to Battle Fleet.', 3 August 1914, H.F. 0184, Backhouse MSS.

⁹⁸ Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-82.

⁹⁹ Admiral Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax's notes on Arthur Marder, Draft of Chapter 14 of *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 11 November 1959, DRAX 6/18, Admiral Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax MSS, CCAC. He was merely Commander Reginald Plunkett when he served in Callaghan's fleet.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon, *op. cit.*, is one of the most recent exaggerators, but he builds on a long tradition.

¹⁰¹ Fisher to Julian Corbett, 22 June 1914, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 308.

Churchill in check, but in a way which left a poor impression on most onlookers, especially those within the service.

The beginning of 1914 is seen by Nicholas Lambert as the point where Churchill and the Admiralty finally abandoned the battleship as a standard of strength in favour of a new concept transmuting the four dreadnoughts funded in the 1914-15 Estimates into ‘units of power which could, if desirable, be expressed in any other form.’¹⁰² It is also said that the Admiralty was on the verge of replacing two battleships from the 1914-15 Navy Estimates with submarines or even a novel ‘torpedo cruiser’ design.¹⁰³ This is not accurate, since equal evidence exists suggesting adoption of this ‘substitution policy’ was not a serious likelihood,¹⁰⁴ as even after the outbreak of war design work on at least two of the 1914-15 battleships continued.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore by the Admiralty’s later reckoning the two complete Turkish battleships taken over in August 1914 had replaced the second two projected battleships as far as procurement considerations went.¹⁰⁶

In conclusion, the Home Fleet at the commencement of the First World War was the direct descendent of Admiral Fisher’s initial 1906 scheme for a new reserve force in Home Waters that he later expanded to include an active-duty component that, although never stated explicitly at the time, was likely meant to one day replace the existing Channel Fleet as Britain’s principal naval force for defence of Britain itself. The controversy which the creation of the Home Fleet brought about, and the historical debates over Fisher’s motives—both in creating the Home Fleet and his overall intentions for the Royal Navy in general—have left an already-difficult to disentangle story of naval reform even more complicated to describe. In the end,

¹⁰² Winston Churchill, draft of the *World Crisis*, CHAR 8/61. Quoted in Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

¹⁰³ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-303.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, Admiralty, ‘Battle and Cruiser Squadrons – Programme’, 8 July 1914, ADM 1/8383/179. This important document will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁵ Sir Eustace Tennyson d’Eyncourt to Rear-Admiral Sir Archibald Moore, 27 November 1914, DEY/27, Sir Eustace Tennyson d’Eyncourt MSS, NMM.

¹⁰⁶ Admiralty, ‘Additions to Shipbuilding and Aircraft Programme since the Beginning of the War.’, 9 December 1914, f. 2, CHAR 13/31, Chartwell MSS.

however, the oft-maligned works of Marder are closer to the mark than has often been allowed, although they are still incomplete for the reasons the revisionists like Nicholas Lambert and Jon Sumida have pronounced over the years.

Some Final Notes on Structure and Content

This study, with the exception of a few necessary digressions, uses a chronological approach. Events and intentions are described in the order in which they occurred as far as this is possible. This approach is the best way to explain many of the complexities surrounding the Home Fleet in the Prewar Era; indeed, it offers many advantages over a thematic approach. It may help in untangling many of the misperceptions and false conclusions drawn about this subject by others.

Chapter 1 details the strategic and financial situation facing the Royal Navy in the first years of the twentieth century, and Fisher's responses to them. It is very much a synthesis of previous historians' work with the exception of a more detailed analysis of Fisher's initial 1904-1905 redistribution of the fleets. The purpose is to throw more light on Fisher's initial intentions for this reorganization. Hopefully the results of this will provide an accurate, comprehensible illustration of the Navy's 'state of play' on the eve of the creation of the Home Fleet.

Chapter 2 describes first the strategic shift by the Navy towards a confrontation with Germany—as opposed to the Dual Alliance—that occurred roughly simultaneously with the Russian Navy's destruction in the Russo-Japanese War. It will be seen, however, that these two events were not as closely related as sometimes thought. The great political shift to the Liberal Party in 1906 will be shown as the major engine of the Home Fleet's creation, and the details of that creation will be discussed in detail.

Starting in Chapter 3, the focus will increasingly shift towards general Admiralty policy, starting with a discussion of British naval planning for an Anglo-German War. This will give additional context for the Home Fleet's creation. Subsequent chapters will follow the pattern of greater emphasis on the Admiralty versus the fleets themselves, because the Home Fleet by 1909 was the largest and most important of the Royal Navy's organizations. By 1912, it will be seen, the Home Fleets in large part were the Royal Navy, and the concerns and opinions of the fleet's officers (especially the C.-in-C., Admiral Sir George Callaghan), were the concerns driving the Admiralty as a whole.

An exception to this rule is the final chapter, which focuses on the month prior to the outbreak of war. The Admiralty decision to mobilize towards the end of July sent the Home Fleet into action, and the details of this mobilization are of interest. They were the culmination of years of planning, practice, and paperwork. They deserve close study. However, before considering how this question will be approached in this study, it is worth considering briefly how the Home Fleet developed. Additionally, prior to now the period between Battenberg's order to 'stand the fleet fast' and the outbreak of war has in large part fallen through the cracks. It is often noted how the Royal Navy's mobilization for war proceeded smoothly, but the finer details are overlooked. It seems therefore appropriate to close by shining a light on such details.

A final word regarding the historiographical background of this thesis. It belongs to the Post-revisionist generation, and is an expansion of work previously done for a Masters' thesis on the wider subject of the Anglo-German naval rivalry and the place of the Revisionists' work in the history of that period.¹⁰⁷ That thesis closed with a plea for further research on the subject. The results of that research make up what follows. As always in history, more work remains possible.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher M. Buckey, 'The Dreadnought Misunderstanding: A Revised Narrative of the 'Dreadnought Era'', University of Salford M.A., 2007.

CHAPTER ONE

Admiral Fisher's Reforms, 1904-1906

So much has been written about Admiral Fisher's tenure as First Sea Lord that to attempt yet another complete narrative here would be pointless. That being said, any attempt to trace the Navy's development during this period (whether referred to as the 'Fisher Era' or the 'Prewar Era')—even after his retirement in January 1910—would be next to impossible without at least a cursory discussion of what Fisher did, and in some cases *did not*, achieve during his half-decade as First Sea Lord. Strong emphasis must also be placed on his initial plans presented to the Government prior to his taking office, a package of reforms collectively known as 'The Scheme'. These plans have been the subject of much discussion and criticism since they were first written in mid-1904. The creation and subsequent development of the Home Fleet cannot be adequately described without placing it in the context of Fisher's work as First Sea Lord.

Before examining Fisher's accomplishments, some words on Fisher's personality and methods seem appropriate here. Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher was a great international public figure. A rumour that his mother was a Cingalese princess—an accusation whose undertones scarcely need elaboration—gained such currency that when a comprehensive denial came out, it appeared not only in British newspapers but in the *New York Times* as well.¹ When Fisher took office as First Sea Lord the U.S. Navy's attaché in London described him in a communique to the Navy Department as 'a man of great ability and force of character' who had made his mark 'as an energetic flag officer, great administrator and ready organizer'.² This was an adequate description of a man who had risen to the top of a service then dominated by the upper middle-

¹ 'Fisher Myth Exploded. British Admiral's Mother Was Not a Cingalese Princess.', *The New York Times*, 9 March 1906.

² Captain Charles H. Stockton to Chief of Bureau of Navigation, 21 June 1904, 'Records of the Office of Naval Intelligence, 1887-1927', Entry 278 (box 22 of 40), f. 62, Record Group 45, NARA.

class élite largely through his own abilities and energies.³ Those energies were extraordinary in their scope, as were his goals upon taking office, but while Fisher was naturally the prime mover in every major reform and reorganization that took place, he rarely acted alone. In fact it is hardly likely that Fisher could have accomplished as much as he did without the remarkably broad coalition of fellow officers, civil servants, politicians, and public figures who, if not entirely of like mind with Fisher, nevertheless believed in his being ‘almost entirely a force for good’, at least when kept under firm supervision.⁴ These men were of both parties, and Fisher himself never announced any personal loyalty to either the Liberals or the Conservatives. As evidence of this attitude, Admiral Sir George King-Hall records the following anecdote, which dates from just before his ennoblement to the title of Baron Fisher of Kilverstone:

‘Lord Rosebery wrote and asked him which side of the house he was going to sit. He said on the cross benches and quoted the following lines:
Sworn to no party,
Of no sect am I.
I can’t be silent
And, I will not lie.’⁵

This non-partisan attitude and the broad composition of his friends served Fisher well. ‘Had it not been for the loyalty of his friends,’ Marder wrote, ‘he would have gone under.’⁶ Aside from his co-workers at the Admiralty, and the members of his unofficial brain trust known as the ‘Fishpond’, his allies included major figures from both the Tory and Liberal aisles, the most important of whom was probably A.J. Balfour, whose confidence in Fisher’s abilities checked a

³ It is sometimes said Fisher came from extremely humble beginnings by the standards of the Victorian Royal Navy’s officer corps. Certainly Fisher himself did nothing to discourage such beliefs. However the fact his family found the income and social connections to put three boys through the *Britannia* (Frederick William Fisher also became a flag officer known to the fleet as ‘Uncle Bill’, while Philip Fisher was lost with the training ship *Atalanta* in 1880) suggests that the Fishers were better off than is commonly thought.

⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Admiralty* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton Limited, 1979), p. 123.

⁵ Admiral Sir George King-Hall diary, 17 December 1909, King-Hall Family MSS, NMRN.

⁶ Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 41.

surge of anti-Fisher feelings amongst the Tories before and after their defeat in 1905.⁷ Of the major Liberals Fisher relied on Viscount Esher and Reginald McKenna once the latter took over as First Lord of the Admiralty. Fisher also cultivated ties with the eminent naval historian Julian Corbett and many prominent newsmen such as Arnold White, W.T. Stead, and J.L. Garvin. Finally King Edward lent Fisher a great deal of moral if not constitutional support.

It was as well that Fisher enjoyed this broad base of support. His 'Scheme' as it was presented to First Lord of the Admiralty the Second Earl of Selborne in May 1904 was an almost root-and-branch reorganization of the Royal Navy. The most relevant details of this Scheme and numerous other Fisherite reforms will be discussed in due course, but two examples show that notwithstanding his natural gift for showmanship he possessed the attention to detail necessary to earn him the plaudit of 'Britain's preeminent naval administrator during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.'⁸ First of all was his decision to run down the enormous quantities of commons stores built up by his predecessors, the economic savings thus achieved were substantial.⁹ The second is an indication of his awareness of the human factor in fighting efficiency: during a consideration of reforming the Navy's steward organization he noted:

'In spite of the liberal increase in variety and amount of the seamen's rations lately instituted, one still hears grumbling on the lower deck. The root of the trouble lies with the cooks, who have no idea how to make the best of the food supplied. They have no idea beyond 'copper rattle' baking and boiling, and, although the food supplied is of the highest quality, it is completely unrecognizable in the nasty mess that leaves the ship's galley.'

Fisher's suggested solution was a 'School of Cookery' for both ships' cooks and officers' messmen. 'It is not proposed that ships' cooks should be instructed in "larding larks" and making "pate de foie gras in aspic," but even three weeks of minor instruction in what is known as "plain

⁷ Williams, 'Politics of Naval Reform', pp. 80-99; idem, *Defending the Empire*.

⁸ Jon Sumida, 'British Naval Administration and Policy in the Age of Fisher', *The Journal of Military History* 54, no. 1 (January 1990), p. 3.

⁹ Ibid., p. 7; Bacon, *Lord Fisher*, ii, pp. 12-28.

cooking”... would make an incredible difference to the comfort and contentment of the lower deck.’¹⁰ Although not related to Fisher’s strategic designs, this attentive detail proves Fisher was no typical administrator.

Even for a man with Fisher’s mighty energies—one physician’s remark that the Admiral ought to have been born twins is well known, less remembered was the reaction of a colleague to this anecdote: terror at the prospect of two Fishers in the Navy¹¹—the wide-ranging nature of the Scheme ensured that implementation would be a difficult proposition. However this was not due, as was once widely believed, to a lack of willingness for reform in the turn of the century Royal Navy. The rapid technological changes of the Late Victorian Era had certainly caused frictions, especially between older officers raised on the routines of the sailing navy and the younger technically-minded generation. There are many anecdotes told similar to the following:

‘The captain of a destroyer, labouring in a heavy sea, was told by a senior officer by semaphore—“House your topmast.” Back came an immediate reply—“Very well, thank you!”’¹²

These tensions being admitted, however, the classical view of the pre-Fisher Admiralty as being a shambolic creature, ‘engines running sweetly, and no-one at the helm’¹³ (the consequences of which was a Royal Navy that was ‘in certain respects a drowsy, inefficient, moth-eaten organism’¹⁴) is, to say the least, simplistic. Similarly, the statement that Fisher was ‘the instigator of the redeployment of the Royal Navy’¹⁵ is accurate only with certain caveats.¹⁶ There were, in

¹⁰ Fisher, ‘The Servant Difficulty’, in Kemp, Peter (ed.), *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, ii (London: Naval Records Society, 1960), p. 146. Hereafter cited as *FP*.

¹¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, pp. 16-17.

¹² Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock, *Whispers from the Fleet*, second ed. (Portsmouth: Gieve’s, Matthews and Seagrove, Ltd.), n.d. [1908], p. xvi.

¹³ Rodger, *The Admiralty*, p. 118.

¹⁴ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, ‘Geography, Technology, and British Naval Strategy in the *Dreadnought* Era’, *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 92.

¹⁶ Matthew S. Seligmann, ‘A prelude to the reforms of Admiral Sir John Fisher: the creation of the Home Fleet, 1902-3’, *Historical Research* 83, no. 221 (August 2010), pp. 506-519.

fact, many reform-minded senior officers besides Fisher. A contemporary German periodical saw definite signs of vitality:

‘[A recent naval manoeuvre] clearly indicates that the British Navy has, during these last years, been at work with iron energy and systematically, on the further development of the readiness for war of its several fleets, both from the point of view of organization as well as of strategy and tactics.’¹⁷

This self-confidence was exemplified in a bold 1902 proposal by Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, to dispose of several warships he considered useless by either sale or outright destruction!¹⁸ The same year saw the introduction of unified entry and training for all naval cadets, which was intended to improve harmony between the engineering branch and the rest of the officer corps.¹⁹ This latter reform was largely the work of Fisher, who was then Second Naval Lord. However these changes could not have occurred if the Admiralty was as retrograde an institution as it is sometimes described. Fisher, force of nature though he seems to us, was not an irresistible force.

Despite this general approval of reforms, or at least those reforms seen by the Admiralty as being of tangible and practical value,²⁰ the pace of reforms prior to Fisher’s taking office can be described as being quite gentle. Gradualism was the order of the day. Fisher, however, was never a man to do things by gradual stages. Late in life he wrote: ‘The 3 Requisites for

¹⁷ Extract from *Marine Rundschau*, in Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg to Lord Selborne, 16 October 1904, quoted in Admiral Mark Kerr, *Prince Louis of Battenberg: Admiral of the Fleet* (London: Longman’s, Green and Co., 1934), p. 181. The same letter is reproduced in full in D. George Boyce (ed.), *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910* (London: Historians Press, 1990), pp. 181-182.

¹⁸ Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge to Admiral Lord Walter Kerr, 5 July 1902, BRI/14, Bridge MSS.

¹⁹ Marder, *op cit.*, pp. 28-32, 46-52; Captain John Wells, *The Royal Navy: An Illustrated Social History 1870-1982* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1994), pp. 58-62. For the story of the Royal Navy’s engineers, see generally Geoffrey Penn, *Up Funnel, Down Screw!* (London: Hollis, 1955). Recent unpublished research has challenged the notion that these educational reforms, yclept ‘Selborne Scheme’, were enacted for the benefit of the engineers, preferring a less egalitarian interpretation where the system of common entry was meant to ensure future engineers came from the ‘right’ social background. In this author’s opinion, this alternate interpretation is by no means mutually exclusive with the older view.

²⁰ The necessity for reform proposals to be both practical and of obvious value to the Navy as a whole during the second half of the Victorian Era is a point which is often not emphasized strongly enough, although there is ample evidence for it from a variety of sources.

Success—Ruthless, Relentless, Remorseless (The 3 R's.)'²¹ Understandably—and also unfortunately—this rankled quite a few of his colleagues, including several senior naval figures who would otherwise have probably sided with his intentions.

The Admirals' Bill

Stated simply, by the end of the Victorian Era 'British naval expenditure was running into the limits of what many financial experts believed the state could afford.'²² Maintaining the Royal Navy's ability to, as one officer put it, 'safeguard law and order throughout the world—safeguard civilization, put out fires on shore, and act as guide, philosopher and friend to the merchant ships of all nations,'²³ was an expensive proposition at the best of times, and the turn of the century was not the best of times. A renewal of explicit commitment to the Two Power Standard beginning with the Naval Defence Act of 1889 had greatly increased not only the size and capability of the Royal Navy's battle fleet,²⁴ but had driven up the size of the Naval Estimates as well despite the initial costs being checked somewhat by Chancellor George Goschen's debt conversion measure.²⁵ The following year saw the publication of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's epochal *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, which helped to ignite a new era of navalism when 'the immediate success of his book made naval history and naval strategy fashionable'.²⁶

²¹ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher, *Memories* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 274.

²² Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 4.

²³ Vice-Admiral Humphrey Hugh Smith, *A Yellow Admiral Remembers* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1932), p. 54.

²⁴ Eric Grove, 'The Battleship *Dreadnought*: Technological, Economic and Strategic Contexts', in Robert J. Blyth, Lambert, Andrew Lambert, and Jan Rüger (eds.), *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), pp. 165-181; Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-Dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008).

²⁵ Sumida, *IDNS*, pp. 12-16.

²⁶ N.A.M. Rodger, 'The Idea of Naval Strategy in Britain in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in Geoffrey Till (ed.), *The Development of British Naval Thinking: Essays in memory of Bryan McLaren Ranft* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 30. Marder wrote that *Influence of Sea Power upon History* and its sequel *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and the Empire* 'effected a revolution in the study of naval history "similar in

At almost the same time, three important new warship types reached maturity: the torpedo boat destroyer, the submarine, and the armoured cruiser. The armoured cruiser—usually defined as a large, fast cruiser with a belt of armour—proved the most immediately pressing to the Navy, although perhaps paradoxically it was actually the oldest of the three. Early efforts at the type like Russia's *General-Admirals* and the British *Shannon* of the 1870s were qualified successes at best. Naval architecture was not enough advanced for the ships to meet their high specifications,²⁷ but advances in steel making, and especially the Harvey and Krupp processes for hardening armour, enabled the construction of ships like the French *Jeanne d'Arc*, which could carry a belt capable of withstanding the fire of existing trade protection cruisers. These ships were perfectly suited to attacking Britain's greatest weakness, her vulnerable mercantile fleet.²⁸ The French fully appreciated this fact, and began building armoured cruisers in large numbers to implement a strategy of *guerre industrielle*, a development of the theories of the old *jeune école*. Direct confrontation with Britain's battle fleet was to be avoided, the main weight of French attack falling on British merchantmen. The important difference between the *guerre industrielle* and the *jeune école* was the former's advocacy of employing the new armoured cruisers as commerce raiders rather than the dubious prospect of using the flimsy torpedo boats of the day for that role.²⁹ While the first of this series of French armoured cruisers, the *Dupuy de*

kind to that effected by Copernicus in the domain of astronomy", and that they 'were especially influential in England, where eyes were only half-opened to the meaning of the command of the sea.' Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁷ Sir Nathaniel Barnaby, *Naval Development in the Century* (London: W. & R. Chambers, Limited, 1904); John F. Beeler, *Birth of the Battleship: British Capital Ship Design 1870-1881* (London: Caxton Editions, 1999); Oscar Parkes, *British Battleships, 1860-1950*, new & revised ed. (London: Seeley Service & Co., 1966), pp. 234-243, 307-313; N.A.M. Rodger, 'British Belted Cruisers', *The Mariner's Mirror* 64, no. 1 (February 1978), pp. 23-36.

²⁸ Some contemporary discussions of this weakness are: [Anonymous], 'The Protection of Commerce During War', *JRUSI* 42, no. 243 (May 1898), pp. 507-539; Commander G.A. Ballard, 'The Protection of Commerce During War', *JRUSI* 42, no. 242 (April 1898), pp. 365-405; Captain Sir John Colomb, 'Naval Intelligence and Protection of Commerce in War', *JRUSI* 46, no. 290 (April 1902), pp. 490-520; Lieutenant W.C. Crutchley, 'On the Unprotected State of British Commerce at Sea', *JRUSI* 33, no. 148 (1889), pp. 625-651.

²⁹ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-29; Arne Røksund, *The Jeune École: The Strategy of the Weak* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007).

Lôme, proved a disappointment,³⁰ subsequent designs (especially from the *Jeanne d'Arc* onwards) were much improved. The Admiralty did not lack the wit to divine French intentions, and Goschen, now First Lord, told the Cabinet in 1898 that 'so far as ... can be gauged, [the French] have begun to recognize that it is by cruisers rather than battleships that they can damage us most.'³¹

Despite some scepticism in the Navy over the potential effectiveness of *guerre industrielle*,³² there was much for French cruisers to damage. The burgeoning Victorian population left Britain reliant on overseas sources for food. In 1882 wheat imports from Californian ports to Britain equalled 186 pounds per head and employed more than six hundred merchantmen, and by 1913 four-fifths of the nation's wheat and flour were obtained by importation.³³ Even these statistics may not tell the true story, since figures relating to international trade in grains do not record those portions of the harvest used for meat production and subsequently 'travelled as pork bellies and chilled beef.'³⁴ Regardless of statistical accuracy, disruption of this trade would 'throw great numbers of people out of employment, thus lowering the rates of wages, while the scarcity of food will cause a rise in the prices.'³⁵ Small wonder, then, that Fisher was blunter still:

³⁰ Luc Feron, 'The Cruiser *Dupuy-de-Lôme*', in John Jordan (ed.), *Warship 2011* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2011), pp. 32-47.

³¹ George Goschen, 'Navy Estimates and Shipbuilding Programme, 1898-99', 17 February 1898, CAB 37/46/20, Cabinet Office MSS, TNA.

³² In 1899 the D.N.I. wrote that 'So long as our ships are at least equal to those of the enemy in speed and fighting power, and we have sufficient numbers, it is believed that the opportunities for successfully attacking this commerce are no greater now — if so great — than they were in the past.' 'Remarks of the D.N.I. on Report by Captain H.B. Jackson', quoted in Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 338. The qualification regarding equal ships is worth noting.

³³ Colonel Sir Charles Nugent, 'Imperial Defence: Part II. Abroad', *JRUSI* 28, no. 125 (1884), p. 460; Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 93; R.W. Paul, 'The Wheat Trade between California and the United Kingdom', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 3 (October 1958), p. 403.

³⁴ Offer, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³⁵ Lieutenant Edward E. Bradford, 'The Maritime Defence of the United Kingdom (including its Colonies and Dependencies), and its Trade, in a War with a Great Maritime Power', n.d. [1890], p. 2, BRD/13, Admiral Sir

‘It’s not *invasion* we have to fear if our Navy is beaten
It’s Starvation!’³⁶

Matters were made worse since protecting the vast and scattered bottoms carrying Imperial commerce was not the only task of the Navy’s cruisers, armoured or otherwise. Cruisers were the Royal Navy’s maids-of-all-work, having inherited from their sailing predecessors the responsibilities for training, diplomatic ‘showing the flag’ deployments, Colonial and overseas police duties, and supporting the battle fleet as scouts and dispatch vessels.³⁷ Such was their importance that Admiral Sir Frederick Richards, the Senior Naval Lord, wrote in 1893 that more than 106 cruisers of all types would be needed for their various duties in a hypothetical war against the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance.³⁸ The resulting strain on the Navy’s cruiser strength was counterbalanced to some extent by Britain’s possession and monopolization of the lion’s share of the so-called ‘Victorian Internet’ infrastructure, the worldwide oceanic cable network, which gave a decisive advantage in global communications during any potential conflict.³⁹

The obvious but expensive remedy to the *guerre industrielle* threat was to construct armoured cruisers for the Royal Navy, and between 1897 and 1905 Britain laid down thirty-five such ships.⁴⁰ Attempts were made to economize through ‘moderate dimensions’, but the resulting ‘County’ class were in retrospect inferior ships. Some alternatives were suggested, former

Edward Bradford MSS, NMM. See also Alfred Mansell, ‘Food-Stuffs in the Time of War’, *JRUSI* 47, no. 310 (December 1903), pp. 1335-1385.

³⁶ Emphasis original. Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 18.

³⁷ Norman Friedman, *British Cruisers of the Victorian Era* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publications, 2012), pp. 8-51.

³⁸ ‘Minute by Sir Frederick Richards and the other Naval Members of Board to First Lord’, 18 December 1893, ‘Programme of New Construction’, ADM 116/878.

³⁹ Paul M. Kennedy, ‘Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870-1914’, *English Historical Review* 86, no. 341 (October 1971), pp. 728-752. The British had long understood the implications of the telegraph and exploited it sagaciously. An early example of this awareness is Donald Currie, ‘Maritime Warfare; The Importance to the British Empire of a Complete System of Telegraphs, Coaling Stations, and Graving Docks’, *JRUSI* 21, no. 89 (1877), pp. 228-247. For the British exploitation of this advantage during wartime, see Jonathan Reed Winkler, *Nexus: Strategic Communications and American Security in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), especially ch. 1.

⁴⁰ Sumida, *IDNS*, p. 20.

Director of Naval Construction Sir Nathaniel Barnaby advocated either treaties protecting commerce from attack or building merchantmen easily convertible to auxiliary cruisers in wartime.⁴¹ Neither of these options was politically favourable, but *something* had to be done. In 1901 Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Michael Hicks Beach warned that the ‘tide of prosperity was at least slackening and some symptoms of a change’ were already visible.⁴² This slackening was only partially the result of ballooning expenditure resulting from the Boer War. Behind the scenes, stronger stands were being taken as deficit spending mounted and the Naval Estimates increased from £20.9 million in 1897-1898 to £36.8 million in 1904-1905.⁴³ The conflict between the Admiralty and the Treasury, a crucial yet sometimes neglected aspect of peacetime planning, can be summarized in excerpts from two letters written in 1901, one by the Chancellor and the other by the First Lord of the Admiralty:

‘In the present enormous military expenditure ... I don’t think I am unreasonable in asking the Admiralty to remember that for 5½ years, with hardly anything that can be called an exception, I have assented to everything that the First Lord proposed to me in the Navy Estimates... I have proved therefore that I am not unsympathetic, and it is too much to ask me in the present circumstances for a further increase of 2 ¾ millions this year[.]’⁴⁴

‘Beach of course is absolutely right to say to the Cabinet “We cannot afford navy estimates beyond such & such a figure, & I will not consent to more”. ... What

⁴¹ Sir Nathaniel Barnaby, *Naval Development in the Century* (London: W. & R. Chambers, Limited, 1904), pp. 6-7. Barnaby had been a past advocate of mercantile conversions due to the paucity of both adequate cruising vessels and funds for building such vessels. The broad outlines of this policy he expressed in the following lecture: Idem, ‘On the Fighting Power of the Merchant Ship in Naval Warfare’, *TINA* 18 (1877), pp. 1-23. See also D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought: Warship Development 1860-1905* (London: Caxton Editions, 2003), pp. 86-88; N.A.M. Rodger, ‘The Dark Ages of the Admiralty, 1869-85. Part II: Change and Decay, 1874-80’, *The Mariner’s Mirror* 62, no. 1 (February 1976), pp. 41-45. Another discussion of the use of mercantile conversions is Professor J.H. Biles, ‘The Design of Mail Steamers, with Special Reference to Their Use for War Purposes’, *TINA* 36 (1895), pp. 45-71. Interest in such auxiliary cruisers did not end with the nineteenth century and in fact they formed an important and usually-overlooked element of the Admiralty’s response to the growth of the German threat. See Matthew S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat 1901-1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War Against Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² Quoted in Bernard Mallett, *British Budgets: 1887/88-1912/13* (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 66. See also Aaron L. Friedberg, ‘Britain Faces the Burdens of Empire: The Financial Crisis of 1901-1905’, *War & Society* 5, no. 2 (September 1987), pp. 15-37.

⁴³ Sumida, *op. cit.*, table 3, p. 345.

⁴⁴ Hicks Beach to Selborne, 2 January 1901, in Boyce (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 107.

Beach has no right to do, what he is always trying to do, and what I shall steadily resist, is to dictate how the Admiralty is to spend the money allotted to it. It is for me for instance to advise the Cabinet what ships or guns are wanted. It is for the Cabinet to accept or reject my advice. Beach has no right to say as he will “We have plenty of destroyers. I won’t consent to any more expenditure on Destroyers”.⁴⁵

As late as February of 1904, First Lord Selborne felt unable to assure his colleagues in the Cabinet that substantial savings could be made in the year’s Navy Estimates despite the destruction of the Russian First Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur.⁴⁶ This was despite his earlier plea to the Board of Admiralty that they must take financial economy

‘to their fireside to sit beside efficiency and not leave the derelict orphan in my sole charge. Further they must reverse their mental process. They must cease to say “This is the ideal plan; how can we get money enough to carry it out?” They must say instead “Here is a sovereign; how much can we squeeze out of it that will really count for victory in a Naval war?”’⁴⁷

Of the senior Admirals considered to replace Lord Walter Kerr as First Sea Lord, only Fisher, despite his unpopularity in some quarters,⁴⁸ offered the needed qualities of administrative talent and a desire to minister to the orphan of economy.⁴⁹ There was much riding on Selborne’s efforts towards economy, a matter that he understood all too well: ‘I understand the situation to be that the whole character of the Budget, vile or passable, depends on what I can do.’⁵⁰ In response, Chancellor Austen Chamberlain told Selborne that a ‘good Budget’ was ‘out of the question’ and

⁴⁵ Selborne to Joseph Chamberlain, 21 September 1901, in *ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁶ Cabinet Memorandum by Lord Selborne, 26 February 1904, in *ibid.*, pp. 170-173.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 36 and Sumida, *INDS*, p. 26. Original location is Selborne to Admiralty Permanent Secretary, 16 February 1903, in ‘Distribution of Business, 1904’, 31 December 1904, ADM 1/7737.

⁴⁸ See for instance Custance to Bridge, 17 October 1901, BRI/15, Bridge MSS. Sir Charles Walker, a long-time civilian secretary at the Admiralty, later wrote that Fisher ‘did not always find it easy to carry to Board with him in his reforms... After one board meeting at which an important matter was dealt with I happened to meet him in a corridor, and, on asking him how matters had progressed, he said, “I did not know admirals could be so rude to each other.”’ Sir Charles Walker, *Thirty-Six Years at the Admiralty* (London: Lincoln Williams, 1933), p. 46. In light of Fisher’s subsequent feud with Lord Charles Beresford, this foreboding observation seems to have come straight from the mouth of Cassandra herself.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Lambert, *op cit.*, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Selborne to Austen Chamberlain, 11 November 1904, f. 239, MS.Eng.hist.c.748, John S. Sandars MSS, Bodleian Library.

Selborne had been correct: ‘I think you accurately represent the financial situation when you say that it depends upon the Navy Estimates whether the Budget is “vile or passable”’.⁵¹

Despite the major importance of economies in expenditure, Fisher’s certitude of achieving them, and (likely) the recognition that, economy or no, Fisher was the best of a very thin crop of candidates,⁵² it still may have taken some ““wire-pulling”” for Fisher’s nomination to go through successfully.⁵³ This may be to do with Fisher’s divisive reputation amongst the upper ranks of the Navy. Despite the controversy Fisher could generate, however, the Government had more important matters to consider when making their choice, and Fisher ultimately got the nod.

The Scheme: Designs and (Re-)Distributions

When Fisher took office he immediately began putting the Scheme into effect. In a letter to Selborne written in the summer of 1904, he claimed that once the Scheme was enacted the Navy ‘shall be Thirty per cent. more fit to fight and we shall be ready for instant War!’⁵⁴ Furthermore, he declared in no uncertain terms that

‘The Scheme herein shadowed forth must be adopted as a whole!
Simply because all portions of it are absolutely essential—and it is all so
interlaced that any tampering will be fatal!’⁵⁵

This bold declaration was typical of Fisher’s unique combination of showmanship, vision and ruthless determination. The most famous element of the Admiralty actions resulting from the Scheme was the design and construction of the *Dreadnought*. The story of this remarkable ship

⁵¹ Austen Chamberlain to Selborne, 12 November 1904, f. 241, MS.Eng.hist.c.748, Sandars MSS.

⁵² Of the others at the head of the Flag List in 1904, only Sir Arthur Wilson and Sir Edward Seymour could be considered first class men, and Seymour lacked administrative experience. Of the others, Sir Compton Domville was said to have decayed by this time, and sailor-strategist Sir Cyprian Bridge had retired due to age in March 1904. For Domville, see George King-Hall diary, 1 November 1902 and 13 April 1903, King-Hall MSS. For Seymour, see Admiral of the Fleet the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Seymour, *My Naval Career and Travels* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1911). For Wilson, see Admiral Sir Edward E. Bradford, *The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvet-Wilson* (London: John Murray, 1923).

⁵³ Admiral Sir John Fisher to Viscount Esher, April 30, 1904, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, pp. 313-314.

⁵⁴ Fisher, ‘Untitled notes for the First Lord on Naval Reform’, May 1904 [possibly backdated], ADM 116/942.

⁵⁵ Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 17.

has been told sufficiently elsewhere,⁵⁶ but discussing *Dreadnought* in isolation obscures how she was conceptualized as just another interlaced component of the Scheme—though admittedly a hugely important component. *Dreadnought* was just one of a series of designs resulting from Fisher’s Committee of Designs appointed to standardize future naval construction into a few distinct types in accordance with Fisher’s theories of naval warfare, and “probably no design in naval architecture was ever so frankly sown in the pure soil of theoretical study and practical experiment.”⁵⁷ The initial philosophy behind the Committee can be seen in this excerpt from commentary on Fisher’s initial proposal for disposing of warships considered unsuitable for modern conditions:

‘No ship is really useful below the strength of a 1st Class Cruiser which cannot keep a seagoing speed of 25 knots in average weather. ...
 ‘This limits [a proposed list of effective warships] to—
Battleships.—Nothing below “Admiral” Class.
1st Class Cruisers.—Nothing below “Theseus” Class.
2nd Class Cruisers.—Nothing below “Dido” Class.
Destroyers.
Scouts.
Submarine Boats.’⁵⁸

The disposal of the myriad old ironclads, sloops, gunboats, and other ships that did not belong to the above list was only the beginning. Fisher had good reason for wishing to clear such dead wood from the naval list: ‘Courageous scrapping is the whole secret of fighting efficiency. You won’t get new ships at the top if you keep on old ships at the bottom.’⁵⁹ Fisher, of course, had his ideas of what those new ships would be. His plan was to build only four broad classes of

⁵⁶ For instance, John Brooks, ‘*Dreadnought*: Blunder or Stroke of Genius’, *War & Society* 14, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 157-178; D.K. Brown, ‘The Design and Construction of the Battleship DREADNOUGHT’, in *Warship*, vol. IV (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1980), pp. 39-52; Grove, ‘The Battleship *Dreadnought*’, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-181; Parkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-483; John Roberts, *Anatomy of the Ship: The Battleship Dreadnought*, revised ed. (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2001); Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-70; and many, many others.

⁵⁷ Julian Corbett, ‘Some Principles of Naval Warfare’, in Kemp (ed.), *FP*, ii, p. 328.

⁵⁸ Committee of Five, ‘Some Criticisms of the Original Print of Sir John Fisher by the Committee of Five’, in Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Fisher to W.T. Stead, 30 October 1910, STED 1/27, W.T. Stead MSS, CCAC.

warships: a 15,900 ton battleship, an armoured cruiser of the same tonnage, a 900 ton, 36 knot destroyer, and a 350 ton submarine with a surfaced speed of 14 knots.⁶⁰ When this plan reached the Committee on Designs the specifics had been changed slightly. The question of submarine designs was not considered,⁶¹ and the destroyer was split into two distinct types. Thus five potential designs emerged from the Committee's report:

- 1) 21 knot, 'all big gun' battleship
- 2) 25 knot, 'all big gun' armoured cruiser
- 3) 33 or 34 knot, 600 ton ocean-going destroyer
- 4) 26 knot, 'Coastal Service' destroyer
- 5) Experimental 36 knot torpedo-armed vessel

These five designs were subsequently built as, respectively, *Dreadnought*, *Invincible*, the *Tribals*, the Coastal Destroyers, and the *Swift*. The three proposed torpedo craft are of special interest as their specifics reveal a major, and until recently, unappreciated part of Fisher's reorganization. While splitting Fisher's original single destroyer type into two seems to go against the principle of simplification, there were very good reasons for such a bifurcation. In the Committee's words the coastal destroyers were 'capable of effectively dealing with the large majority of foreign torpedo craft against which we have to provide... at moderate cost.'⁶² The larger and faster ocean destroyers were, meanwhile, meant 'to accompany the fleets in all weathers, anywhere and to any part of the world'.⁶³

This was a reflection of the somewhat schizophrenic nature of the destroyer's place in British strategy. One of the major innovations that emerged from Fisher's time as C.-in-C.

⁶⁰ See Fisher, 'Some of the Details of the Proposals', Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 22. The basics of these designs, especially the armoured cruiser and the destroyer, seem to have been worked out between Fisher and the Constructor at Malta, W.H. Gard, during Fisher's time as C.-in-C. Mediterranean. Gard subsequently joined Fisher's Committee of Designs. Norman Friedman, *British Destroyers: From Earliest Days to the Second World War* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2009), p. 102; also D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought*, pp. 186-195.

⁶¹ Presumably it was decided to leave that work to Captain Bacon's submariners and the specialists at Vickers, who had a monopoly arrangement with the Navy for private submarine contracts. See Nicholas Lambert, *JNFR*, pp. 50-55, 154-157.

⁶² Committee on Designs, 'First Progress Report', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Mediterranean was the employment of destroyers as an integral part of the fleet, using their torpedo batteries as a force multiplier for the battle line.⁶⁴ The idea of using destroyers as a counter to torpedo attacks on battlefleets was also considered; one result of the 1904 manoeuvres was that Channel Fleet C.-in-C. Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson considered that destroyer screens around the fleet as good an anti-submarine tactic as could be devised at the time.⁶⁵ These tactics were in opposition to the original intention of destroyers as patrolling off enemy ports and running down any torpedo craft that attempted to slip out to sea, a role that they still performed in the Channel at the time of the Committee of Designs' report.⁶⁶ The division between coastal and ocean destroyers was presaged by the development of the high-freeboard *River*-class destroyers, which had much superior seakeeping abilities versus the older turtleback destroyer types.⁶⁷

The 36-knot experimental design, meanwhile, was meant to use her torpedoes and extreme speed to 'render the time honoured function of battleships impossible, and should make the convoy of slow ships along defined routes, keeping lines of communication with overseas bases open, and blockading operations, impossible to conduct with certainty.'⁶⁸ In other words, it seems the intention was to replace existing small gun-armed trade protection cruisers with fast cruising torpedo vessels. The Committee was more reticent and in discussion of the type did not specify a *raison d'être*, instead writing that the 36-knotter had 'a great future' if she proved

⁶⁴ Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-73.

⁶⁵ He wrote to Vice-Admiral Sir Gerard Noel that a destroyer screen 'is a very good protection and in most cases if the destroyers get near them they can follow them up and sink them.' Wilson to Noel, 22 May 1904, NOE/4/A, Noel MSS.

⁶⁶ Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-69, 73-74. See also Bridge to Admiral Sir Charles Penrose FitzGerald [President, Committee on Torpedo Boat Destroyers], 21 March 1902, BRI/15, Bridge MSS.

⁶⁷ The difference was so stark that the *Rivers* have been described as a completely different type from the earlier vessels. See David Lyon, *The First Destroyers*, soft back ed. (London: Mercury Books, 2005).

⁶⁸ Fisher, 'The Fighting Characteristics of Vessels of War', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

affordable.⁶⁹ As it happened, none of these hopes were achieved—the resulting *Swift* was 2,131 tons on trial, cost £236,000, never made her contract speed, and owing to her massive and vulnerable power plant she was considered fit only to be little more than a fleet scout.⁷⁰

The ‘ocean destroyer’ design also went awry. The design requirements were cutting edge and the initial November 1904 submissions from destroyer firms—every one produced in haste since the Admiralty only allowed eleven days for replies—were all rejected.⁷¹ Ten months passed before the Admiralty and the shipbuilders reached agreement on acceptable designs, meaning none could be ordered under the 1904-5 Estimates.⁷² The resulting *Tribals* had their share of good qualities but were hamstrung by their extremely short operational range (a result of fuel-hungry turbines and inadequate fuel capacity), and their high cost was a fatal drawback,⁷³ especially when the Naval Estimates were being stripped of every penny that could be spared. The resultant small number of functional seagoing destroyers begun prior to the coal-burning, *River*-descended *Beagles* of the 1909 Estimates⁷⁴ left one officer complaining that from 1902 on Britain’s destroyer procurement had been ‘spasmodic’ and resulted in the Royal Navy being ‘the unfortunate possessors of a number of Destroyers which may be classed as “Good”, “Bad” and “Indifferent”’.⁷⁵

These disappointments, however, were still in the future when Fisher and the Committee of Designs reported to Selborne. The division of destroyer construction into what Norman

⁶⁹ Committee on Designs, ‘First Progress Report’, *ibid.*, p. 222.

⁷⁰ Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-106; Edgar J. March, *British Destroyers: A History of Development, 1892-1953* (London: Seeley Service & Co., 1967), pp. 96-98.

⁷¹ March, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁷² Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-108; March, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

⁷³ The cheapest of the *Tribals*, the *Amazon*, cost £137,034, almost double that of a *River*. March, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁷⁴ Only twelve *Tribals* and the *Swift* were ordered between 1905 and 1908. The thirty-six ‘Coastals’ were unsuitable for fleet work and indeed they had never been intended to perform such duties.

⁷⁵ Captain John de Robeck to Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, 5 or 12 May 1909, DRBK 3/13, Admiral of the Fleet Sir John de Robeck MSS, CCAC.

Friedman terms a ‘high-low mix’⁷⁶ was not only in line with previous developments in British destroyer designs and tactics, but also fit in with Fisher’s intentions regarding the new battleship and armoured cruiser designs and his plans for redistributing the Royal Navy’s existing naval strength.

Fisher’s *dicta* for the *Dreadnought* and *Invincible* were that ‘[t]he two governing conditions which have definitely fixed on are *guns* and *speed*’.⁷⁷ Both these characteristics had been guiding interests of Fisher’s since his days as a Lieutenant in H.M.S. *Excellent* in the 1860s, and his year of service as Gunnery Officer of the revolutionary ironclad frigate *Warrior* cannot be discounted as a major influence on his thinking.⁷⁸ *Warrior* and her sister *Black Prince* were the most powerful warships on the seas when completed, being faster than their nearest foreign equivalents and possessing armour that was essentially impregnable.⁷⁹ They could confidently outpace any ship that might possess sufficient armament to overpower them, and their eventual re-designation as first class cruisers in 1891 was apt (although one which has until recently been overlooked because of their status as near-obsolete relics not yet deleted from reserve), as they were in many ways the forerunners of the *Drakes*.⁸⁰ When reading Fisher’s comments about the *Invincibles* it is tempting to imagine he was trying to recreate the absolute supremacy enjoyed by *Warrior* when he was her Gunnery Officer.

However, focusing too much on a hypothetical ‘*Warrior* connection’, despite its attractiveness, obscures the other important influences on *Dreadnought* and *Invincible*. Above all,

⁷⁶ Friedman, *op cit.*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ Committee on Designs, ‘First Progress Report’, Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁷⁸ Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-37.

⁷⁹ Admiral G.A. Ballard (ed. N.A.M. Rodger), *The Black Battlefleet* (Greenwich: The Society for Nautical Research, 1980), p. 55; Roger Chesneau (ed.), *Conway’s All The World’s Fighting Ships 1860-1905* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1978), p. 7.

⁸⁰ Profuse thanks must be given to my friend and advisor, Professor Eric J. Grove, for bringing my attention to this change of designation. For a detailed treatment of *Warrior* and her significance, see Andrew Lambert, *Warrior: Restoring the World’s First Ironclad* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1987), pp. 7, 9-44, 171-174. For the reasons behind this redesignation, see Friedman, *British Cruisers: Victorian Era*, p. 144-145.

both designs were ‘the logical outcome of many years of steady development in ship and engine design, hastened by rapid developments in gunnery.’⁸¹ The influence of those gunnery advances on *Dreadnought* and *Invincible* are evident not just from their ‘all big gun’ armament, as opposed to previous ships carrying several sizes of gun ‘as if you were peopling the Ark, and wanted representatives of all calibres’.⁸² Said main armament was disposed to give equal weight of fire at any point of the compass, a characteristic demonstrating how important the armoured cruiser heritage was in the design process.⁸³ Combined with Fisher’s now well-known preference for the *Invincible*, we can see that *Dreadnought*’s function was not merely a revolutionary warship, but a prototype and test bed for Fisher’s ultimate hope of creating an all-purpose capital ship. Her rapid construction time was not only to display what could be done by British shipbuilding industry in a simulated crisis, but to prove sound the features planned for subsequent capital ships like the *Invincibles*.⁸⁴ Like many other Fisher reforms, he had been championing this for years, as was evident by his love of the fast second-class battleship *Renown*, a ship he had helped to design,⁸⁵ which became his preferred flagship. In 1900 Fisher had written Selborne that:

‘I on one occasion [as C.-in-C. North America] “mopped up” all the cruisers one after another with ... *Renown*. The heavy swell and big seas had no corresponding effect on the big *Renown* as it had on the smaller *Talbot*, *Indefatigable*, and other

⁸¹ D.K. Brown, ‘Battleship DREADNOUGHT’, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁸² Fisher, ‘Rough Headings of 6th Lecture’, 30 December 1901, in ‘Extracts from Confidential Papers. Mediterranean Fleet, 1899-1902.’, p. 10, MSS 253/1/2, Box 1/2, Crease MSS. Aside from the *King Edwards*, the Royal Navy was one of the more minor offenders in this regard. The American *Virginia* class, ordered in the same year as Fisher wrote of a gun-populated Ark, carried four 12-inch, eight 8-inch, twelve 6-inch, twelve 3-inch, and twelve 3 pounders. The 12-inch and 8-inch batteries were carried in two-story turrets, with a predictable effect on shooting efficiency. Chesneau (ed.), *Conway’s 1860-1905*, p. 143. For a discussion of these turrets, see Parkes, *op. cit.*, p. 401. For the reasons why this exceptional array of guns was chosen see Norman Friedman, *U.S. Battleships: An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), pp. 17-49.

⁸³ The use of turbines for efficient long-distance steaming at high speed is also significant evidence toward this conclusion.

⁸⁴ Fisher himself had no doubt *Dreadnought* would be a success, and even before she completed orders were planned for three near-sisters, the *Bellerophon* class. Parkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-502. Others were more doubtful: e.g. ‘Civis’ [Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge], *The State of the Navy in 1907: A Plea for Inquiry* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1907), pp. 104-107.

⁸⁵ Randal Gray (ed.), *Conway’s All The World’s Fighting Ships 1906-1921* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1984), pp. 22-23; Parkes, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

cruisers, and for that reason in my plans of battle on this station [the Mediterranean] I put the fast battleships *Canopus* and *Ocean*, with their 17½ knots speed, with the cruisers, as I feel perfectly sure they will stand me in good stead in dealing with the enemy's cruisers and protecting the retreat of our own when occasion requires them to fall back.'⁸⁶

Fisher went still further subsequently, proposing in his initial notes on the Scheme that '[t]here is good ground for enquiry whether the naval supremacy of a country can any longer be assessed by its battleships. To build battleships merely to fight an enemy's battleships, so long as cheaper craft can destroy them, and prevent them of themselves protecting sea operations, is merely to breed Kilkenny cats unable to catch rats or mice.'⁸⁷ Selborne was sceptical, noting on the same paper that battleships were 'essential, just as much as 100 years ago.'⁸⁸ These exchanges were not merely theoretical discourses. In fact they hinged heavy in regards to Fisher's plans for redistributing the Royal Navy's fighting squadrons.

In his initial Scheme, Fisher explicated a plan to deploy the Navy's active strength into five 'great fleets' that would each have a 'strategic centres'. The fleets were the Home, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Western, and Eastern Fleets. Their centres were Dover, Gibraltar, Alexandria, the Cape, and Singapore respectively. While Fisher did not define the term 'strategic centre' explicitly in any of the memoranda, he left no doubt what it meant: 'Five keys lock up the world!' Fisher declared, and proclaimed that '[t]hese five keys belong to England, and the five great fleets of England will hold those keys!'⁸⁹ The next paragraph expanded on the principles behind this redeployment:

'The old system of stations was undoubtedly a good one in past years, but our present stock-taking reveals the fact that the cruiser of today is a totally different

⁸⁶ Fisher to Selborne, 19 December 1900, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, p. 174.

⁸⁷ Fisher, '[E]laboration of the previous Print by Sir John Fisher, which he gave to the Committee of Seven', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 41. The passage referring to 'cheaper craft' deserves great emphasis.

⁸⁸ Selborne's notes on *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Fisher, 'Appendix H: Instant Readiness for War, Strategy—Fleet Distribution and Fleet Orders', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

vessel to that of a few years ago. Speed, range of action, and fighting qualities are all immeasurably improved, telegraphy has been enormously developed, hence transmission of orders, and mutual conference of thought enormously bettered. Instead of a number of isolated squadrons acting under different heads, all actuated from different views of the same state of conditions, each independent of the strategy pursued by the other, we will have a co-ordinated whole. Unity of purpose is strength, ever so much more is unity of strategy. The very essence of our naval strategy is to hunt out and destroy the enemy.'

This was another of Fisher's long-standing ideas. He described a similar plan in one of his Mediterranean lectures. Said to date from 1899, Fisher's 'Outline of a Scheme to Govern the Disposition of the Fleet' suggested four main commands to be created by merging many of the Navy's existing stations. The 'Eastern Fleet' comprised the China, Pacific, Australian, and East Indian Stations, the 'Atlantic Fleet' the Cape, South Atlantic, and North American and West Indian Stations, the 'Mediterranean Fleet' the added the Channel and Cruiser Squadrons to the existing Mediterranean force, and the 'Home Fleet' would remain as then organized. The following is a detailed breakdown of the proposed fleets:

The Eastern Fleet would have its headquarters 'probably at Ceylon' and the C.-in-C., a full Admiral, would have an armoured cruiser as flagship, part of a full cruiser squadron 'which he would make the tour of his whole Station'. A battleship squadron in China would be under the command of a Vice-Admiral, and four Rear-Admirals or Commodores 1st Class would command the local detachments. The entire fleet would combine 'at stated periods' for exercises. The Atlantic Fleet would be based at the Cape Station's headquarters and be commanded by a Vice-Admiral with two Rear-Admirals and Commodore. As with the Eastern Fleet, the entire strength would combine for manoeuvres. The Mediterranean Fleet would remain based on Malta, but the former Channel Squadron would work from Malta and the Cruiser Squadron at Corfu. These two

forces would be renamed the Second and Third Divisions of the Mediterranean Fleet respectively.

The Home Fleet would be commanded by a Vice-Admiral assisted by two Rear-Admirals.⁹⁰

In 1904 however, Fisher presented a detailed plan for how the Royal Navy's active strength was to be deployed to forge the five keys.⁹¹

Home Fleet	Channel Fleet	Cruiser Squadron	Mediterranean Fleet	China Fleet	Australian Squadron	East Indian Squadron	Cape of Good Hope Squadron	West Atlantic	Pacific Squadron
8 battleships, 2 third-class cruisers, 24 destroyers.	8 battleships, 2 third-class cruisers	4 armoured cruisers	12 battleships, 4 first-class armoured cruisers, 4 third-class cruisers, 20 destroyers.	4 armoured cruisers, 4 first-class protected cruisers, 4 second-class cruisers, 12 destroyers, 8 river gunboats.	2 armoured cruisers, 2 protected cruisers, 4 third-class cruisers	2 second-class cruisers, 2 third-class cruisers.	2 protected cruisers, 2 second-class cruisers, 4 third-class cruisers.	2 protected cruisers, 4 second-class cruisers.	3 second-class cruise

The Home and Channel Fleets (the latter of which was the same as the proposed Atlantic Fleet) would be supplemented in wartime by ships from the new system of reserves based on partial 'nucleus crews'. These consisted of enough officers and specialist ratings to operate with the active fleet on a few hours' notice, *e.g.* an emergency too critical to allow for the delay of mobilizing reservists.⁹² The importance of these changes in the organization of the reserve fleet will be examined shortly.

It can be a dangerous business to try to summarize Fisher's often-enthusiastic proposals into a coherent vision.⁹³ There is something to be said for the characterization of Fisher as a man who 'thought in large brush-strokes and primary colours' with a vision that 'was as broad, as grandiose and as ephemeral' as Churchill at his most grandiloquent.⁹⁴ However this generalization can easily be pushed too far, as analysis of his proposals for the 'Scheme' shows.

⁹⁰ Fisher, 'Outline of a Scheme to Govern the Disposition of the Fleet.', in Fisher, 'Extracts from Confidential Papers. Mediterranean Fleet, 1899-1902.', pp. 85-86, MSS 253/1/2, Box 1/2, Crease MSS.

⁹¹ Fisher, 'Table K', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 129-30.

⁹² Bacon, *Lord Fisher*, i, pp. 287-290; Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, pp. 100-101.

⁹³ Nicholas Lambert's work is such an example. As was noted earlier, Geoffrey Till described Lambert's thesis as enticing, but never entirely convincing. The Navy's battleships in particular were discussed in a manner indicating that Fisher would perhaps have been glad had they just vanished from the Earth on some Edwardian morning.

⁹⁴ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

They are as wide-ranging as they are in places disjointed, nevertheless several quite coherent themes and ideas do emerge from the myriad proposals and appendices.

By withdrawal of the China Fleet's battleships and a thorough weeding out of the Navy's extensive collection of small, martially questionable foreign service craft, enough men could be found to reorganize the existing fleets in European waters. This allowed maintenance of 'a sufficient fleet in permanent commission' to 'provide nucleus crews for all the remaining ships on the war list not in commission' and enabling 'sufficient elasticity to commission six 1st class ships, *i.e.*, battle-ships or armoured cruisers (two at each of the home ports), without upsetting the mobilization of the remainder of the fleet in reserve.'⁹⁵ The new Atlantic Fleet, 'based on Gibraltar, where all repairs will be carried out', would 'act as a reinforcement to either the Home or Mediterranean fleets as required.'⁹⁶ The Atlantic Fleet would be the hinge on which the Navy's war strength would deploy.

Soon a committee led by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg, was created to make Fisher's redeployment plans manifest. An early report made its views on geopolitics, and thus Fisher's as well, explicitly clear:

'It has been accepted that the most likely combinations against us to be provided for are, in order of probability—

1. Germany and Russia;
2. France and Russia;

The United States being regarded throughout as friendly.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ D.N.I. Committee to Fisher, 10 November 1904, pp. 7-8, in Admiralty, 'First and Second Progress Reports (Redistribution of the Fleet in Commission) of Committee presided over by Director of Naval Intelligence', 6 December 1904, M.15015/04, in Admiralty, 'Redistribution of the Fleet in Home and Foreign Waters: Minutes on the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Reports of Progress of Committee presided over by the Director of Naval Intelligence', 6 December 1904, ADM 1/7736.

⁹⁶ D.N.I. Committee, 'Fourth Progress Report', 3 December 1904, M.15017/04, p. 2, in 'Redistribution of the Fleet in Home and Foreign Waters: Minutes on the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Reports of Progress of Committee presided over by the Director of Naval Intelligence', 6 December 1904, ADM 1/7736.

⁹⁷ D.N.I. Committee to Fisher, 10 November 1904, p. 1, in Admiralty, 'First and Second Progress Reports (Redistribution of the Fleet in Commission) of Committee presided over by Director of Naval Intelligence', 6 December 1904, M.15015/04, in Admiralty, 'Redistribution of the Fleet in Home and Foreign Waters: Minutes on the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Reports of Progress of Committee presided over by the Director of Naval Intelligence', 6 December 1904, ADM 1/7736.

The report also noted however that beyond those generalities ‘it was not considered necessary to enter into political considerations of an international character.’ Apart from some natural and inevitable broad-based strategic considerations, the reorganization was primarily another part of Fisher’s economy drive.⁹⁸

The final redistribution plan produced by Battenberg’s Committee differed slightly from the original Scheme proposals:

	Channel Fleet	Atlantic Fleet	Mediterranean Fleet	Eastern Fleet
Battleships	12 (14) ^α	8 (9) ^α	8 (9) ^α	-
Armoured Cruisers	6	6	4	6
2nd Class Cruisers	1	1	4	9
3rd Class Cruisers	1	1	-	7
Scouts	2	2	4	-
Destroyers	36	-	40 ^β	8 ^γ

α When available.

β Fifteen in reserve on station with nucleus crews.

γ Two in reserve with nucleus crews.

The Eastern Fleet was further divided among the four stations as follows:⁹⁹

	China Station	Australian Station	East Indies Station	Cape Station
Armoured Cruisers	5	1	-	-
1st Class Unarmoured Cruisers	-	-	-	1
2nd Class Cruisers	4	3	2	2
3rd Class Cruisers	-	5	2	-
Destroyers	8	-	-	-
River Gunboats	9	-	-	-

The armoured cruisers in European waters were grouped into numbered squadrons, each attached for administrative purposes to one of the fleets. Their duties were far more expansive than supporting the battle fleet, however. In fact, they were meant as flying squadrons capable of deployment to any point on the globe coordinated centrally by telegraph.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-115.

⁹⁹ D.N.I. Committee, ‘Fourth Progress Report’, 3 December 1904, M.15015/04, pp. 2-3, in Admiralty, ‘Redistribution of the Fleet in Home and Foreign Waters’, 6 December 1904, ADM 1/7736.

¹⁰⁰ Norman Friedman, *Network-Centric Warfare: How Navies Learned to Fight Smarter through Three World Wars* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), pp. 3-7; Nicholas A. Lambert, ‘Strategic Command and Control for

The Scheme into Action

Fisher was able to begin implementing his reforms almost immediately. Two days after becoming First Sea Lord, the Russian Second Pacific Squadron opened fire on British fishing trawlers off Dogger Bank, mistaking them for Japanese torpedo boats.¹⁰¹ Fisher used the furore that followed as a pretext for bringing home the crews of various gunboats and sloops on foreign stations that were tying up manpower. Then-D.N.I. Battenberg would later recall:

‘Lord Fisher dictated to me the following telegram to all C. in C.’s and S.N.O.s on foreign stations:

“‘War with Russia is imminent. Concentrate your fleet at Station Headquarters. Pay off immediately the following ships (here followed the names of all the sloops and gunboats). Send home by first packet and wire date of arrival in England.’”

‘By the time these parties arrived home we had enough officers and men for the scheme which was put into execution.’¹⁰²

Despite this success, the final redistribution likely remained something of a compromise for Fisher. Selborne was much more reticent about disposing of older battleships than Fisher. In response to Fisher’s initial list of ships to be disposed of he noted that ‘I do not agree about *Nile*, *Trafalgar*, *Thunderer*, and *Devastation*. I would treat then the same as [the] “Admirals”. *After Armageddon* we shall want them badly. The Japs would give a million apiece for them tomorrow.’¹⁰³ Apart from these, there also remained quite a few ships from Fisher’s original list of ‘*bonâ fide* fighting vessels’¹⁰⁴ still in reserve for lack of crews even with the great reductions in ‘non-effective’ ships. Overall, ‘the Royal Navy’s fighting efficiency had certainly been increased,

Maneuver Warfare: Creation of the Royal Navy’s “War Room” System, 1905-1915’, *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 361-410.

¹⁰¹ Russian trigger-happiness aside, this mistake in identity is less bizarre than it seems today. In 1904 Britain was in close, public alliance with Japan and was the world centre of warship production for foreign powers, especially Japan. The Russian C.-in-C. Admiral Zinovy Rozhdestvensky had perhaps reason to be paranoid of Japanese warships operating in the North Sea.

¹⁰² Marquess of Milford Haven to Lord Cecil Fisher, 25 August 1921. Quoted in Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

¹⁰³ Marginal Note by Selborne on Fisher, ‘Main Principles of Scheme’ in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Fisher, ‘Main Principles of Scheme’, in *ibid.*, p. 13.

the worst administrative problems had been solved, and over three and a half million had been shaved from the naval estimates.’¹⁰⁵

The men brought home were not merely intended to crew the restructured fleets. The ‘nucleus crew’ system required these men. Fisher explained that this system was, in conjunction with the fleet redistribution:

‘(a) To maintain in commission at home and abroad as large an effective fleet as possible consistent with Imperial requirements, both political and diplomatic.
 ‘(b) To maintain in reserve at home the remainder of the effective fleet manned with about a two-fifths complement consisting principally of the most important ranks and ratings, except ships in dockyard reserve.’¹⁰⁶

These nucleus crew ships were to be organized into divisions ‘suitably distributed between the three home ports’ each initially to be commanded by a Rear-Admiral but later to have separate Rear-Admirals ‘one ... to command the battle-ship division and one to command the cruiser division at each port’ as the size of the reserve fleet was increased.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore there was to be ‘a sufficient floating surplus of personnel in barracks to enable six battle-ships or first-class cruisers—two at each home port—to be fully commissioned on emergency without dislocating general mobilization arrangements.’ The choice of which type to mobilize was, significantly, only to be determined on the day, so twelve ships—six battleships and six cruisers—were to be maintained in heightened readiness.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ Fisher, ‘Nucleus Crews’, in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ D.N.I. Committee, ‘Fourth Progress Report’, 3 December 1904, M.15015/04, pp. 5-6, in Admiralty, ‘Redistribution of the Fleet in Home and Foreign Waters’, 6 December 1904, ADM 1/7736.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10. The ‘emergency ships’ were to be the following:

Portsmouth	Plymouth	Chatham
<i>Canopus, Goliath</i>	<i>Barfleur, Hood</i>	<i>Repulse, Ramillies</i>
<i>Powerful, Terrible</i>	<i>Niobe, Europa</i>	<i>King Alfred, Diadem</i>

Battenberg's Committee recommended the following distribution of nucleus crew ships:¹⁰⁹

Portsmouth	Plymouth	Chatham
<i>King Edward VII, Renown, Canopus, Goliath, Prince George. Powerful, Terrible, Royal Arthur, Gladiator, Indefatigable, Latona, Amethyst, Pandora.</i> All reserve torpedo boats.	<i>Commonwealth, Barfleur, Hood, Trafalgar, Nile. Niobe, Europa, Edgar, Blake, Arrogant, Eclipse, Cambrian, Hermione, Diamond, Harrier, Hussar.</i> All reserve torpedo boats.	<i>Dominion, Repulse, Ramillies, Resolution. King Alfred, Diadem, Argonaut, Spartiate, Blenheim, Vindictive, Talbot, Scylla, Sapphire, Pegasus, Pioneer, Pyramus, Dryad, Speedy.</i> All reserve torpedo boats.

The large number of modern ships in this initial schedule is deceptive; it was intended they would pass into the active fleets once sufficiently worked up. They were to be exchanged over the course of 1905 by the older ships they would replace on active service—and by the beginning of 1906 the estimated nucleus crew reserve would be:¹¹⁰

Portsmouth	Plymouth	Chatham
<i>Barfleur, Renown, Centurion, Canopus, Ocean, Goliath. Cressy, Aboukir, Powerful, Terrible. Gladiator, Indefatigable, Iphigenia, Pandora.</i> 12 Destroyers and all reserve torpedo boats.	<i>Royal Sovereign, Revenge, Empress of India, Hood, Nile, Trafalgar. Devonshire, Roxburgh, Niobe, Ariadne, Europa. Arrogant, Eclipse, Diamond.</i> 12 Destroyers and reserve torpedo boats	<i>Majestic, Repulse, Resolution, Ramillies, Royal Oak. King Alfred, Argyll, Amphitrite, Argonaut, Spartiate. Vindictive, Talbot, Terpsichore, Thetis, Sapphire.</i> 12 Destroyers and reserve torpedo boats.

The addition of destroyers to the nucleus crew reserve illustrates another part of the Scheme not yet touched upon: the adoption of torpedo craft as a major element of defence against invasion, a perennial bogey that often aggravated relations between the Navy and the Army.¹¹¹ In the strained financial conditions of the post-Boer War period, the Balfour government's Cabinet Defence Committee was trying to bring order to British strategic policy, and cuts in expenditure would be one result. With these cuts looming, both services escalated their traditional turf war and the responsibility for defence against invasion became a political

¹⁰⁹ Appendix II, *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Appendix III, *ibid.*

¹¹¹ For the invasion issue, see: Nicholas d'Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peace-time Britain, 1902-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 28-32; Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 65-83. For torpedo craft and invasion, see Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, pp. 55-72, 87-90.

tool.¹¹² The Admiralty challenged the Army's avocation for a sizable force of soldiers by exploiting the potential of the submarine as a defensive weapon.¹¹³ In October 1903, Battenberg wrote that establishing submarine bases in the Channel ports:

‘ought to go a long way towards dispelling the ever-recurring fears of invasion so dear to the “old women of both sexes” mentioned by Lord St. Vincent. To these (a few live in the War Office) it may be pointed out that the French in all their utterances on the subject... point out with pride that the existence of submarines as part of the defense mobile makes any attempt at [amphibious] invasion of French territory the act of lunacy. They are quite right and the argument cuts both ways.’¹¹⁴

The *défense mobile* Battenberg refers to was another part of Admiral Fournier's aforementioned *guerre industrielle* strategy. The role of the new generation of French armoured cruisers has already been mentioned, but submarines were another essential element. Combined with the *Marine Française*'s substantial force of torpedo craft that was the *jeune école*'s legacy, they were based in groups at various French ports to keep the traditional British battleship blockade at arms' length, thus enabling the armoured cruisers to sortie during the night.¹¹⁵

Fisher, like Battenberg, recognized that this use of torpedo craft cut both ways. In May 1903 he spoke to the Royal Academy, telling his audience that when the submarine and wireless telegraphy were perfected:

‘we do not know what a revolution will come about. In their inception they were weapons of the weak. Now they loom large as weapons of the strong. Will any fleet be able to be in narrow waters? Is there the slightest fear of invasion with them, even for the most extreme pessimist?’¹¹⁶

¹¹² Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65. As Fisher asked in one official submission, ‘what would be the good of a British Army as big as that of Germany if the Navy was insufficient to keep command of the sea?’ Fisher, ‘A Brief Précis of the Principal Considerations that must Influence our Future Naval and Military Policy’, n.d. [c. September 1903], f. 6, Add MS 49710, Balfour MSS.

¹¹³ Fisher, ‘Invasion and Submarines: The effects of submarine boats’, n.d. [November 1903], ADM 116/942.

¹¹⁴ The original document is now missing, but it is quoted in Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 370-371. Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 64, cites this quotation and italicizes the final sentence.

¹¹⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-29; Selborne, ‘Navy Estimates, 1901-1902’, 17 January 1901, pp. 5-6, CAB 37/56/8.

¹¹⁶ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher, *Memories and Records*, ii (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1920), pp. 86-90.

By 1904 Fisher clearly felt both the submarine and wireless communications were sufficiently perfected for his Scheme, as the use of wireless to vector armoured cruiser squadrons has already been shown. To defend against invasions or raids, Fisher planned to use submarines and surface torpedo craft. In his original Scheme he proposed 'a "Defense Mobile" [*sic*] of torpedo boats consisting of four flotillas of eight each', to be based at Dover, Portland, Plymouth, and Milford. Similar units were considered a possibility for Malta and Gibraltar.¹¹⁷ Selborne's only objection was to the term 'Defense Mobile'¹¹⁸, and he felt that one of the flotillas should be based in the Thames.¹¹⁹ The Battenberg Committee modified this proposal to three new torpedo boat flotillas in permanent commission, one at Chatham of four boats, and two of eight boats, one at Devonport and the other at Portsmouth.¹²⁰

Taken together, the new 'nucleus crew' policy and the new torpedo flotillas were a sweeping change in the structure of the Navy's reserve force. Yet this was not an unprecedented move. The new Channel Fleet had been the result of a similar reorganization, begun in 1902, of the 'curious, not to say inappropriate and parlous, distribution of the naval assets that were stationed in Britain's home waters'.¹²¹ The then-existing system under the command of the Admiral Superintendent of Reserves comprised partially manned Coast Guard ships scattered in various ports as district ships, their officers expected to undertake various tasks not at all conducive to fighting efficiency. At the same time the main naval force in Home Waters, the

¹¹⁷ Fisher, 'Nucleus Crews', in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹¹⁸ Quoth Selborne: 'We will never adopt any word of phrase implying defence. This word should be struck out of the Navy's vocabulary. Offence, always offence, and nothing but offence.'

¹¹⁹ Selborne marginal notes on *ibid.*

¹²⁰ D.N.I. Committee, 'Fourth Progress Report', p. 4, ADM 1/7736.

¹²¹ Matthew S. Seligmann, 'A prelude to the reforms of Admiral Sir John Fisher: the creation of the Home Fleet, 1902-3', *Historical Research* 83, no. 221 (August 2010), p. 508.

Channel Squadron, was becoming more and more of a flying squadron, expected to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet during a projected war with the Dual Alliance.¹²²

As then-D.N.I. Rear-Admiral Reginald Custance noted, the absence of the Channel Fleet would leave the naval defence of the British Isles 'to a fleet composed of ships inferior in quality, and manned by crews not hitherto kept in the same high state of efficiency as are those of the Mediterranean and Channel ships.'¹²³ After lengthy discussion between Lord Walter Kerr, Battenberg, Selborne, Custance, and Sir Gerard Noel, it was decided to form the disparate Coast Guard ships and the Port Guardships into a new organization called the Home Fleet with its own C.-in-C.¹²⁴ It was initially to be based around the four Port Guardships, regrouped into a single Home Squadron, supplemented by the Coast Guard vessels which would join the Home Squadron for training exercises. The Admiral Superintendent of the Naval Reserves was to become C.-in-C. Home Fleet and would be freed to concentrate on sea duties by the appointment of a junior flag officer to manage much of Reserves' administrative work. It soon became clear there was room for improvement, as Battenberg noted in an essay entitled 'The Home Squadron'.¹²⁵ Of especial concern were the tethering of the Coast Guard ships to certain ports and the unwieldy nature of the C.-in-C. Home Fleet's role as both fleet commander and Superintendent of Reserves, a measure Noel had insisted on. Once Sir Arthur Wilson took over from Noel on 21 March 1903, the Admiralty instituted another reorganization that made the Home Fleet a truly separate entity.¹²⁶

¹²² Ironically, this development had much to do with Fisher. See Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-272.

¹²³ Custance memorandum, 29 May 1901, in D.N.I., 'Mediterranean Fleet. Reinforcements in War. (Malta Conference)', 29 May 1901, M.0499/01, ADM 116/900B. Cited in Seligmann, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

¹²⁴ Seligmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 508-510.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 512-513.

¹²⁶ Ibid., *op. cit.*, pp. 515-516.

This reorganization, which effectively doubled the Navy's battle strength in Home Waters, was opportune for more reasons than increased peacetime efficiency. As of 1902, the C.-in-C. Home Fleet would play a leading role in an Anglo-French naval war. He 'would have under his orders, besides the main fleet, the Bay of Biscay and Milford Squadrons of Cruisers and the Western Squadron of Cruisers and Destroyers.'¹²⁷ With this force he would 'watch and bring to action, if they put to sea, the French ships at Brest and in the Biscay ports and thus keep the entrance to the English Channel and to the St. Georges Channel, as well as the Bay of Biscay, clear of the enemy and free for the passage of our merchant ships.'¹²⁸ Significantly, the Channel was to be swept by two cruiser-destroyer squadrons. The Admiralty evidently saw nothing to gain by exposing capital ships to the French *défenses mobile* in the narrow waters of the Channel, although the Home Fleet's wartime base was still to be Portland. Furthermore the Admiralty recognized the French desire for a *guerre industrielle*:

'The weakness of the French Northern Squadron and the assembly of a strong force of cruisers in Northern ports points to a design to attack our trade. The arrangements for the distribution of the cruisers should bear this in view...

'At the commencement of hostilities the most essential point would seem to be the concentration of a fast and powerful squadron of large cruisers with a view to dealing with the similar squadron which it is believed to be the intention of the French to assemble at Brest.'¹²⁹

The Ententes, first with France and then with Russia, undermined the importance of this thinking as regards commerce protection. As the threat of war with the Dual Alliance receded, the importance of interdicting raiders as they left their ports became less obviously imperative.¹³⁰ Other pressure for change came from domestic politics with the departure of the Conservatives at the end of 1905. The new Liberal Government, elected in a landslide victory in January 1906,

¹²⁷ Custance memorandum, March 1902, in Admiralty, 'Home Defence', 18 April 1902, ADM 116/900B.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 104.

would put great pressure on the Admiralty for further economies at the same time as the Admiralty's strategic outlook began to shift northeastwards to the growing German battlefleet based on the North Sea.

CHAPTER TWO

The Creation of the Home Fleet, 1906-1907

The first round of reformist initiatives—the Scheme—as put into practice during 1905, were the product of Admiral Fisher's efforts to reduce the Navy's expenditure in a time of financial stringencies and to optimize its fighting power to face a multi-theatre threat—the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance. Between the French Navy's armoured cruisers and Toulon Fleet and the Russian Black Sea and Pacific Squadrons, the Royal Navy had to maintain substantial forces overseas. This fact was overlooked after the war as the men involved published their memoirs, all of which were written with the benefit of hindsight and the memory of the Great War and the co-operation between France and Britain on their consciousness. The timing of Fisher's initial Scheme and the increasingly anti-German position Britain took were in large part coincidental, but once the connection between these events had been made it has been very hard to properly separate them again.

Like many problems, this cuts both ways. In some cases, events and decisions driven or at least partially influenced by concerns over Germany have now been recast by historians as being the results of other events. Such is the case with the birth of the Home Fleet. While Germany playing a role in the Home Fleet's inception and development has never been outright denied, other motivations have been put forward that to a large degree exclude the growth of the German *Kaiserliche Marine* from consideration. Nicholas Lambert considers the Home Fleet was established as a cost-cutting measure combined with Fisher's desire to use submarines and other torpedo craft as the basis of Britain's strength in Home Waters.¹ Professor Eric Grove has

¹ Nicholas Lambert, *JNFR*, pp. 157-164.

gone farther still, once imagining the Nore Division of the Home Fleet as a sort of imperial rapid reaction force, ready to be deployed anywhere in the world.²

The problem, ultimately, is to evaluate exactly what Fisher, the Admiralty, and the government had in mind during the latter half of 1906 when the Home Fleet scheme was being worked out between the Cabinet and the Admiralty. Before that can be done, the state of the Royal Navy in 1906 and the general political situation should be sketched out, for many events of importance to the Navy were happening simultaneously, and all had bearing on the eventual creation of the Home Fleet. The three major events were the destruction of the Russian Navy in the Far East, the end of the Conservative Government, and the continuing expansion of the German Navy.

Germany Rises, Russia Falls

Contrary to some statements, Germany's fleet can definitely be considered a threat to Britain from 1898 onwards, although a minor one compared to the fleets of the Dual Alliance. While as late as 1895 the principal threats German naval strategy and construction was directed against were 'the French North Fleet and the Russian Baltic Fleet'³ only two years later Tirpitz was, from his position as State Secretary of the *Reichsmarineamt*, able to begin earnestly turning the *Kaiserliche Marine* towards Britain. His Memorandum of June 1897 stated that 'the most dangerous naval enemy at the present time is England.'⁴ While there is reason to question, as

² Eric Grove, 'The Battleship is Dead; Long Live the Battleship. HMS *Dreadnought* and the Limits of Technological Revolution', *Mariner's Mirror* 93, no. 4 (November 2007), pp. 415-427. As a result of his supervision of this thesis, Professor Grove no longer believes this.

³ Oberkommando der Marine, November 28, 1895. Quoted in Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent*, p. 78. For the development of Imperial Germany's maritime strategy from its beginnings, see Ivo Nikolai Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

⁴ Tirpitz, 'General Considerations on the Constitution of our Fleet according to Ship Classes and Designs', in Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

Patrick Kelly does in his recent biography of Tirpitz,⁵ whether the subsequent Navy Bills of 1898 and 1900 were deliberate steps taken against the Britain, the growth of a powerful German Navy was unlikely to be greeted with enthusiasm across the North Sea, as Tirpitz was well aware.⁶

One of the earliest tocsins within the Admiralty to ring a warning of Germany's rise was D.N.I. Custance, who would soon become Fisher's most powerful critic within the Navy in terms of intelligence, if not rank and influence.⁷ In September 1901, while Fisher and Lord Charles Beresford were working together (if not exactly in harmony⁸) to press for strengthening the Navy's Mediterranean presence, Custance was trying to secure more strength at home to counter Germany. His response to a typical demand for reinforcement from Fisher shows this clearly:

‘The wants of the Mediterranean Fleet have been repeatedly pressed upon the attention of their Lordships by the C.-in-C. The Home Fleet has had no such advocate, but it is believed that the manoeuvres have shewn that the necessity of practice and frequent exercise together ... is important, if it is to be on par with the formidable German force which is being rapidly developed in the North Sea.’⁹

Neither Selborne nor Kerr were swayed into taking immediate action by these words, and the entreaties from the Mediterranean continued.¹⁰ Several months later in May 1902 Custance complained to his close friend Sir Cyprian Bridge that: ‘After pounding away for a long time, the German menace has at last been brought partially home ... The worst thing I know is the advent

⁵ Patrick Kelly, *loc. cit.*

⁶ Grand-Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, i (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., 1919), p. 194-197. Tirpitz's memoirs were written, however, in the bitterness that came from the Armistice, and conscientious historians might wish for other sources. For those, see Lambi, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-145. For a skilful autopsy of Germany following the Great War and the resulting cultural bitterness, see Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, paperback ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 51-153.

⁷ Marder, *FDSF*, i, pp. 90-91.

⁸ Freeman, *Naval Feud*, pp. 39-58.

⁹ Quoted in Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 463.

¹⁰ Details of Fisher's Mediterranean campaign, and Custance's reaction, can be found in Matthew Allen, ‘Rear Admiral Reginald Custance: Director of Naval Intelligence 1899-1902’, *The Mariner's Mirror* 78, no. 1 (February 1992), pp. 61-75. See also Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-411. It is important to observe that despite their lack of support for Custance, Selborne and Kerr were still very aware of the German threat. Recent treatments of this awareness are Seligmann, ‘Changing Horses’, pp. 239-258, and Keith Wilson, ‘Directions of Travel: The Earl of Selborne and the Threat from Germany, 1900-1904’, *IHR* 30, no. 2 (June 2008), pp. 259-272.

of Fisher [as Second Sea Lord] with all his wild superficial ideas.’¹¹ The phrase ‘brought partially home’ signifies that Custance’s department was at work on a memorandum regarding the British naval position *vis à vis* Germany, and the finished product was submitted at the end of the month.¹² This document, sometimes called the Custance Memorandum despite being largely the work of Commander George Ballard,¹³ was the first significant Admiralty discussion of the potential German threat. Then in November the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Hugh Arnold-Forster, returned from a visit to the German Navy’s home in Wilhelmshaven and submitted a report of his observations to the Cabinet.¹⁴ Thus by the end of 1902 the Admiralty can be said to have been fully aware of the as-yet nascent German challenge across the North Sea, as evidenced in a letter from Selborne to Marquess Curzon where he observed that Germany’s navy was ‘becoming very formidable’.¹⁵ Nevertheless the Dual Alliance remained the greater threat, and the Admiralty was content to bide their time. Fisher too had concerns regarding the German Fleet’s growth, which as early as November 1900 he had described as ‘another disturbing naval element.’¹⁶ The use of ‘another’ is instructive—Germany was becoming a concern for Fisher, but it was not yet the primary concern.¹⁷ It was the Far East and the Mediterranean that were foremost in the minds of their Lordships during the next two years

¹¹ Custance to Bridge, 11 May 1902, BRI/15, Bridge MSS.

¹² Custance, ‘Memorandum on the Strategic Position in the North Sea’, 28 May 1902, in Boyce (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 144-146.

¹³ Ballard, ‘Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War with Germany now at the Admiralty’, enclosure in Ballard to Fisher, 3 May 1909, ADM 1/8997.

¹⁴ Arnold-Forster, ‘Notes on a Visit to Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, August 1902, and General Remarks on the German Navy and Naval Estimates’, 18 November 1902, CAB 37/62/126. Much information on the background of this memorandum is in Add MS 50287, Hugh Arnold-Forster MSS.

¹⁵ Selborne to Marquess Curzon, 4 January 1903, in Boyce (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

¹⁶ Fisher to Joseph Chamberlain, 10 November 1900, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, p. 166.

¹⁷ The development of Fisher’s concerns over Germany from 1900 onward can be traced through his correspondence. See, for instance: Fisher to James Thursfield, 8 January 1900; Fisher to Thursfield, 29 November 1901; Fisher to Battenberg, 10 February 1902; Fisher to White, 8 June 1902; all in Marder, *ibid.*, pp. 180, 217, 223, 259-262. Interestingly, during this period Fisher once suggested alleviating the Navy’s shortage of destroyers by ordering some ‘from Schikau [*sic*] the great German builders’. Fisher to Robert Yerburgh, 10 June 1901, WHI/1, Arnold White MSS.

as tensions between Russia and Japan over Port Arthur, Manchuria, and the Korean Peninsula grew ever more intense.¹⁸ Britain's alliance with Japan strengthened her hand against the Russians in the Far East and 1904 entente with France neutralised the threat of French help for Russian ambitions—just in time, as it turned out.

It is probably significant that one of the Navy's most capable flag officers, Vice-Admiral Sir Gerard Noel, was chosen to succeed Sir Cyprian Bridge as C.-in-C. China during the deepening crisis. If Britain was dragged into the conflict, Noel's battleships would be on the front line. In the event Russia did not attack Britain; in fact she could not cope with Japan alone.

Perhaps fortunately for Noel and Britain, no intervention was required. The Russo-Japanese War was a disaster for the Russian Navy. The culmination came on the morning of May 15, 1905, when Admiral Nebogatov surrendered his surviving ships after the Battle of Tsushima. His reasoning was simple humanity, a trait often denied the Russians in popular imagination: 'God help me, I do not want to drown my people.'¹⁹ Thus ended a ten month 'voyage of the damned' by the bulk of the Russian Baltic Fleet *cum* Second Pacific Squadron. Russian hopes for victory in the Russo-Japanese War died with their fleet. In addition to Tsushima, the original Russian Pacific Squadron had been wiped out by the Japanese during their siege of Port Arthur, Russia's prized warm water base in the Far East. With Tsushima, Russian strength in the Baltic also disappeared.²⁰ Worse quickly followed: revolution swept the nation. All told, Tsarist Russia

¹⁸ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 427-441; Keith Neilson, 'A Dangerous Game of American Poker': The Russo-Japanese War and British Policy', *JSS* 12, no. 1 (March 1989), pp. 63-87; Nish, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Konstantin Pleshakov, *The Tsar's Last Armada: The Epic Voyage to the Battle of Tsushima* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 283.

²⁰ To put the strategic impact of this in stark perspective, Russia lost a larger fleet during the war than the contemporary United States Navy could muster, and as a result Russia's position among the naval powers dropped from third to at least eighth or ninth.

‘became second-rate in its image, its military capabilities, and its actual ability to influence others.’²¹

Fisher’s announcement of the victory at Tsushima to Balfour was suitably Biblical: ‘See 1 Kings 22. 31’²² Custance’s successor as D.N.I., Captain Sir Charles Ottley, and his Assistant the now-Captain Ballard, wrote less dramatically that the ‘crushing and decisive’ victory at Tsushima ‘must clearly exert its influence... upon the naval policy of all other nations.’²³ Britain was no exception, as the demise of the Russian fleet allowed Germany’s to take its place in the Two-Power Standard alongside France.

Britain now possessed, as long as the United States was excluded from the calculations as was customary²⁴ a *de facto* three-power standard²⁵ that would last until the end of 1907.²⁶ The withdrawal of the China Station’s battleships was not a direct reaction to Tsushima, and even before the destruction of Russia’s armadas the Admiralty had been losing interest in maintaining the China Station at its current strength. Proposals had been rattling around the Admiralty since

²¹ Rotem Kowner, in Idem (ed.), *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, paperback ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 6.

²² ‘The King of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule of his chariots, saying, “Fight neither with small nor great save only with the King of Israel.”’, quoted in Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 16. This verse aptly summed up Togo’s tactics; he concentrated his battleships’ fire on Rozhdestvensky’s squadron and overwhelmed them in short order, and only afterwards proceeded to destroy the rest of the Russian fleet.

²³ Captains G.A. Ballard and C.L. Ottley, ‘Further Report of Committee on Relative Strength of the British Navy and Its Constitution, Distribution, and Personnel’, 6 June 1905, in *Naval Necessities*, ii, p. 142, ADM 116/3092.

²⁴ ‘Our diplomacy ought to save us from war with the U.S.’, wrote the First Lord. Selborne to Curzon, 4 January 1903, in Boyce (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²⁵ A fact which did not go unnoticed outside the Admiralty; Secretary of the C.I.D. Colonel Sir George Clarke explicitly mentioned it in a memorandum for Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, stating that conditions ‘have left us in possession of a three Power Standard.’ Clarke, ‘Notes on Comparative Naval Strength’, enclosure in Clarke to Arthur Ponsonby, 2 July 1906, f. 183, Add MS 41213, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

²⁶ Ballard and Ottley, ‘Further Report of Committee on Relative Strength of the British Navy’, 6 June 1905, in *Naval Necessities*, ii, p. 141, ADM 116/3093. It is worth noting that despite this superiority, Ballard and Ottley did not recommend any slackening of naval construction.

before Fisher succeeded Lord Walter Kerr,²⁷ and during his work on the committee in charge of turning Fisher's redistribution proposals into reality, Battenberg wrote that:

‘As soon as the political situation allows of the withdrawal of the China battleships, it is suggested to add two to Home Fleet and 1 each to the other two fleets; to allow for ships re-fitting two and one at a time respectively ... bringing the total of battleships down to 32 (as against 33 now) which number my calculations show to be permissible with the system of nucleus crews and two year commissions.’²⁸

The totality of Japan's victory at sea gave the Admiralty sufficient cause to act. Only a few days after Tsushima, Sir Gerard Noel was informed that ‘His Majesty's Government and Japanese Government have decided that all the British Battleships in China shall return immediately to European waters’. Noel fired back a telegram to the First Lord asking whether the presence of three American battleships in the Philippines had been considered. Fisher and the other Sea Lords were taken aback over Noel's behaviour, and with Cawdor's support brusquely told Noel to obey his orders.²⁹ While Noel would become a member of the ‘Syndicate of Discontent’, his telegram was most likely not meant to be as insubordinate as it seemed. Cawdor attempted to smooth Fisher's ruffled feathers by reminding him that Selborne had encouraged the station chiefs to give him their views on strategy, and this explanation is confirmed by surviving correspondence between Noel's predecessor and Selborne.³⁰ Whether Cawdor's effort at diplomacy had any effect on Fisher's feelings is open for questioning since relations between Fisher and Noel remained bad long afterwards. The withdrawal of the China Station's battleships has been seen as the beginning of the end of Britain's global naval supremacy.³¹ In fact, the presence of large armoured battle squadrons in Chinese waters was the anomaly. Prior to the

²⁷ ‘The D.N.I. [Battenberg] has made some proposals, the principle one being to re-call two of the China Battle-ships. I think whatever has to be done had better wait a few days to see what happens at Port Arthur.’ Kerr to Selborne, 11 October 1904, in Boyce (ed.), *op cit.*, p. 181.

²⁸ Battenberg memorandum, 7 November 1904, MB1/T5/28, Battenberg MSS.

²⁹ Admiralty, ‘C in C China – Sir G.H.U. Noel. Criticism of Board Orders’, ADM 1/7811.

³⁰ See various letters by Bridge to Selborne and the other Naval Lords in BRI/14 and BRI/15, Bridge MSS.

³¹ Kennedy, *Naval Mastery*, pp. 213-214, gives a more nuanced than usual version of this argument.

creation of the Russian Pacific Squadron there were only a few armoured warships—usually cruisers—in that theatre apart from those of the Imperial Japanese Navy, and once the Russo-Japanese War ended almost all were withdrawn.³²

New Year, New Reforms, New Government

Balfour resigned on December 4th, 1905, ceding Downing Street to a minority Liberal government on the eve of a General Election. The leading Liberals were not caught off guard, Lewis Harcourt writing in late November that ‘I think C.B. [Campbell-Bannerman] ought to refuse to ‘accept office in this Parliament’ and to compel A.B. [Arthur Balfour] to dissolve or go on.’³³ Of Balfour’s motives, Rhodri Williams suggests a desire to drive a wedge between the leading Liberals on foreign policy issues, setting the ‘Liberal Imperialists’ who had supported the destruction of the Boer states against those who had decried the entire South African enterprise and wished, mostly, for ‘Peace, Retrenchment and Reform’.³⁴ This would force the new Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to include men such as R.B. Haldane, Sir Edward Grey, and H.H. Asquith in any Liberal cabinet at the expense of more radical personages. Sir George Clarke supposed that Balfour desired a brief spell in opposition to settle the issue of tariffs once and for all.³⁵ If this were truly Balfour’s intention, it failed utterly. The Liberals won in a landslide. Campbell-Bannerman’s biographer described the results as being ‘almost embarrassingly overwhelming.’³⁶

³² Nicholas A. Lambert, ‘The Opportunities of Technology: British and French Naval Strategies in the Pacific, 1905-1909’, in N.A.M. Rodger (ed.), *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), pp. 41-58.

³³ Harcourt to Esher, 24 November 1905, ESHR 10/16, Viscount Esher MSS, CCAC.

³⁴ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 79-80.

³⁵ Enclosure in Clarke to R.B. Haldane, 6 February 1905, f. 147-157, Haldane 5906, Viscount Haldane MSS. Cited in Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 127.

³⁶ John Winton, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, Book Club ed. (London: Purnell Book Services Limited, 1973), p. 475.

While free trade and tariffs may have been the most glorified issues of the election, there was also the less-spoken-of promise of social reforms on the Liberals' agenda. These measures out demanded funds, and instead of instituting any new and radical budgetary changes Campbell-Bannerman and his Chancellor, H.H. Asquith, planned to divest money from the defence estimates. This strategy had the added benefit of appeasing the Radicals, for whom every pound sterling spent on armaments rubbed nerves raw:

'The Liberal dilemma was obvious. Each dreadnought cost approximately £2,000,000. If the Cawdor programme of November 1905, which called for four large armoured ships (dreadnoughts and battle-cruisers) annually, accepted 'without prejudice' by Campbell-Bannerman, was put into effect, it would mean about £8,000,000 a year less for domestic social reforms. On the other hand, if the ships were not built the Royal Navy might lose control of the seas.'³⁷

Clearly, the new Liberal First Lord would have to undertake an onerous balancing act between Navy and Party.

The new First Lord of the Admiralty was Baron Tweedmouth, whose appointment came at Fisher's suggestion.³⁸ Tweedmouth has long been considered the runt of the prewar First Lords. Marder described him as 'a pleasant, colourless man of barely average abilities'.³⁹ Esher shared this opinion: 'Good fellow as he is, his capacity is unequal to his task as First Lord.'⁴⁰ Not all have agreed with this assessment; Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall felt Tweedmouth was 'an honourable, loyal gentleman... a man who, though perhaps past his best and doomed to break down before long, was a patriotic servant of his country and a staunch upholder of the necessity of a strong Navy.'⁴¹

³⁷ Gerald H.S. Jordan, 'Pensions Not Dreadnoughts: The Radicals and Naval Retrenchment', in A.J.A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914: Some aspects of British Radicalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 163.

³⁸ Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 65n1.

³⁹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Esher journal, 13 December 1907, in Brett (ed.), *Esher*, ii, p. 269.

⁴¹ Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall, *Naval Memories and Traditions* (London: Hutchinson & Co, Ltd., 1926), p. 195.

Tweedmouth's failure to prevent further major cuts in the Navy Estimates is seen as evidence of his weakness.⁴² In fairness to Tweedmouth, however, his position in the Cabinet may well have been untenable by design. He was appointed to a post he possessed little knowledge of, leading the Tory *National Review* to grouse that he was equally well qualified 'for the Office of the Astronomer Royal',⁴³ while the 'economist' faction seeking further spending cuts counted amongst its members such luminaries as Churchill, David Lloyd George, McKenna, and Asquith. Even with Fisher's guidance and the sympathy of Esher and Sir Edward Grey, this was a most overwhelming opposition, and the inevitable conclusion is that Tweedmouth was probably doomed from the start no matter his own qualities.

The Home Fleet is Born

In August 1906, Fisher sent a letter to the three principal fleet Commanders-in-Chief regarding a fleet redistribution planned for completion by March 31st 1907. Foreign relations were now 'such that the Mediterranean Fleet can be reduced, and the Atlantic Fleet regarded as primarily a reinforcing squadron for the main (Channel Fleet). It also permits some reduction in the Channel Fleet itself, provided that the units composing it are of the most powerful character.'⁴⁴ The commissioned strength of the Navy in capital ships would fall from thirty-three battleships and twenty-four armoured cruisers to twenty-six and twenty respectively.⁴⁵ However the Admiralty insisted that 'the reduction they contemplate is one of numbers rather than fighting strength', since by April 1907 eight new armoured ships would be available, each superior in

⁴² Marder refers to Tweedmouth as the 'only one real weak First Lord' among the four Fisher served, though he attributes this partially to Tweedmouth's declining health. Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

⁴³ Cited in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Admiralty, 'Reprint of Letter Informing Commanders-in-Chief of Forthcoming Re-Distribution', 18 August 1906, in Admiralty, 'Admiralty Policy. Replies to Criticisms.', first proof, October 1906, Tweedmouth Papers Volume III, MSS 252/5/8, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁴⁵ The ships slated for the axe were the battleships *Majestic*, *Magnificent*, *Victorious*, *Prince George*, *Canopus*, *Bulwark*, *London*, *Triumph*, *Swiftsure*, and eight cruisers including *Cornwall* and *Cumberland*.

fighting power to the ships it was proposed to pay off.⁴⁶ Fisher and the Board softened the blow by affording the fleet commanders an ‘opportunity of offering any suggestions that you may wish, as regards dates or other details, which will, in your opinion, facilitate the alterations or prevent their giving rise to unnecessary inconvenience.’

This proposal had been under consideration by the Admiralty for several months as a result of the newly elected Liberal Government’s demand for further economies in the Navy Estimates. Nicholas Lambert covers the fighting over the Navy’s finances in detail, but some of this ground must be re-travelled here. In brief, the Liberal government had demanded further cuts in the subsequent year’s estimates, and the Admiralty had determined this could only be accomplished by a reduction in the number of ships in full commission. The previous technique of financing naval works *via* borrowing was set to end in the 1907-8 financial year. The Admiralty had been informed of this decision the year before by the previous government and Asquith had no intention of proposing something ‘altogether inconsistent with the position which we took up in the House of Commons in 1905[.]’⁴⁷ The Chancellor loftily added that ‘nothing Sir John Fisher could say would affect my judgement as to the propriety of a new Loans Bill’, and the First Lord’s reply that serious additions to the 1907-8 and 1908-9 estimates ‘must be considered owing to [this] decision’ cut no ice.⁴⁸

Fisher informed Lord Tweedmouth at the end of May that he had been ‘discussing the details with the Controller[,] the Accountant General and the Director of Naval Intelligence as to the financial effect of withdrawing six Battle Ships and four Armoured Cruisers now in full commission and placing them in Commission in Reserve (that is with nucleus crews) and reducing the personnel by 2000 men’. Fisher continued that ‘the conclusion has been reached

⁴⁶ These were *Dreadnought*, three *King Edwards*, and four *Cochrane* class armoured cruisers.

⁴⁷ H.H. Asquith to Tweedmouth, 23 May 1906, MSS 254/8, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁴⁸ Asquith to Tweedmouth, 24 May 1906 and Tweedmouth to Asquith, 25 May 1906, MSS 254/9, Tweedmouth MSS.

that we should save about a quarter of a million in 1907-08' although this number would be partially offset by automatic increases in parts of the Estimates.⁴⁹ These and other proposals went before the Cabinet in a memorandum on 26 June.⁵⁰ Tweedmouth put forward three proposals for reductions on the lines of Fisher's earlier report to the First Lord:

1. Reducing new construction by dropping a fourth *Invincible* and substituting a single 'small unarmoured vessel' [i.e. a small cruiser] in place of three *Tribals* and four submarines from the 1905-1906 estimates. A further armoured vessel would be cut from the next year's estimates.
2. The aforementioned reduction of seven battleships and four armoured cruisers to nucleus crew reserve.
3. Reducing the personnel vote (Vote A) from 129,000 men to 127,000.

Together these three measures would save £1,600,000, but that figure shrank to £1,250,000 after increases elsewhere in the estimates were taken into consideration.

Despite offering further reductions described as 'the unanimous conclusion' of the Board of Admiralty, the memorandum cannot be described as conciliatory. Most of its length was dedicated to enumerating foreign progress in naval armaments and warning that '[m]any facts stand in the way of further reductions at present'. The previous twelve years had seen great:

'development of personnel, establishments, and materiel that ... has involved greatly increased annual outgoings. Vote A for men has risen from 84,000 to 129,000; an expenditure on works to be executed by loan to the estimated cost of 32,000,000 *l.* has been sanctioned by Parliament, of which 26,500,000 *l.* has already been expended; new docks, breakwaters, barracks, hospitals, colleges, and training establishments have thus been brought into existence, and at the same time the increase in the size, complexity, and cost of ships of war has gone on apace in response to the demands for heavier armament, stronger armour, and greater speed and mobility.'

⁴⁹ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 29 May 1906, MSS 254/41, Tweedmouth MSS. The meeting itself is summarized in Admiralty, 'Memorandum of a Meeting of the Sea Lords at the Admiralty on Saturday, 26th May, 1906', in 'Admiralty Policy: Replies to Criticisms', First Proof, pp. 122-125, F.P. 4720, FISR 8/9/2, Fisher MSS.

⁵⁰ Tweedmouth, 'Naval Estimates, 1907-08.', 26 June 1906, CAB 37/83/60.

This last point was expanded on greatly. Besides *Dreadnought*, other large battleships and armoured cruisers were on order elsewhere.⁵¹ The memorandum also stressed the expense caused by the Navy's takeover of coastal defence responsibilities, and that '[m]ore than ever the whole measure of the adequacy of the fleet must be its capacity to discharge the duty of protecting our coasts at home and those of our oversea Colonies ... and to safeguard British ocean commerce, which is the very foundation of national prosperity and existence.'⁵² At the same time, Britain was extremely fortunate that not only were relations with other powers good and the Navy's strength well above the Two Power Standard, these conditions were only temporary, and 'alliances and ententes are not everlasting, and the unexpected must never be neglected.'⁵³ Effective maintenance of Britain's maritime position, Tweedmouth suggested tentatively, meant that an adjustment of the naval standard to 'roughly the equivalent strength of the next two most powerful navies in the world plus 10 per cent.' would be 'not unreasonable' until further Cabinet discussion could clarify matters.

Asquith counterattacked on the 9th. The Chancellor noted that the 'governing factor in naval expenditure ... is the cost of new construction; just as in the case of the Army it is the number of men to be maintained'. Resultantly he declared that 'naval expenditure lends itself much more easily to retrenchment, because the amount of new construction to be put in hand is entirely within the discretion of the Government.'⁵⁴ While Asquith allowed that the Two Power Standard 'may itself require revision', the Chancellor was derisive about maintaining such

⁵¹ Tweedmouth's memorandum listed the following armoured ships:

- 6 French (*Dantons*)
- 3 German (*Nassaus & Von Der Tann*)
- 1 Russian (*Rurik*)
- 4 Japanese (*Aki* and *Satsuma*, *Settsu* and *Kawachi*)
- 2 American (*Delaware & North Dakota*)

⁵² Tweedmouth, 'Naval Estimates, 1907-08.', 26 June 1906, pp. 2-3, CAB 37/83/60.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Asquith, 'Naval Expenditure', 9 July 1906, CAB 37/83/63.

strength as to a combination of France and Germany. 'Is it reasonable to expect us to build against a combination of that character—in the whole sphere of speculative politics by far the most improbable that can be conceived?'⁵⁵ Asquith went on to argue Britain's existing naval strength was sufficient for any reasonable standard, and that furthermore a reduction in shipbuilding would be a show of the nation's sincerity regarding the coming Hague Conference.

Three days later Campbell-Bannerman called a meeting at 10 Downing Street to settle the question, and the memorandum subsequently issued summarizing the results shows the hand of a fine mediator, likely Campbell-Bannerman himself.⁵⁶ While Tweedmouth's arguments were rebuffed, the Admiralty's construction budget still came through in seaworthy condition: all three armoured ships authorized for 1906-7 were spared and the two new armoured ships for 1907-8 were definitely confirmed, meanwhile the third was made conditional to the outcome of the forthcoming Hague Conference. This condition no doubt satisfied the First Sea Lord, who is well known for his dim views on such gatherings, once thundering that 'Moderation in war is imbecility!'⁵⁷ Doubtless Fisher thought the failure of that conference was an inevitability. Elsewhere the Prime Minister was less generous, and the Admiralty's offer of reductions in active strength was confirmed along with various other 'heavy sacrifices'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁶ Cabinet, 'Memorandum relative to Meeting, under Presidency of the Prime Minister, on Thursday, July 12, at 10, Downing Street', 27 July 1906, CAB 37/83/65.

⁵⁷ Fisher, 'Submarines. (A Letter to the Controller of the Navy.)', 20 April 1904, p. 4, ADM 116/942. Fisher himself took this expression from Thomas Macaulay's review of Lord Nugent's *Some Memorials of John Hampden, his Party, and his Times* in *The Edinburgh Magazine*. See Lord Macaulay, *Lord Macaulay's Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome*, complete ed. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1892), p. 233. Elsewhere Fisher wrote that 'the inevitable result of Conferences and Arbitrations is that we always end up giving up something. It's like a rich man entering into a Conference with a gang of burglars!' Fisher, 'War Plans and the Distribution of the Fleet', f. 10, ADM 116/1043B1. These denunciations were partially a sailor's bluff, as Christopher Martin has recently shown. Christopher Martin, 'The Declaration of London: A Matter of Operational Capability', *Historical Research* 82, no. 218, pp. 731-755. The relevant details will be examined later.

⁵⁸ Cabinet, 'Memorandum relative to Meeting, under Presidency of the Prime Minister, on Thursday, July 12, at 10, Downing Street', 27 July 1906, CAB 37/83/65.

This did not entirely put matters to rest. On July 12th Fisher scrawled a hasty note ('Excuse haste & pencil') to Tweedmouth requesting

'in case by chance you should be seeing Prime Minister or Chancellor of Exchequer tonight that after seeing you & showing you the proposed 2 Millions reduction I had a very long interview with my colleagues & I got their reluctant consent of to the reductions because of its being associated with obtaining the two millions under a fresh Loan act[.]'

Fisher ominously continued

'if that act is not carried out we must withdraw the proposed reduction[;] more especially as the reductions are mixed up with the obtaining of the Loan. It is desirable I think to be very explicit with the Chancellor of the Exchequer & the P.M. on this point, as I feel bound to admit the justice of what my colleagues say.'⁵⁹

Asquith's reply to this letter indicates he may not have noticed the subtext that the Admiralty was consenting to the reductions only reluctantly and that any further cuts would be bitterly opposed.⁶⁰ Alternatively, it is possible that he did not care.

This effort by the Admiralty to preserve funding for new construction, especially the 'extraordinary lengths to which Fisher went to defend the battleship standard'⁶¹ is, according to Nicholas Lambert, explained by what he terms the 'Naval-Industrial Complex'.⁶² Briefly put, the Admiralty had a symbiotic relationship with the private industrial interests. The Admiralty depended on shipbuilders and those firms that supplied such essentials as armour plating and heavy ordnance. In turn, these firms required Admiralty contracts to remain in business.⁶³

⁵⁹ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 12 July 1906, enclosure in Asquith to Tweedmouth, 13 July 1906, MSS 254/13, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁶⁰ Asquith to Tweedmouth, 13 July 1906, MSS 254/13, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁶¹ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 142-154.

⁶³ Besides Nicholas Lambert, sources on this phenomenon include Marshall J. Bastable, *Arms and the State: Sir William Armstrong and the Remaking of British Naval Power, 1854-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Ian Johnston & Ian Buxton, *The Battleship Builders: Constructing and Arming British Capital Ships* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2013); Hugh Lyon, 'The Relations between the Admiralty and Private Industry in the Development of Warships', in Ranft (ed.), *Technical Change*, pp. 37-64; and Hugh B. Peebles, *Warshipbuilding on the Clyde* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1987). For the historical development of this symbiosis, see William H.

In summary then, the proposed reduction in active strength was a result of a new government seeking economies in defence expenditure to free up money for other programmes, and Fisher and the Admiralty were forced to safeguard the Navy's future strength by reducing its immediate strength. The problem was events proved such goals would not be that simple to achieve. Furthermore, other considerations would soon come into play.

One of these concerns was the matter of the Reserve Divisions of the fleet. As constituted under the initial scheme they were three separate units, one at each of the three Home Ports. Each of these divisions represented a sizable collection of naval force, as can be seen by their strength given in the January 1907 *Navy List*:

Chatham Division	Portsmouth Division	Devonport Division
Six battleships	Four battleships	Five battleships
Twelve cruisers	Thirteen cruisers	Eleven cruisers

This powerful force remained in three distinct pieces. Worse, they did not operate together except for the possible exception of annual naval manoeuvres. They were thus, in the words of a later Admiralty paper, 'without an organization enabling them to act together.'⁶⁴ While unmentioned in the surviving July and August correspondence on fleet redistribution, this consideration must have played an important part in the decision to create the Home Fleet. Such influence is implied in an Admiralty letter stating the new organisation would allow more efficient training and operation of the ships in reserve 'than has heretofore been practicable.'⁶⁵

As frank-bordering-on-direct as the earlier inter-departmental clashes may seem, they paled in comparison to what resulted from the Admiralty's tentative letter to the three C-in-Cs.

McNeil, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000*, paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. pp. 223-306.

⁶⁴ Admiralty, 'Reason for and Constitution of Home Fleet.', F.P. 4822, p. 4, FISR 8/23, Fisher MSS.

⁶⁵ Admiralty, 'Organisation of Ships in Commission in Reserve, and Rearrangement of Ships in Commission at Sea.', draft copy, 23 October 1906, MSS 252/5/4, Tweedmouth MSS.

Fisher, on his annual Alpine holiday, summarized the situation in an October 5 letter to Tweedmouth:

‘We sent very confidentially to the Commanders in Chief what the Board had in view & invited them to offer any remarks before we issued the final orders officially & publicly & evidentially some of these officers have broken faith and have been writing privately to the King or those who have told his Majesty as mentioned in your last letter or else those officers are writing entirely in the dark as to what is being arranged for.’⁶⁶

The previous day Fisher, despite an earlier letter swearing ‘the same sort of oath as Jeptha’s to murder anyone who caused me to write [on official matters] while away from the Admiralty’,⁶⁷ found himself reassuring the First Lord about the proposed reductions:

‘This subject, as you will remember, was most extensively gone into by the Sea Lords, and we unanimously came to the conclusion to state to you that there was no justification for keeping such an immense Naval Force in full service at sea as at present, i.e., the present Naval Force at sea is greater in power than at the time of the Dogger Bank incident, when it was possible for France and Russia to have thrown in their lot against us, and we considered our naval strength then amply sufficient. Now Russia is annihilated, France our friend, and Germany our only possible foe, many times weaker than ourselves; so how can we support of justify keeping up our strength at a higher pitch than then? But not only this—the nucleus crews are by this new arrangement increased in strength, and more vessels ready in home waters against our own possible foe—Germany. It’s a vital necessity to carry out this arrangement.’⁶⁸

Whether this soothed Tweedmouth’s mind is questionable, since he wrote to Campbell-Bannerman on October 15th that:

‘I am afraid we are likely to be in a great hucker about naval affairs[.] [T]he proposed redistribution of the fleets including the placing of 6 battleships & 4 armoured cruisers in the nucleus crew ship reserves at home has now come out and there is a great outcry arising about it.’⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 5 October 1906, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 96-97. The original letter is MSS 254/50, Tweedmouth MSS. Lambert, citing this letter, infers that at least one of the officers Fisher mentions wrote to ‘a hostile newspaperman’, despite Fisher’s lack of mention of the press at any point in the letter except for his noting that ‘Mahan has been trotted out by *The Times*’. Be that as it may, the story was in press circulation by October.

⁶⁷ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 10 September 1906, in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁶⁸ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 4 October 1906, in *ibid.*, p. 95-96.

⁶⁹ Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 15 October 1906, f. 128, Campbell-Bannerman MSS. The change from eleven capital ships to ten reflects the grounding and eventual loss of the battleship *Montagu* during the summer. For

This outcry was made worse because of the leak. Because the Home Fleet proposal, it seems, went straight from fleet officers to journalists, several senior officials may only have learned of the redistribution over their breakfast or evening newspapers.⁷⁰ One important opponent was Sir George Clarke, the Secretary of the C.I.D., whose relationship with Fisher ran hot and cold depending on the issues under consideration.⁷¹ Already opposed to the *Dreadnought* and the *Invincibles*, he had tweaked the Admiralty's nose during the estimates debate by offering Campbell-Bannerman his own assessment of the Royal Navy's future capital ship needs.⁷² Fisher had responded with a detailed complaint, noting that Clarke was 'a retired soldier, and entirely without knowledge of the fighting requirements of the Fleet' and that 'his conduct is indefensible'.⁷³ Clarke now opposed the Home Fleet on the grounds it would dilute the Channel Fleet's strength without providing a corresponding replacement.⁷⁴ In addition, he felt the new organization was conceived and created by the Admiralty and the Cabinet without regard for the

some time it was hoped *Montagu* could be salvaged, but this proved impossible and she was written off. Resultantly the number of ships going to the Home Fleet was given as either eleven or ten for several months.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 159, cites C.I.D. Secretary Sir George Clarke as one such official. This is unlikely, since the October 15th letter to Esher which Lambert references is predated by another of September 26th also referencing the reductions. In addition, his citation of a cutting from *The Times* as appearing in the former letter is wrong, as it was enclosed in the September 26th letter.

⁷¹ During the summer of 1906, Fisher vented to Tweedmouth that '[t]he sooner we send Clarke to die of yellow fever as Governor of some West Indian island the better!' Fisher to Tweedmouth, 9 July 1906, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 83. On the other hand, Fisher wrote to Clarke in 1907 after the 'Invasion Bogey' reappeared thanking him for penning a suitable broadside against it to *The Times*. See Fisher to Clarke, 12 September 1907, in *ibid.*, p. 131-133. Two months after wishing him to contract a fatal Governorship, Fisher described a memorandum by Clarke titled 'Note on the Strategic Aspects of Wireless Telegraphy' as 'one of the "best things he ever saw"', adding 'You see though I can never forget a friend, yet I can forgive an enemy.' Esher to Campbell-Bannerman, 24 September 1906, f. 207-210, Add MS 41213, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

⁷² Clarke to Ponsonby, 2 July 1906, Add MS 41213, f. 182-191, Campbell-Bannerman MSS. See also Admiralty, 'Relations between Admiralty & the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence (Sir G.S. Clarke).', 1906, ADM 116/3095.

⁷³ Admiralty, 'Statement Regarding Admiralty Responsibility for the Strength of the Navy', July 1906, F.P. 4776, p. 1, FISR 8/18, Fisher MSS.

⁷⁴ Clarke to Esher, 15 October 1906, ESHR 10/39, Esher MSS.

C.I.D.'s opinion, and that 'to increase our torpedo boat and submarine preponderance' was no replacement for a sufficient battleship force.⁷⁵

Fisher was undeterred by the growing opposition and three days after his return to work on the 20th an official Admiralty Minute was issued on the Home Fleet. The text of the Minute set down the basics of the new organization. The Home Fleet would be 'constituted from the Ships in Commission in Reserve... under the supreme command of a Flag Officer with the status of Commander-in-Chief and Head Quarters at Sheerness'. The Home Fleet was further intended 'in every respect organized with a view to enhancing its value as a fighting force, and Battle Practice and other Fleet exercises not at present carried out by the Reserve Divisions will be introduced. The primary object aimed at will be sea-going efficiency, and for this purpose the cruises of the Home Fleet will be made as frequent as practicable.' Home Fleet ships were to be interchangeable with those in the other three fleets, and transferring Home Fleet ships to the other fleets in place of ships in Dockyard hands was explicitly mentioned. Likewise the Home Fleet's cruisers were to exercise with their counterpart squadrons 'from time to time'. The minute concluded that:

'The Board of Admiralty are satisfied that the constitution of a Home Fleet will increase the immediate striking strength of the Navy, and that the more active training which the Nucleus Crews will receive under the new system will add to the sea experience of the Fleet as a whole.'⁷⁶

This was the public consumption version. The letter issued to the Cs-in-C. of the Fleets and the Home Ports the same day was much more extensive, but nonetheless covered much of the same ground. An initial draft survives in the bound Tweedmouth papers, and several of the passages omitted from the letter as issued are revealing. The new Home Fleet was being

⁷⁵ Clarke to Esher, 15 October 1906, ESHR 10/39, Esher MSS; Clarke to Esher, 16 November 1906, ESHR 10/40, Esher MSS.

⁷⁶ Admiralty minute, 23 October 1906, MSS 252/5/3, Tweedmouth MSS.

constituted to ‘enable their Lordships to provide more efficiently ~~than at present~~ for the exigencies of War’.⁷⁷ Ten battleships and cruisers were to be added to the existing Reserve Divisions, which would be redesignated as the Home Fleet. The ships marked for reduction were the battleships *Glory*, *Goliath*, *Canopus*, and *Caesar* from the Channel Fleet and *London* and *Bulwark* from the Mediterranean Fleet, and the armoured cruisers *Cornwall* and *Cumberland* of the First Cruiser Squadron and *Antrim* and *Devonshire* from the Second Cruiser Squadron. The Admiral (D)—the officer in charge of the Navy’s torpedo craft—was to be placed under the Home Fleet’s C.-in-C. ‘for administrative purposes’, a move described in another passage cut from the final draft, ‘as being a measure better suited to the War arrangements Their Lordships have adopted.’

While these documents suggest there was little more to the new Home Fleet but another reorganization of the reserves and perhaps an unmentioned financial motivation at work, that impression is misleading. This is not an accident of history, but was actually a quite deliberate subterfuge on Fisher and the rest of the Board’s part. Throughout the next month Fisher and his subordinates drew up a highly secret set of memoranda setting out the long-term plan for the Home Fleet. These papers were bound and issued within the Admiralty in January 1907.⁷⁸ Tweedmouth, of course, received the memoranda individually, and his copy of the first included a covering letter in Fisher’s unmistakable hand. This letter is reproduced in its near-entirety (except for a few words made illegible by the volume’s binding) here to illustrate the extreme secrecy involved:

‘First Lord

⁷⁷ Admiralty, ‘Letter to Commanders-in-Chief, Home Ports, and Channel, Mediterranean, and Atlantic Fleets.’ (draft copy with corrections), October 1906, MSS 252/5/4, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁷⁸ Admiralty, ‘The Home Fleet’, 1 December 1906 [actually c. January 1907], ADM 1/7882. Despite the cover date, this volume contains prints dated as late as 22 December 1906.

‘Herewith the programme of arrangements for constitution of Home Fleet as concurred in by the Sea Lords & all those concerned in the detailed copying out of the orders.

‘It would be extremely unwise to make this programme public or even to issue it confidentially as it would tie our hands in arranging from time to time any modifications in it which may be for the greater convenience of the Service.

‘Further it is most undesirable to let Foreign admiralities know beforehand what the constitution of our Squadrons are going to be.

‘Propose to adhere to the Parliamentary answer ... that the Board of Admiralty do not propose to make public the varying disposition of the fighting units of the Fleet which is their sole responsibility and it is not in the interests of the public service to do so[.]’⁷⁹

The memorandum that followed laid out the long-term plan for another rearrangement of the command structure in the British Isles.⁸⁰ The creation of the new Home Fleet was only the first of three steps, and was scheduled for April 1907. Another amendment would happen in November 1907, followed by a final change that would bring the programme to completion in April 1908. The overall goal was explicitly spelled out in boldface type:

‘These Phases are so arranged as to bring in the newest ships now completing building into the Home Fleet, so that in April 1908 the *Escadre d’Élite* of the Home Fleet stationed at the Nore or Dover, will of itself be largely superior to the whole German Fleet, and consequently remove all cause for anxiety should a crisis at any time arise when the Channel and Atlantic Fleets are cruising in the Atlantic.’

Similar terms appeared in the orders to the officer chosen to take command of the new Home Fleet, Rear-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman:

‘3. The Home Fleet which will come under your command will comprise the existing Reserve Divisions and certain Battleships which are being withdrawn for this purpose from the Channel, Mediterranean, and Atlantic Fleets.

‘4. This fleet will be organized, as regards the larger vessels, in three divisions, which will be based respectively at the Nore, Portsmouth, and Devonport. The Nore Division, which will be the *Escadre d’Élite* of the Home Fleet, will be subdivided into a Battleship Division and a Cruiser Division, the latter being organized as a distinct command, and comprising the Fifth Cruiser Squadron. ...

⁷⁹ Fisher to Tweedmouth, n.d. [November or December 1906], MSS 252/5, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁸⁰ Admiralty, ‘Organisation of Home Fleet.’, n.d. [November or December 1906], in Admiralty, ‘The Home Fleet.’, pp. 24-45, ADM 1/7882. Further copies can be found as MSS 252/5/10, Tweedmouth MSS and F.P. 4722, FISR 8/10, Fisher MSS.

‘5. The primary object My Lords have had in view of constituting the Home Fleet is increased readiness for war, and, as contributing to this end, increased seagoing efficiency of all ships in Home Waters. ...

‘12. The cruising ground of the Home Fleet will be in home waters and the North Sea, with occasional cruises on the Scandinavian coasts.’⁸¹

The ‘Escadre d’Élite’, when completely formed in April 1908, would comprise *Dreadnought*, the three *Invincibles*, both *Lord Nelsons*, and the ex-Chilean battleships *Swiftsure* and *Triumph*.⁸² Except for *Dreadnought*, these ships were to be added to the Chatham-based Nore Division as they were completed. In the meantime the Nore Division would be populated with *Dreadnought* and several other battleships. The inclusion of the *Invincibles* is possibly less suggestive than it appears. Despite Fisher’s ambitions for the type, their inclusion in the Home Fleet’s battleship strength was probably meant to be a temporary measure until the three *Bellerophons* entered service, as the Nore Division also included the powerful Fifth Cruiser Squadron populated with some of the Navy’s best armoured cruisers.

As, and possibly more, important than these is Fisher’s condensed description of his intentions in a letter written to Tweedmouth while the Admiral was in Germany. As has been well documented, Fisher preferred to trust to *ad hoc* committees and his own oral powers of persuasion instead of the written word, fluent a letter writer though he was. The result is that most major decisions were never put on the record and thus there has been plenty of room for various interpretations of what Fisher’s real agenda was. This makes the letter of 11 October particularly valuable, as it is probably as close as we can get to Fisher’s vision of the Home Fleet’s purpose in late 1906:

‘I had better anticipate by a few lines now what I am going to explain in detail when we meet, in order to remove any impression that may possibly exist in your

⁸¹ Admiralty, ‘Orders to Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet’, 22 December 1906, pp. 9-13, in Admiralty, ‘The Home Fleet.’, ADM 1/7882.

⁸² Admiralty, ‘Organisation of Home Fleet.’, n.d. [November or December 1906], p. 35, in Admiralty, ‘The Home Fleet.’, ADM 1/7882.

mind that the rearrangement of the strength of our various Squadrons ... in any degree implies any diminution in our fighting strength!

'On the very contrary I don't know anything that we have done which will more add to our fighting efficiency! And this is the main lesson:- that by this new re-arrangement whereby 7 Battleships and Armoured Cruisers are brought home we are able to constitute a fresh "Home Fleet" (as I should like to term it) & by a reorganization which this addition of 11 powerful armoured ships admits of as regards our present Reserve Divisions & placing them all under one Admiral who I have in mind to suggest to you as "par excellence" fitted for it (and it so happens all the circumstances peculiarly lend themselves to this project), we get a homogenous perfectly constituted Reserve Fleet always in "home waters" working under the Supreme Command of one Admiral & I hope you will see that when this Fleet goes out for Manoeuvres next Summer in the manner I propose to suggest to you that everyone will see what another great stride forward we have taken in our strategic policy of collecting our fighting strength in the place we want to fight.

'Intimately associated with this project, and indeed the very basis of it, is the great fact that for years to come, Dover, the Nore & the North Sea are our "points d'appui" & you will see when I explain the details (too intricate for a letter) how everything fits in to our purpose. ...

'The silly cry (which I am assured on excellent authority has fallen perfectly flat on the Country) that the fighting efficiency of the Navy is being reduced & our naval supremacy impaired will be met in the most conclusive manner by the British Public seeing a new Fleet emerge into being complete in all its parts instead of the presently disconnected & inorganically incomplete Reserve Division which we have not sooner formed up simply because the time was not ripe, nor had the psychological moment arrived for the New Dispensation to be brought forward.⁸³

This letter is classic Fisher, at once both starkly written and frustratingly vague. Most of the letter is meant to reassure a nervous politician about the potential ramifications of the proposed changes, albeit that reassurance is tempered with a warning that secrecy is still paramount. The exact purpose of the new Home Fleet is only discussed tangentially, although the heavily emphasized reference to 'Dover, the Nore & the North Sea' as 'points d'appui' leaves little room for misunderstanding. Fisher was even more direct in a letter written for the Prince of Wales' benefit twelve days later. As the Prince was a fellow naval officer and, at this point, still regarded by Fisher as a friend, the First Sea Lord saw no reason to mince words:

⁸³ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 11 October 1906, MSS 254/53, Tweedmouth MSS. Partially reproduced in Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

‘These are the absolute facts of the case:--

‘Our only probable enemy is Germany. Germany keeps here *whole* Fleet concentrated within a few hours of England. We must therefore keep a Fleet twice as powerful concentrated within a few hours of Germany.

‘If we kept the Channel and Atlantic Fleets *always* in the English Channel ... this would meet the case, but this is neither feasible or expedient, and if, when relations with foreign powers are strained, the Admiralty attempt to take the proper precautions ... then *at once* the Foreign Office and the Government veto it, and say such a step will precipitate war! ... The Board of Admiralty don’t intend ... to subject themselves to this risk, and they have decided to form a new Home Fleet always at home, with its Headquarters at the Nore and its cruising ground the North Sea.’⁸⁴

Furthermore, as Fisher contended elsewhere, the Home Fleet was ‘the gradual and logical development of the Redistribution of the Fleet, as arranged in October 1904, but the full development was not feasible at that date as the strength of the outlying fleets and squadrons was disproportionate to the number of ships at home, and so the necessary personnel was not available.’⁸⁵ While Ruddock Mackay wrote that ‘no evidence is adduced to substantiate this claim’ in the official prints regarding the Home Fleet,⁸⁶ an examination of the previous reforms to the Navy’s reserve system shows this is not strictly true. The new scheme was in many ways a repetition of the 1902-1903 reorganization which had created the original Home Fleet that Fisher converted into the Channel Fleet at the same time he set up the nucleus crew reserve. Now, with the 1906 Summer Manoeuvres showing the nucleus crew ships were generally efficient and could be filled out from naval barracks and reservists in a crisis, Fisher intended to amalgamate the existing reserve forces split between the three Home Ports into a single organization. The only confusing part of this development is, according to some, the fully-commissioned Nore Division.

⁸⁴ Fisher to Prince of Wales, 13 October 1906, in *ibid.*, p. 103-5.

⁸⁵ Fisher, ‘The Home Fleet.’, n.d. [January 1907], in Admiralty, ‘The Home Fleet.’, p. 1, ADM 1/7882.

⁸⁶ Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

This brings us back to the Home Fleet's initial organization. As mentioned previously, the Nore Division based on Chatham was to be the most powerful element of the Home Fleet, but would not be at full strength until April 1908, and upon formation it would consist of six battleships including *Dreadnought*. Alongside these would be the six ships of the Fifth Cruiser Squadron, plus six smaller cruisers. Two of these cruisers, *Sapphire* and *Attentive*, were to be flagships to the Rear-Admiral (D) and Commodore (D) respectively.⁸⁷ The Commodore (D)'s command would be the forty-eight destroyers with full crews as well as their attending auxiliaries; the Rear-Admiral (D) commanded of the remaining Home Fleet torpedo craft. Aside from the Rear-Admiral (D), four other Rear-Admirals were to serve under the C-in-C Home Fleet, two for command of the two Nore Divisions and two for command of the Portsmouth and Devonport divisions.⁸⁸

The inclusion of the Navy's torpedo craft in the Home Fleet has led Nicholas Lambert to argue that Fisher was attempting to change how the Navy was organized by replacing the armoured capital ship with the torpedo craft. Lambert cites one passage from 'the order in council which created the Home Fleet' as being extremely significant, although he omits a portion which is reproduced here:

'3. The entire flotilla of torpedo craft and submarines, consisting of 3 scouts, 48 destroyers, and all submarines in full commission which are not allocated for local defence of Home Ports, together with all scouts, torpedo gunboats, destroyers, and their respective parent vessels, repair ships, and mine-laying vessels now in commission with nucleus or special crews, under the command of the Admiral D and respective Captains D, will be affiliated to the Home Fleet, and be placed under the supreme command of Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.'⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Admiralty, 'The Home Fleet.', January 1907, pp. 6-8, in Admiralty, 7 June 1907, 'Redistribution of the Fleet', ADM 1/7936.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁹ Admiralty, 'Home Fleet. Part II.', pp. 15-16, in Admiralty, 'The Home Fleet', December 1906, ADM 1/7882.

Fisher employed similar language in a memorandum on the redistribution of the fleet to be sent to fleet commanders smarting over the loss of some of their destroyers:

‘It has to be observed that new strategic conditions necessitate the employment of the largest practicable number to be obtained of these vessels for North Sea service, and for this reason a number of torpedo-boat destroyers have been brought home from China, the Mediterranean and Gibraltar to strengthen the home force, leaving only a small proportion of torpedo craft abroad. ... the political circumstances were quite different when originally 24 destroyers were attached to the Channel Fleet.’⁹⁰

Equally important for the ‘flotilla defence’ case is a proposal to redeploy several submarine flotillas along the East Coast. Captain Sydney Hall, the Inspecting Captain of Submarines considered that, after 1909, ‘It would not seem necessary to distribute submarines along the coast in peace time, and I suggest that for Home Ports the best policy will be to provide a sea-going base [i.e. a submarine tender] with 9 submarines’ at Pembroke, Rosyth, and Grimsby. Each flotilla ‘can be moved according to the strategical requirements of the case.’⁹¹ A reinforced flotilla was moved to Harwich.⁹²

Thus it would seem there was in fact a large focus on torpedo craft in the Home Fleet’s creation. In fact, this is undeniable, although at the time few recognized the importance of the flotilla in Fisher’s new organization, instead focusing on the movements of the Navy’s capital ships.⁹³ At the same time, assuming the entire organization was meant for ‘flotilla defence’ is also a misconception. While the submarine and destroyer flotillas were used for anti-invasion duties, this was not their sole function—especially in the case of the destroyers. Fisher, like the majority of the Royal Navy’s flag officers, was not terribly concerned by the prospect of an invasion, and while there was certainly an element of deterrence to the Home Fleet, this aspect

⁹⁰ Admiralty, ‘The Distribution of the Fleet’, January 1907, MSS 253/61, Box 3/2, Crease MSS.

⁹¹ Captain Sydney Hall memorandum, 19 November 1906, in Admiralty, ‘Admiralty Committee on Submarine Service’, 11 June 1906, ADM 1/7880.

⁹² Lambert, *JNFR*, p. 162.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

should not be overestimated. It is perfectly true that with strong flotillas at home ‘gave the Admiralty far greater flexibility in deployment of armoured warships’,⁹⁴ but the question must be asked, where was the most likely place for a naval confrontation between Britain and another Great Power during this time? The answer is, of course, the North Sea, since that Great Power would almost certainly be Germany. It was not the ‘outer marches of the Empire’ that had need of those armoured warships. As Fisher had emphasized in his October 11th letter to Tweedmouth, the Navy’s ‘points d’appui’ were in the North Sea. Fisher hoped to reinforce this point on his return to the Admiralty, such that

‘I hope to make so transparently obvious to you that I have not the very faintest doubt but that you will cordially approve the whole arrangement in toto! The only one thing I specifically beg of you is to keep the matter private until the time arrives to make the public announcement on the subject as if it leaks out presently we shall be subject to extreme disadvantages in the manipulation of the details of the scheme.’⁹⁵

There was certainly reason to fear ‘extreme disadvantages’ if the full Home Fleet scheme, and especially the attachment of the dreadnoughts to the Nore Division, became public knowledge. Even amongst Fisher’s allies, there was consternation when they learned of it. Prince Louis of Battenberg (now Vice Admiral, Second Cruiser Squadron) had been involved in the initial discussions on redistribution in the summer of 1906, where he expressed a desire ‘to submit some suggestions to you for gilding the pill of reduced sea-going squadrons as regards the British Public & Press.’⁹⁶ However Battenberg was left out of the later discussions, as he wrote to another Fisher supporter, naval journalist James Thursfield, that ‘the first and so far only scheme ... brought out by J.F. of which I had not a previous inkling’ was the Home Fleet.⁹⁷ Of

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

⁹⁵ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 11 October 1906, MSS 254/53, Tweedmouth MSS. Partially reproduced in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 98-99.

⁹⁶ Battenberg to Fisher, 24 July 1906, F.P. 203, f. 13, FISR 1/5, Fisher MSS.

⁹⁷ Battenberg to Thursfield, 23 January 1907, in Kerr, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

Fisher's plan 'to form the Sheerness/Chatham division of the Home Fleet of our eight best battleships... and our eight best armoured cruisers', Battenberg was mystified and wondered 'Where is the sense of this, even the sense of proportion?'⁹⁸

Fisher's opponents were just as vituperative. Sir George Clarke wrote a long letter on the Home Fleet proposal to the Prime Minister on 15 November, complaining that he found it 'difficult to follow & understand the new schemes which the Admiralty now evolves at brief intervals, or the principles, if any, which guide those schemes.'⁹⁹ Fisher, whose attitude toward the C.I.D. grew more hostile as the Army gained in influence, ignored related objections to the Home Fleet, leading Esher to rap the Admiral's knuckles over his attitude:

'I deprecate, if you will allow me to say so, your method in dealing with ... opponents.

'In a country like ours, governed by discussion, a great man is never hanged. He hangs himself. Therefore pray be Machiavellian, and play upon the delicate instrument of public opinion with your fingers and not your feet—however tempting the latter may be.'¹⁰⁰

Esher implored Fisher to 'condescend to convert the "six men who count"', and with regard to the C.I.D. specifically, the proper course was 'to give it plenty to do!' thus giving Clarke less time to meddle in naval affairs. Fisher seems to have ignored this sound counsel, and in February a frustrated Esher wrote 'You are always chaffing me about the excellent "advice" which I now and then diffidently give you. You never take it!'¹⁰¹ While Knollys thought that Esher's 'letter to Jacky has terrified him'¹⁰² and some modification would be made to the Home Fleet prior to its formation a few weeks in the future, this did not happen.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 218-220.

⁹⁹ Clarke to Campbell-Bannerman, 15 November 1906, Add MS 41213, f. 236-240, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

¹⁰⁰ Esher to Fisher 21 October 1906, in Maurice V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher*, ii (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, Limited, 1934), p. 199.

¹⁰¹ Esher to Fisher, 4 February 1907, in *ibid.*

¹⁰² Knollys to Esher, 4 February 1907, in *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Commanding Admirals

While Fisher felt secure enough to ignore both the C.I.D. and Esher's suggestions, there was one man whose opinions Fisher could not ignore. This was Rear-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman, the officer chosen for command of the Home Fleet. Bridgeman, sadly, is something of a forgotten man in the history of the Navy. Marder's description of him is typical—according to him, Bridgeman was not 'a particularly forceful person, and more of a follower than a leader,' however he 'did possess sound judgment'.¹⁰⁴ This does not do the man justice, nor does his only biographer's depiction of Bridgeman as an archetypal English gentleman suffice.¹⁰⁵ Bridgeman can be described as generally unassuming but nonetheless possessing a considerable charm which comes through in his surviving correspondence (he had an endearing habit of ending many sentences with exclamations). Bridgeman was popular within the Navy despite belonging to neither the 'Fishpond' nor the 'Syndicate of Discontent', as can be illustrated by the fact that both even at the height of the Fisher-Beresford feud, Bridgeman had friends in both camps despite his Home Fleet being one of the most bitter points of dispute.¹⁰⁶ Another example of this respect is a young Lieutenant writing in his diary of 'the very welcome intelligence that I am most likely going to the "Dreadnought" on Admiral Bridgeman's Staff. By Jove I hope it's

¹⁰⁴ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 258.

¹⁰⁵ Stewart Ross, *Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman: The Life and Times of an Officer and a Gentleman* (Chesterton Mill: Bailly's, 1998). To judge by Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly's obituary of Bridgeman, he was considerably more:

'Having served for many years under Sir Francis Bridgeman in the Home Fleet, I should like to say a few words in honour of a man who was a perfect English gentleman, as well as being an excellent officer. He was always tactful and courteous to all, no matter what their rank or station. Though a strict disciplinarian, he was very helpful in time of difficulty, and ever ready to hear one's reasons for mistakes made, as long as the same mistake was not made the second time. The one thing he abhorred was a want of straightness; once he found a man was not always straight, such a person no longer existed for him. He did not suffer fools gladly, but in dealing with them his inborn courtesy never failed him.'

Quoted in 'Obituary,' *The Times*, 22 February 1929, no. 45134, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Two leading figures of the 'Syndicate of Discontent', Doveton Sturdee and Sir Gerard Noel, have multiple friendly letters from Bridgeman dating to this period amongst their surviving correspondence.

true.’¹⁰⁷ Upon being informed that Bridgeman was to succeed him as Second-in-Command of the Channel Fleet, Admiral Sir Hedworth Lambton wrote to Fisher that ‘I think they have picked the right man in Bridgeman to succeed me.’¹⁰⁸ Fisher himself paid the following tribute to Bridgeman in his *Memories*:

‘There are few people living to whom I am under a greater obligation than Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman, G.C.B. This distinguished sailor aided me in the gradual building up of the Grand Fleet. ... Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman’s command, with whom the Grand Fleet originated under the humble designation of the Home Fleet—a gathering and perpetuation of the old more or less stationary coast-guard ships scattered all round the United Kingdom and, as the old phrase was, “Grounding on their beef bones” as they swung with the tide at their anchors. ... I hope Sir Francis Bridgeman will forgive me for hauling him into this book—I have no other way of showing him my eternal gratitude; and it was with intense delight that I congratulated Mr. Churchill on obtaining his services to succeed Sir Arthur Wilson[.]’¹⁰⁹

In either December 1906 or January 1907 Bridgeman, then second-in-command of the Mediterranean Fleet, wrote to the Admiralty in forceful terms regarding his forthcoming command. He insisted that the ‘Sheerness Division’ of the Home Fleet be fully manned and placed ‘on a similar footing to Mediterranean or Channel Fleets’, and that ‘if this cannot be done... that I am relieved of all responsibility[.]’ Bridgeman also wanted the Nore Division to have ‘ample opportunities for exercising at sea.’¹¹⁰ While Bridgeman’s orders regarding the Home Fleet specified that the Nore Division would, as has previously been mentioned, be the new fleet’s ‘*Escadre d’Élite*’, those orders did not refer to the Home Fleet’s manning arrangements. However Tweedmouth (and by extension, Fisher) took Bridgeman’s concern about

¹⁰⁷ Lieutenant Barry Domvile diary entry, 6 November 1906, DOM/11, Admiral Barry Domvile MSS, NMM.

¹⁰⁸ Rear-Admiral Sir Hedworth Lambton to Fisher, 25 May 1904, F.P. 126, f. 13, FISR 1/4, Fisher MSS.

¹⁰⁹ Fisher, *Memories*, pp. 246-247.

¹¹⁰ Bridgeman to Sturdee, 19 January 1907, SDEE 3/2, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Doveton Sturdee MSS, CCAC. Bridgeman’s original communications with the Admiralty have apparently not survived, meaning this letter is a very important piece of evidence regarding the Home Fleet’s origin.

his crews seriously, and Tweedmouth attempted to allay the prospective Commander-in-Chief's fears in a letter dated January 30th:

‘With regard to your own active striking squadron I think you may consider that they will be really fully manned: $\frac{3}{5}$ ^{ths} of nucleus crews to be permanent during commission[,] $\frac{2}{5}$ ^{ths} mostly trained men who be from time to time moved en bloc in order to meet the necessities of service in other ships on more distant berths but who will not be moved oftener than from 8 to 12 months[.] I am told this system was practically in force in the Channel Fleet in 1903.’¹¹¹

The ‘active striking squadron’ was, of course, the Nore Division. Bridgeman seems to have felt reasonably reassured by this reply. However, some concerns remained, as he expressed to his colleague Captain Doveton Sturdee, who was about to join the Channel Fleet:

‘I also know that you will recognize the difficulties of my prospective command, & how necessary intercommunication between us will be. As regards the employment of Cruisers & destroyers, for it is once thought that these two bodies have two masters, bang goes all interest, discipline, & the rest of what makes up an efficient fleet!—

‘In a sense! The Nore Division will be fully manned, also 48 Destroyers if they can be found (I mean the Destroyers) but I hear many are quite unfit to go to sea & no prospects of their being put into repair! The repairs laying exclusively with the Admiralty!

‘The proper defence of our trade & coasts, & the general preparedness for Battle, is what we must work at together, and so long as I am taken fully into the counsels of the Senior C in C, I should help him to the best of my ability; always & at the same time expecting him to receive with sympathy & patience whatever I may have to propose! There are plenty of rocks to get stranded on in this scheme, and careful piloting, will be the surest road to success...’¹¹²

Those familiar with the subsequent history of the Royal Navy in this period will take special note of the final paragraph, since Bridgeman's hopes for a smooth working relationship with the new Channel Fleet Commander-in-Chief would remain mere hopes.

Bridgeman's numerous connections throughout the service made him useful for enquiring exactly what certain critics of the Home Fleet wanted in its stead. Most important amongst these was Lord Charles Beresford, another Admiral who Fisher and the rest of the Board could not

¹¹¹ Tweedmouth to Bridgeman, 30 January 1907, MSS 254/603, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹¹² Bridgeman to Sturdee, 5 February 1907, SDEE 3/2, Sturdee MSS.

ignore—no matter how much they may have wished to. Beresford was the man chosen to replace Sir Arthur Wilson as C.-in-C. Channel Fleet, thus being the ‘Senior C in C’ mentioned in Bridgeman’s letter to Sturdee.

One of the many members of the Anglo-Irish Protestant ascendancy to join the Navy, Beresford was the second son of the clergyman-heir of the Marquisate of Waterford. He was also, more importantly, a naval officer of no small distinction, having earned the nation’s affection in 1882 with his handling of the gunboat *Condor* during the bombardment of Alexandria and again in 1884-1885 through his efforts during Sir Garnet Wolseley’s expedition to save General Gordon and his men from annihilation at Khartoum.¹¹³ Nevertheless he, like Fisher, possessed ‘a gigantic personality’, and ‘both men sought credit for their works and neither liked to share the limelight.’¹¹⁴ Although by his own admission he was by no means a first-class mind,¹¹⁵ Beresford could usually be counted to make up the deficit with ‘charm, geniality, high spirits, humour, and his unvarying kindness and thoughtfulness.’¹¹⁶

Beresford had been offered—and had accepted—command of the Channel Fleet in September 1906, having received the Admiralty’s August letter regarding the proposed fleet redistribution at roughly the same time. About the latter, he informed Tweedmouth that he would ‘overhaul it, and send some remarks.’¹¹⁷ Press speculation of Beresford’s appointment seems to have preceded the Admiralty’s official offer.¹¹⁸ Beresford left no doubt of his intentions, as he wrote to Tweedmouth that ‘I have all ready [*sic*] made out many plans for War Organisation for

¹¹³ Fisher was also present at Alexandria, in command of the Royal Navy’s newest and most powerful ironclad, H.M.S. *Inflexible*. So too were Arthur Wilson (Captain, H.M.S. *Hecla*), Hedworth Lambton (Flag Lieutenant to the C.-in-C. Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour), Prince Louis of Battenberg, and numerous others.

¹¹⁴ Freeman, *Naval Feud*, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Of his education in the *Britannia*, he wrote ‘Book-work did not interest me, but I took great pains to become proficient in seamanship, in which I always secured a high place.’ Lord Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Lord Charles Beresford*, second ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1914), p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ Beresford to Tweedmouth, 10 September 1906, MSS 254/123, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹¹⁸ Beresford to Tweedmouth, 21 September 1906, MSS 254/124, Tweedmouth MSS.

Channel Fleet in all details. Cruisers, T.B.D, Battle Fleet &c. provided I do not find them there, which is unlikely.’¹¹⁹ The same letter stressed again Beresford’s desire to have exact plans laid out. Speaking of his own plans, Beresford said they were ‘personally corrected on the 1st of each month and signed by me. This keeps things as they are for a sudden emergency and not as they might[,] could[,] or should be. Ships laid up and ships not available like “Prince of Wales” are all illuminated [*sic*] from list for sudden emergencies.’¹²⁰ He also objected—quite ironically—to the appointment of Reginald Custance as his second-in-command: ‘Custance impossible person either he or I would separate in two months.’¹²¹ He found other things worrying as well:

‘I am told privately that all T. craft are to be under Bridgeman, an excellent arrangement but their organization for war corrected every week, must be made out by me or submitted to me. I imagine if Lambton with his Cruisers made out all his plans and details of what they were to do in War, and for practising &c for War where would the C. in C. be knowing nothing till war was declared, the man who has got to fight and command in War must make out all the details for what is to be done, where ships are to go, how they are to practice for war &c himself, then the Ad^l in command of squadrons or T.B.D’s, &c, can carry out the orders. If reports that Ad^l Bridgeman will be a C. in C. which would appear to indicate that the C. in C of Channel is to have nothing to do with the organization for War, of by far the most important item of the initial steps of a Channel War.’¹²²

Beresford was obviously under the impression that as commander of the Channel Fleet he would be the overall commander during hostilities.

Tweedmouth’s notes for a reply are instructive, but nevertheless failed to disabuse Beresford of this illusion:

‘With regard to the question of the Destroyers one of the reasons for Admiral Bridgeman being made Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet was the certainty that he would cordially cooperate with you. And he will have orders to consult you on all matters of strategy, subject to the lines of Admiralty policy. And you will receive copies of all instructions given to him from time to time on that and War preparation questions.

¹¹⁹ Beresford to Tweedmouth, 13 October 1906, MSS 254/127, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Beresford telegram to Tweedmouth, 26 October 1906, MSS 254/130, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹²² Beresford to Tweedmouth, 30 October 1906, MSS 254/131, Tweedmouth MSS.

‘The present system has been found inconvenient for Administrative purposes[,] especially when the Commander in Chief Channel Fleet is out of touch of Destroyer bases. The active flotilla of Destroyers will from time to time be placed under the orders of C in C Channel Fleet for exercise.’¹²³

Fisher prepared a draft letter for Tweedmouth towards the end of the year that the First Sea Lord thought ‘meets all you want as regards to [Beresford’s] relations with Bridgeman.’¹²⁴ Meanwhile another letter of Beresford’s must undoubtedly have raised eyebrows at the Admiralty, if there were any eyebrows not already at their zenith:

‘I am sending you home shortly my view of the subject of the strength of the Fleet under the new scheme of reduction, you may not agree with me, and the Board may not agree with me, and no doubt you & your Board ought to know more than I do, but you told me to write to you on points I thought important and so I have done so.’¹²⁵

Beresford’s follow-up to this letter seems not to have clarified the situation at all, and by January 1907 the situation was becoming critical. Bridgeman, as seen, was worried enough to ask for reassurances from the Admiralty regarding his forthcoming command. Simultaneously, Tweedmouth asked Bridgeman, still Beresford’s subordinate, ‘to get from him something definite as to his requirements’. What Bridgeman got amounted to a list of demands; Beresford ‘said he would be content with 14 good Battle ships, 6 Big Cruisers, 4 smaller ones, and 3 Divisions of destroyers with their accompanying auxiliary vessels!’ Furthermore, ‘he wished the Constitution of the Home Fleet entirely altered! Or, as he described it “Swept Off”.’ With evident frustration, Bridgeman reported Beresford was vague on just how this sweeping would manifest itself ‘but, as far I could gather he wants the “Escadre d’elite” or “Nore Division” to be an addition to the Channel Fleet, in fact an extra Division of it & to be composed of 6 or 8 Battle

¹²³ Tweedmouth’s notes for a reply, n.d. [November 1906], attached to Beresford to Tweedmouth, 30 October 1906, MSS 254/131, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹²⁴ Fisher to Tweedmouth, n.d. [c. November 1906], MSS 254/57, Tweedmouth MSS. Discussions of the provision of a ship for the Duke of Connaught’s use as High Commissioner of the Mediterranean provides a rough date for this letter. In the event this position was a sinecure entailing no actual work, and the Duke resigned it in 1909. See ‘Duke of Connaught. Resigns Mediterranean Sinecure.’ *The Age* [Melbourne, Australia], 27 July 1909, no. 16962, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Beresford to Tweedmouth, 5 October 1906, MSS 254/126, Tweedmouth MSS.

Ships & a similar number of big Cruisers, Torpedo craft &c.’ This force would be fully-manned and commanded by a Vice-Admiral (under Beresford, of course), and would join up with the Channel Fleet a few times a year for exercises. The other Port divisions of the Home Fleet would be a reserve. Ignoring Bridgeman’s explanation of ‘how difficult the Board would find it’, Beresford ‘declared he would be satisfied with nothing less’.¹²⁶

Exchanges of letters having proved useless, Tweedmouth proposed a summit meeting in hopes of clearing the air. After all, Tweedmouth reminded Fisher, ‘I do think we sometimes are inclined to consider our own views to be infallible and are not ready enough to give consideration to the views of others who may disagree with us but who will still give us ideas and information which can be turned to great use.’¹²⁷

Any hope Tweedmouth held for something constructive to result from the conference was an illusion, and one can only imagine the mood at the conference between Beresford and Fisher and Tweedmouth that happened on January 20th at the Admiralty. Whatever was said between the three, an agreement was reached whereupon it was decided that the forty-eight destroyers under the Commodore (D)’s command as well as the Fifth Cruiser Squadron would be detached from the Home Fleet to the Channel Fleet ‘[w]hensoever desired for Exercise and Manœuvres’. Furthermore the Home and Atlantic Fleets would exercise together with the Channel Fleet under Beresford’s overall command, since they would be under the C.-in-C. Channel Fleet during wartime by virtue of Beresford’s position as the ‘Senior Flag Officer afloat’. However the frequency of these combined exercises were to be decided by the Admiralty and did not ‘in any

¹²⁶ Bridgeman to Tweedmouth, 14 January 1907, MSS 254/595, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹²⁷ Tweedmouth to Fisher, 8 June 1907, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 125-126.

way derogate from the position and authority of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Atlantic and Home Fleets'.¹²⁸

In the long term this meeting achieved little in terms of soothing the conflict between Beresford and the Admiralty, and Fisher at least must have suspected as much when wrote to his friend George Lambert of the results:

'I had three hours with Beresford yesterday, and all is settled, and the Admiralty don't give in one inch to his demands, but I had as a preliminary to agree to three things:--

I. Lord C. Beresford is a greater man than Nelson.

II. No one knows anything about the art of naval war except Lord C. Beresford.

III. The Admiralty haven't done a single d—d thing right!'¹²⁹

Of course, things were by no means settled. However, Beresford suddenly had to depart for North America and this made further discussion impossible for the moment.¹³⁰ Meanwhile, Beresford left his wife, Lady Mina Beresford, and the Liberal Unionist M.P. Carlyon Bellairs to manage a press campaign against the Home Fleet.¹³¹ Fisher was also in a vituperative mood. Just before Beresford's departure he told Arnold White that the nation 'can sleep quiet in our beds! Beresford, having had one month's leave, has asked for another month to go abroad ... so that 'bolt from the blue' can't be coming, or the 'one man on whom all depends' would surely ask that some other Admiral should take his place (and that he resign), to be ready for the German invasion, which is to come without warning like the last trump!'¹³²

¹²⁸ Admiralty, 'Points agreed upon by Lord C. Beresford and Sir John Fisher and afterwards approved by the First Lord and the Sea Lords', 28 January 1907, in Admiralty, 'Miscellaneous Papers dealing with the atagonism of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford to the Policy of and Administrative Arrangements of the Board of Admiralty 1906-1909', ADM 116/3108.

¹²⁹ Fisher to George Lambert, 21 January 1907, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 115.

¹³⁰ Beresford's actual reason was to settle the sizeable estate of his brother Delaval Beresford, who had been killed in a railway accident, although he seems to have hid this from Fisher when asking for leave. He did however keep Tweedmouth informed of his progress, correspondence which bristles with frustration at having to traverse thousands of miles across North America owing to the scattered nature of Delaval's land holdings. See for instance Beresford to Tweedmouth, 11 February 1907, MSS 254/577, Tweedmouth MSS. Fisher either never received this information, or regarded it as inconsequential to Beresford's complaints, or both.

¹³¹ Freeman, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

¹³² Fisher to White, 19 January 1907, in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Meanwhile the Channel Fleet remained under the taciturn Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson's command, leaving him to draw up and oversee a combined series of manoeuvres involving not only the Channel Fleet but the Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets as well.¹³³

The Day Approaches

Public reaction to the Home Fleet announcement varied, and much of the most strident denunciations unsurprisingly came from those already opposed to the Fisher's policies. In November 1906 *The Gentlemen's Magazine* commented:

‘This new departure has been viewed askance in certain quarters as foreshadowing a reduction of the fighting strength of the substantive Fleet; but there seems to be nothing in the text of the memorandum to warrant such a construction.’¹³⁴

The *Saturday Review* had earlier taken a reserved stance, stating that ‘In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the decision of the Admiralty to effect a rearrangement of ships in the Channel, Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Reserve Fleets must be assumed to be in accordance with the principle that the peace distribution of the Navy should also be its best strategical distribution for war.’ Although the Admiralty's announcement was ‘too slight to allow any safe opinion to be expressed on the merits of this fresh shuffling of units’, the tentative conclusion was that ‘It is not yet a constitutional maxim that the Board of Admiralty can do no wrong, and the general hymn of praise is premature.’¹³⁵

Others were much less reticent. In a long criticism of the Admiralty based on the writings of Bridge and Custance amongst others, an anonymous writer in the *Edinburgh Review* complained:

¹³³ Wilson, ‘Orders &c for Combined Fleet Exs. Lagos, Feb. ‘07’, CUR/14, Admiral Sir Assheton Curzon-Howe MSS, NMM.

¹³⁴ ‘Review of the Month’, *The Gentleman's Magazine* 301, no. 2111 (November 1906), p. 550.

¹³⁵ ‘Notes of the Week’, *The Saturday Review* 102, no. 2661 (27 October 1906), p. 503.

‘But if a North Sea fleet is in itself necessary, what are we to think of an Administration which, while talking of improving the ‘striking power’ of the Navy, can give us, on our most exposed front, nothing better than a miscellaneous collection of ships, not fully manned, and in many of its units not above the suspicion of having been allowed, by want of necessary repairs, to fall into a state of comparative inefficiency?’¹³⁶

The pages of periodicals was not the only place the Home Fleet was attacked, indeed the issue became another round of ammunition for Carlyon Bellairs to use in his regular attacks on the Admiralty in the House of Commons. Bellairs however was not the first to bring the Home Fleet up in Parliament. Soon after the Admiralty’s official announcement in October, Liberal M.P. for Brighton Aurelian Ridsdale asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Edmund Robertson, if the new organization would decrease the number of battleships in full commission. Robertson replied with the not-quite-straight answer that the Navy’s battleships would be ‘arranged in what the Board consider to be a more efficient fighting disposition.’¹³⁷ Less than a week later Bellairs, who could be counted on to regularly ask something regarding the Admiralty, asked when a full statement on the Home Fleet, including details of the sliding scale of nucleus crews, would be made. Robertson responded that as the Home Fleet was still in development, and in any case the Admiralty did not wish to give such specific information publically.¹³⁸ During the same session, Sir Gilbert Parker asked Robertson ‘whether it is considered by the Admiralty and the Committee of Defence that ships ... in the Reserve or Home Fleet, are immediately effective as a striking force in the emergency of war?’ Parker’s question stirred the Prime Minister to life:

‘The Answer is—Yes. The Board of Admiralty consider that the redistribution of ships about to be made adds to the fighting efficiency of the Fleet. Questions of

¹³⁶ ‘Admiralty Administration and Naval Policy’, *The Edinburgh Review* 205, no. 419 (January 1907), p. 180.

¹³⁷ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 163, col. 1098-1089.

¹³⁸ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 164, col. 83-84.

this nature are not referred to the Committee of Defence, but I thought I would give this reply in order to save time.’¹³⁹

The next day, Parker asked for the names of the ships that would be withdrawn from the other fleets to constitute the Home Fleet. When Robertson replied it would be ‘premature’ to give their names so long before the Home Fleet was actually organized, he came under fire from several other M.Ps including Bellairs, Sir Howard Vincent, and the Viscount Turnour, leaving Robertson to finally snap that ‘I will give the names as soon as the Admiralty thinks I ought to.’¹⁴⁰ The matter was not left there, as F.E. Smith asked a similar question on November 12th.¹⁴¹

From there, many of the questions asked of Robertson contained more and more innuendo. Bellairs implied that the Coastguard would be abolished upon creation of the Home Fleet.¹⁴² Major William Anstruther-Gray asked ‘whether the sea-going squadrons are to be reduced by six first-class battleships and four armoured cruisers, thus reducing the battleships at sea in full commission from thirty-two to twenty-six, and the cruisers from twenty-one to seventeen, and the first line of defence by one-fifth.’¹⁴³

There remained one last change yet to be made before the Home Fleet was officially constituted. The transfer of the Reserve Divisions at the Home Ports would leave Bridgeman saddled with eight ancient ironclads Fisher had banished to harbour duties but not yet removed from the list of first-class battleships.¹⁴⁴ It was swiftly arranged that they would be handed over to the individual port C-in-Cs, who would be responsible for whatever care and maintenance parties would be required to keep them reasonably functional until they were sold off.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Ibid., col. 106.

¹⁴⁰ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 164, col. 318-319.

¹⁴¹ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 12 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 164, col. 1031.

¹⁴² Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 7 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 164, col. 517-518.

¹⁴³ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 27 November 1906, Fourth Series, v. 165, col. 1413-1414.

¹⁴⁴ These eight were *Edinburgh*, *Camperdown*, *Rodney*, *Devastation*, *Thunderer*, *Anson*, *Benbow*, and *Howe*.

¹⁴⁵ Bridgeman, ‘Non Seagoing Ships attached to Home Fleet.’, 25 March 1907, X.26/1907, ADM 1/7931.

The Home Fleet's First Test

Upon its activation, there was much to do in the Home Fleet, especially in the Nore Division and the Fifth Cruiser Squadron. The latter, despite being expected to remain in Home Waters, was still meant to operate independently from the rest of the Home Fleet in the same manner as the cruiser squadrons attached to other fleets.¹⁴⁶

The first major test of the Home Fleet as an operational force came in the summer of 1907. While for reasons of economy there would be no Grand Manoeuvres as had occurred annually in previous years, Lord Charles Beresford was authorized to conduct a series of three exercises with the Channel Fleet and detachments from the Home Fleet. These, as Shawn Grimes notes, fitted well as an effort by the Admiralty to validate the 1907 War Plans, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.¹⁴⁷ Aside from the surviving official reports to the Admiralty, a lucid narrative of events survives in the logbook kept by Midshipman Christopher Maude of the battleship *Hindustan*'s gunroom. His summary, written just after the end of the manoeuvres, provides a useful point of comparison with the official reports of Beresford and Custance.¹⁴⁸

The first exercise would run from June 24th to June 27th. Beresford's orders for the exercise give three objectives:

- '(a) To determine whether it is possible to maintain a force of Destroyers supported by Cruisers off an enemy's coast which contains the enemy's principal base, the Destroyers' base being over 150 miles from this principal base.
- '(b) On the Battle Fleet leaving its base, to practise [sic] the Cruisers and Destroyers on both sides in their probable duties in War, and also to practice the Battle Fleet in trying to avoid attack by Destroyers after dark and in defending itself from such attacks.

¹⁴⁶ Commander P.H. Hall-Thompson minute, 15 April 1907, on Bridgeman, 'Home Fleet. Alteration to Complement of Real Admiral of Nore Division', 10 April 1907, X.134/1907, ADM 1/7931.

¹⁴⁷ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁸ Midshipman Christopher Maude, 'Log Book, Sept 15th 1906 to May 31st 1908', MSS 161, Lieutenant-Commander Christopher Maude MSS, NMRN.

‘(c) The Battle Fleet to pass through water in which submarines may be acting.’¹⁴⁹

Taking part would be the Channel Fleet and the Fifth Cruiser Squadron plus three scouts and thirty-six destroyers of the Home Fleet, some of the latter being nucleus crew ships.¹⁵⁰ The exact Order of Battle was:

‘C’ Fleet	‘X’ Fleet
Eleven Battleships	Five Cruisers
Four Cruisers	Two Scouts
One Scout	Twenty-four Destroyers
Twelve Destroyers	

Beresford would command ‘C’ Fleet, while ‘X’ Fleet was commanded by the Rear-Admiral Commanding Fifth Cruiser Squadron, Rear-Admiral Sir George Callaghan.¹⁵¹ The battleground was the South Coast and the Straits of Dover. ‘C’ Fleet’s would proceed up the Channel and through the Straits of Dover. ‘X’ Fleet’s objective would be ‘to watch and report to its supposed battle fleet, represented by the Wireless Telegraph Station at Dover, all the movements of (C) Battle Fleet with a view to bringing it to early action, and for its Destroyers to attack (C) Battle Fleet, (C) Cruisers, or accompanying (C) Destroyers in any manner possible in War.’ ‘C’ Fleet’s objective was to proceed to sea unobserved and evade the ‘X’ Battle Fleet.¹⁵²

It might be wondered why Beresford did not ask for the Nore Division’s heavy ships to join these exercises, so providing an actual ‘enemy’ battle fleet. The answer seems to be that the Admiralty had already arranged for the Nore Division to cruise as a unit in Norwegian waters,

¹⁴⁹ Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises, Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Exercise I.’, 24 July 1907, No. 843/5098, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ About whom much more will be heard.

¹⁵² Beresford, ‘Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 21. Objects of First Exercise.’, 12 June 1907, enclosure No. 1 in Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises, Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Exercise I.’, 24 July 1907, No. 843/5098, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

followed by goodwill visits to Trondheim and Christiania (now Oslo).¹⁵³ However, considering later events it might be doubted whether Beresford would have asked for Bridgeman's presence even had they been available. In company with Bridgeman's ships were four destroyers, one of which was the River-class *Eden* with the others being older 30-knotters. Bridgeman's favourable report of the *Eden*'s seagoing qualities was noted with pleasure by D.N.C. Sir Philip Watts.¹⁵⁴

Returning to the actual events of the manoeuvres, Midshipman Maude provides the following depiction of the action, whose directness is refreshing compared to the official reports:

'At about 9.a.m. we sighted the enemy's cruisers on the Port Bow, through the straits. They on sighting us, dropped astern of us, and then followed us. This gave the C. in C. a good opportunity of getting away from them. Keeping the main fleet on an E.N.E course, he detached the 3 cruisers and the battleships *Hindustan*, *Britannia* and *Juppiter* [sic], to turn round and drive off the enemy. This they did, and when they had lost sight of the Main body, they turned round and followed them, in order to keep in touch with and if possible pick up the remainder of the fleet again. About noon, the enemy turned off onto an E.N.E.ly course. The detached squadron, thinking this was a ruse to see if they would follow the enemy, or continue on their own course, kept to their same course, thus making the enemy think they were following the main body.'

Callaghan's force seems to have been taken in by this, but nevertheless things soon began going wrong for 'C' Fleet.

'About 6 in the evening, the *Talbot* being sent to determine the strength of the enemy's destroyer flotilla, who had got out of sight, came within range of their cruisers and was put out of action. About 8 the Admiral ordered the detached squadron to spread on different courses, to wade [sic] the enemy's destroyers, when it became dark. This however took some time to arrange, and about 9.15 the enemy appeared to port, and attacked.'

This attack was driven off and the detached squadron continued to spread out as ordered. The delay, however, had serious consequences:

¹⁵³ Bridgeman, 'Home Fleet. Visit of Nore Battleships to Norway. Letter of Proceedings.', 1 July 1907, X.169/1907, ADM 1/7931.

¹⁵⁴ Minute by Watts, n.d. [July 1907], on Bridgeman, 'Home Fleet. Visit of Nore Battleships to Norway. Letter of Proceedings.', 1 July 1907, X.169/1907, ADM 1/7931.

‘They [the detached squadron] had not spread quite soon enough however, for the enemy’s destroyers coming down about 10.30 found the wing ship before she had got far enough out of her original course. From here, they found both the other two battleships, and of the three, the *Britannia* and *Juppiter* [sic] were sunk. The cruisers however escaped.’¹⁵⁵

In addition to the loss of *Britannia* and *Jupiter*, *Hindustan* was ruled heavily damaged. Beresford wrote in his report that the June 26th ‘attack by the ‘X’ Scouts and Destroyers on the ‘C’ screening battleships was well executed.’¹⁵⁶

The second exercise ran from July 1st to July 3rd. Its object was ‘[t]o obtain experience in watching an enemy’s base with a Battle Fleet to which Cruisers and Destroyers are attached.’¹⁵⁷ Beresford’s ‘C’ Fleet represented the opposing force and was based in the Humber, with Vice-Admiral Custance taking command of the observing ‘X’ Fleet at Yarmouth. Callaghan’s squadron was broken up between the two forces, with Callaghan himself coming under Custance’s orders. Beresford’s goal was to escape Custance’s patrolling destroyers and get to sea. Of interest is his assessment of the risks from those patrols:

“‘C’ Fleet runs a considerable risk from the ‘X’ Destroyers. How much risk this policy involves it is very desirable to determine. Much will depend on the efficiency of the ‘C’ Destroyers and Cruisers in driving off the ‘X’ Destroyers and maintaining an efficient screen for ‘C’. ‘C’ must be prepared to risk some of the Destroyers and possibly an Armoured Cruiser to effect the object in view.’¹⁵⁸

Custance, meanwhile, gave Callaghan command of the observation patrols, which consisted of three armoured cruisers, a scout, and thirteen destroyers. Custance’s main body took up a

¹⁵⁵ Maude, ‘Log Book, Sept 15th 1906 to May 31st 1908’, MSS 161, Maude MSS.

¹⁵⁶ Beresford, ‘Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 39. Commander-in-Chief’s Observations on Exercise No. 1 Carried Out by Channel Fleet, Fifth Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers, 24th to 27th June 1907.’, 19 July 1907, enclosure No. 5 in Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises, Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Exercise I.’, 24 July 1907, No. 843/5098, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁵⁷ Beresford, ‘Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 32. Second Exercise.’, 12 June 1907, enclosure No. 1 in Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers. Exercise II.’, 1 August 1907, No. 897/5098, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁵⁸ Beresford, ‘Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 33. Orders for “C” Fleet – Exercise II.’, 30 June 1907, enclosure No. 1 in Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers. Exercise II.’, 1 August 1907, No. 897/5098, ADM 1/7926.

position too far from the Humber and Beresford's ships were able to escape due the slowness in communications between Callaghan's patrols and Custance's squadron. By the time Custance learned of Beresford's position it was too late to force a general engagement. Nevertheless both sides took losses, Beresford losing a cruiser and six destroyers plus another cruiser severely damaged and Custance ten destroyers and a cruiser. Of these results, Beresford wrote that 'a fleet in 'X'[s] position requires most intelligent and prompt scouting by its Cruisers and Destroyers.' Furthermore, the results 'shewed that much combined work is essential to all classes of vessels. Being based on a very possible war problem, it gives considerable food for reflection'. Beresford found fault with the deployment of the watching destroyers, which 'were stopped in pairs close to the entrance.' 'What the exact object in view was, is not clear', Beresford wrote with obvious puzzlement.¹⁵⁹ Custance, meanwhile, emphasized the importance of wireless telegraphy.¹⁶⁰ He also declared that destroyers did not undertake sufficient practice 'to appreciate the work which they are more immediately required to do, which to my mind is not to torpedo the enemy's battleships, but to deal with his destroyers.'

The third exercise took place in Pentland Firth. It was a modification of the second exercise divided into two related phases, running from July 8th to the 10th, and.¹⁶¹ The premise of the first phase was '[t]wo Fleets nearly equal in strength of armoured vessels ... are anxious to engage, but the Fleet in harbour wishes to try and reduce its opponent by a torpedo attack before leaving harbour.' The second phase was meant to practice cruisers in driving away destroyers

¹⁵⁹ Beresford, 'Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 40. Commander-in-Chief's Observations on Exercise II, Carried Out by Channel Fleet, Fifth Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers – 1st. – 3rd. July 1907.', 30 July 1907., enclosure No. 5 in Beresford, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers. Exercise II.', 1 August 1907, No. 897/5098, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶⁰ Custance, 'Report on Exercise II.', 7 July 1907, enclosure No. 6 in Beresford, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts and Destroyers. Exercise II.', 1 August 1907, No. 897/5098, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶¹ Beresford, 'Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 34. Third Exercise.', 4 July 1907, enclosure No. 1 in Beresford, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Third Exercise.', 3 August 1907, No. 910/5098, in Admiralty, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907', D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

from around a battle fleet while the destroyers attempted to tail a battle fleet with the object of attacking during the night. 'X' Fleet, now commanded by Custance would be the watching fleet. Based at Queensferry, Custance had five battleships, four armoured cruisers, two scouts, and the First and Third Destroyer Flotillas with which to carry out his observation duties. The sortieing 'C' Fleet at Aberdeen was commanded by Beresford, who had now returned from haranguing the Admiralty on July 5th, and comprised seven battleships, two armoured cruisers, three second-class cruisers, the scout *Sentinel*, and twelve destroyers from the Portsmouth and Devonport nucleus crew divisions of the Home Fleet.¹⁶²

Custance placed his four smaller cruisers and twelve destroyers watching the 'C' torpedo base at Aberdeen under the command of Captain Bentinck Yelverton of the protected cruiser *Talbot* while he stayed with his battlefleet seventy miles farther to sea.¹⁶³ 'X's watching force was deployed with *Sentinel* a mile off land and the destroyers in three quartets out from *Sentinel's* position. During the ensuing sortie by Beresford's ships, Yelverton's watching force was badly mauled, losing two cruisers and five of his destroyers, with the *Sentinel* listed as a probable loss as well. In exchange, Beresford lost six of his destroyers, but four others had indeed reached Custance's main force and attacked it.¹⁶⁴ In his summary of the third exercise, Beresford thought that while Custance's distribution of watching destroyers in quartets instead of pairs was superior but twelve were not enough versus Beresford's twenty-four,¹⁶⁵ and the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Custance, 'Orders for 'X' Fleet', 6 July 1907, enclosure No. 3 in Beresford, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Third Exercise.', 3 August 1907, No. 910/5098, in Admiralty, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907', D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶⁴ Beresford, 'Channel Fleet Exercise Memorandum No. 41. Exercise III (8th. – 10th. July 1907).', 1 August 1907, enclosure No. 4 in Beresford, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Third Exercise.', 3 August 1907, No. 910/5098, in Admiralty, 'Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907', D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶⁵ From this he concluded that the Navy possessed far too few seagoing destroyers.

question of if they should ‘patrol and not be stopped requires experiments.’¹⁶⁶ Beresford also felt the exercise had shown ‘the danger to which any Fleet is exposed when within 70 miles of a Torpedo base.’ General instructions were also needed for officers in command of inshore watching forces.

The Admiralty found several points on which to disagree with Beresford’s conclusions. Custance’s deployments were criticized as Their Lordships felt that ‘[n]o British Admiral conceivably would remain for a whole night with his Fleet within 70 miles of a Destroyer base known to contain double the number of Destroyers that were at his own disposal.’ Furthermore, it was felt that the dispositions chosen for the watching destroyers ‘appear[ed] to have facilitated the escape of “C’s” destroyers.’¹⁶⁷ Custance likely did himself few favours by describing the Home Fleet destroyers’ nucleus crews as ‘hastily thrown together’.¹⁶⁸ Even before receiving an Admiralty reply, Beresford quickly withdrew one of his comments on Callaghan’s performance in the first exercise, writing that his criticisms should have been levelled at himself for writing poorly worded orders.¹⁶⁹

While the financial pressure from the Cabinet had led the Admiralty to abandon holding the annual Summer Manoeuvres for 1907, it was still perfectly happy to authorize smaller-scale ‘combined tactical exercises’ such as those carried out in June-July 1907. Beresford was

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Admiralty, ‘Precis of the points on which Their Lordships disagree with the conclusions drawn by Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet’, n.d. [December 1907 or January 1908], in Admiralty to Admiral Sir Day Bosanquet [C.-in-C. Portsmouth], 4 January 1908, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶⁸ Custance, ‘Report on Exercise III’, 19 July 1907, enclosure No. 5 in Beresford, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron, Scouts & Destroyers. Third Exercise.’, 3 August 1907, No. 910/5098, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

¹⁶⁹ ‘The criticisms should have been levelled at the Commander-in-Chief who defeated the object he had in view by putting in his orders that the “X” Cruisers were to “follow” the “C” Fleet, instead of as he intended to “watch” the “C” Fleet. The “X” Cruisers obeyed the orders to “follow”, therefore the criticism on their procedure is undeserved.’ Beresford to Admiralty, 3 August 1907, No. 916/5098, in Admiralty, ‘Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Sqdⁿ, Scouts & Destroyers. June & July 1907’, D.675/1908, ADM 1/7926.

subsequently authorized to carry out another series of such exercises in October 1907. Unlike the June-July exercises, little survives of in the way of documentation, and most detail comes from a long testimonial sent to Sir Edward Grey by Fisher during the course of the Beresford Enquiry.¹⁷⁰

This evidence might be considered biased, but what is beyond a doubt is that, unlike the June-July exercises, which were carried out amicably in terms of relations between Beresford and the Admiralty, the October exercises began on a sour note. Once again Beresford chose to give command of one side to Custance. While this had been all well and good when only parts of the Home Fleet were being employed, this time it was not, for it left the Home Fleet's C.-in-C., Sir Francis Bridgeman, under the command of a junior officer. Quite aside from the general awkwardness of this arrangement, this decision was particularly annoying to the Admiralty because they felt it was 'most desirable' for Bridgeman to gain experience in operating a large fleet. In the terse summary prepared for the Foreign Secretary, it is noted that: 'Objection was taken at the time to this arrangement, but Lord Charles Beresford replied that it rested with him whom he should put in command... the Board of Admiralty did not press the point.'¹⁷¹

Once the exercises got under way Beresford took an opportunity to lash out at the commander of the First Cruiser Squadron, Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Scott. Scott was looked upon by Beresford and his associates as a Fisher plant sent to be, in the words of Scott's biographer, 'a poisoned thorn ... in Lord Charles' ample flank.'¹⁷² One of the exercises involved the First Cruiser Squadron watching a patrol line off Cromarty. As Scott recalled, his orders were 'to watch Cromarty and see that the Enemy (if they were there) did not leave without being

¹⁷⁰ Reginald McKenna, 'Reasons for omission of Combined Tactical Exercises in 1908', 18 May 1909, ADM 116/3108.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Peter Padfield, *Aim Straight; A Biography of Admiral Sir Percy Scott* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1966), p. 161.

observed... till certain that the Enemy were not there, and then to ask for further instructions.’¹⁷³ What Scott did not discover until later was that the ‘enemy’ had slipped out from Cromarty and upon its return massacred Scott’s force. Instead of asking for an explanation, Beresford and Custance unloaded upon Scott in a memorandum written subsequent to the exercises. Scott never received notice that the enemy had already left Cromarty before he arrived. As he recalled, ‘it is difficult to understand why the Commander-in-Chief and Sir Reginald Custance should have promulgated to the Fleet a Memorandum which intimated that the capture was due to my incapacity.’¹⁷⁴ The nucleus crew destroyers also were a point of contention. Beresford having already complained to the First Lord that they ‘cannot go at high speed, or remain at sea more than 18 hours, without officers breaking down and so inviting a danger.’¹⁷⁵

Relationships between the Channel Fleet’s leadership and the Admiralty would not get better from here on out, and as a result the Home Fleet was increasingly drawn into the crossfire of the savage feud that resulted. The climax of this story will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Creation in Perspective

In summary, the creation of the Home Fleet in 1906-7 was the result of numerous and sometimes contradictory factors relating to strategy, manpower requirements, economics, technology, and contemporary politics both domestic and international. There were so many threads that ultimately were woven together to make the Home Fleet that declaring a specific one to be the most important is probably more an exercise in opinion than anything else. Too many great events were happening practically simultaneously for one to emerge as a prime mover. In 1905 alone the Balfour government was swept from power, the first four *Dreadnoughts* were

¹⁷³ Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Scott, ‘Enclosure to Letter dated ___ February, 1909, From Vice-Admiral Commanding Second Cruiser Squadron, No. __’, 1909, FISR 5/16, Fisher MSS.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Beresford to Tweedmouth, 22 April 1907, MSS 254/564, Tweedmouth MSS.

conceived and ordered, Russian sea power was destroyed in the Far East and her domestic politics were disrupted by revolution, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was renewed and relative safety in Far Eastern waters thus assured, and the Moroccan crisis brought France and Britain to a closer but still cautious understanding, Fisher's reforms—including the redistribution of the fleet—were implemented in earnest, and despite the continued growth of the German battlefleet Britain could at the end of the year, claim to possess a three-power standard of naval superiority in Europe.

Many of these events were from the Admiralty's point of view positive developments, especially the misfortunes of Russia and the various internal reforms instigated by Fisher and the Fishpond. Yet at the same time they had created several new problems. The initial Fisher Scheme was oriented towards action in the English Channel, as evidenced by the emphasis on building as many submarines of the current type (the 'C' Class) as was possible and also the entire Coastal Destroyer design. The thawing of relations with France and the simultaneous replacement of the Russian Baltic Fleet with the German *Hochseeflotte* as the major threat in Northern Europe meant that the Admiralty's strategic priorities would have to be shifted northeastward. At the same time the continued necessity for economical Navy Estimates was further reinforced by the Liberals' epochal victory in the General Election. Furthermore there was still the thorny issue of manning the fleet. All these factors combined to force Fisher and the other Sea Lords into carrying out another round of strategic redistribution.

The timing was inauspicious, coming so soon after the initial reshuffling, as was the secrecy with which the Home Fleet's organization was drawn up following the stormy reception of Fisher's August 1906 proposal. While such secrecy was an understandable reaction to the leakiness of the Navy's Commanders-in-Chief, it was also a trait Fisher sometimes took to

extremes and which in the event only clouded matters further—to the point that even Fisher's close allies were left steaming in the dark. As a result, historians have been left to put together an incomplete jigsaw puzzle, and inevitably interpretations distilling the Home Fleet's genesis to a straightforward motivation or motivations have appeared as a result, be they a prophetic readying of the King's Navy to fight the Germans or cloaking Britain's coast with flotillas so her heavy ships could still project power around the globe without prodigious expense. Neither of these explanations seems to be entirely satisfactory—or at least they seem not to be—when all the evidence is considered thoroughly and on the assumption that Fisher's own statements about the Home Fleet's creation are trustworthy to a fair degree.

It is clear that a simple anti-German explanation does not entirely address the financial and technological dimensions of Admiralty policy making. However, the alternative 'flotilla defence' narrative tends to neglect the importance of the battlefleet and in extreme interpretations leaves the capital ships cooling their heels offstage in like some Edwardian analogue of the U.S. Pacific Fleet's Task Force One post-Pearl Harbor.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, as has been shown, enough evidence exists to indicate that Germany was a major factor in the Home Fleet's initial conception, unless the authors of numerous Admiralty documents were completely disassembling towards the rest of the government and much of the Navy itself. Yet the importance of the torpedo craft in Britain's transforming strategy cannot easily be overstated. As will be seen shortly, both flotilla and battlefleet had their place in the Admiralty's plans for future sea campaigns. What is more, the roles they would ultimately play when Armageddon came were much better developed than is sometimes suggested. It is to the matter of the Royal Navy's plans for such a war that attention will now be drawn.

¹⁷⁶ For which see David C. Fuqua, 'Task Force One: The Wasted Assets of the United States Pacific Battleship Fleet, 1942', *The Journal of Military History* 61, no. 4 (October 1997), pp. 707-734.

CHAPTER THREE

Planning for War, 1906-1909

The establishment of the Home Fleet in 1907 coincides with the first of a series of specific War Plans being drawn up at the Admiralty for a war with Germany. By then the *Kaiserliche Marine* was the principal threat upon which the Royal Navy focused its energies, and this would remain true up to the outbreak of the First World War. Whether or not, as Keith Neilson has argued, ‘Anglo-German relations have been given greater emphasis for the period before 1914 than they deserve’,¹ within the Admiralty at least there can be little doubt Germany was the focus of attention, even accepting Nicholas Lambert’s strictures about the importance of finance in policy making. ‘Our only probable enemy is Germany,’ quoth Fisher in late 1906, ‘Germany keeps her *whole* Fleet always concentrated within a few hours of England. We must therefore keep a Fleet twice as powerful concentrated within a few hours of Germany.’² This is why the Home Fleet, though originating as a mixture of economy measure and Admiralty centralization, evolved into the future centrepiece of the Royal Navy organization in Home Waters by the time of its inauguration in spring 1907. It is also why the Royal Navy’s War Plans from 1907 onwards, or at least those that survive, are almost entirely concerned with what action would be taken in North Sea: success or failure there would dictate the rest of the conflict.

This concentration on key areas was not new to Admiralty planning documents. Prior to 1907, there were no Admiralty ‘War Plans’ *per se*. What there was were ‘War Orders’, which were, generally speaking, lists of objectives for the fleet commanders to use for drawing up their own plans of campaign. While this differentiation comes close to being a hair-splitting

¹ Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xi.

² Fisher to Prince of Wales, 23 October 1906, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 103.

technicality on a certain level, it is nevertheless important during this period. The reason for this importance is the change in relationship between the Admiralty and the fleet commanders, and the increasing centralization of strategy. Another historical importance of these War Plans, which will be discussed in detail below, comes not from their focus on Germany as the ‘only probable enemy’, but what they show of how the Royal Navy planned to use their strength, which after 1907 meant, increasingly, the Home Fleet. Then as now, this is a matter of much contention and in some cases misunderstanding.

Prior to the 1911 creation of the Admiralty War Staff, the Royal Navy had no specific department or body dedicated to war planning, although the Department of Naval Intelligence in consultation with the Board of Admiralty tended to be the *de facto* strategic planning organ, with the finer details left to the fleet Cs-in-C. Nevertheless, the documents relating to war planning that survive from the earliest years of the twentieth century suggest that the Navy’s planning process was nowhere near as chaotic or haphazard as has been suggested by certain authors.

Historians have traditionally not been kind to the Navy’s planning efforts in the last half of Fisher’s first term. Marder mentioned them only in passing,³ although his working under Admiralty sufferance regarding access and publication of materials may explain this.⁴ When they were published by the Navy Records Society as part of a two-volume collection of Fisher’s official papers, the collection’s editor wrote of their ‘almost complete refusal to face the naval realities of the day’.⁵ Paul Haggie found them lacking and in some places, self-contradictory.⁶ More recent authors have seen them in a different light. Andrew Lambert observes they were perfectly satisfactory for the naval situation of 1907-1908 when Germany had neither submarines

³ Marder, *FDSF*, i, pp. 379-380.

⁴ Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts*, pp. 9-14, 69, 104-105.

⁵ Kemp (ed.), *FP*, ii, p. 317.

⁶ Paul Haggie, ‘The Royal Navy and War Planning in the Fisher Era’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, no. 3 (July 1973), pp. 116-123.

nor significant coastal fortifications in the Frisian Islands.⁷ Nicholas Lambert, meanwhile, writes that they were not ‘true war plans’ but ‘strategic studies’, and their purpose was to show the government the Admiralty had an alternative to the Army’s proposed ‘continental commitment’.⁸ Christopher Martin agrees, although he gives much more credence to their being more or less representative of actual Admiralty plans for an Anglo-German war, and makes a reasonably convincing argument that the Admiralty also used them as ammunition against the forthcoming Second Hague Conference.⁹

The principal historians of the Fisher Era agree that formal planning for a war with Germany began in 1905, at least partially in reaction to the Moroccan crisis.¹⁰ Previously, orders for an anti-German maritime campaign would have likely been extemporized on the day using such war plans as existed for a war with one or both members of the Dual Alliance.¹¹ An exception to this is a 1904 print included in the second volume of *Naval Necessities* by Battenberg discussing the organization of torpedo craft flotillas.¹² In this document D.N.I. Battenberg (doubtless recalling his experience in the 1902 Manoeuvres where, as C.-in-C. ‘X’ Fleet, he had used his destroyers to outfox Sir Arthur Wilson and Sir Compton Domvile and escape his blockaded base at Argostoli¹³) noted that while the German Bight could be watched by destroyers based at Harwich, Kiel would be a far more difficult proposition. The suggested solution was to scuttle blockships in the Elbe, forcing the German fleet to come through the

⁷ Andrew Lambert, *Admirals: The Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008), p. 314.

⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁹ Christopher Martin, ‘The 1907 Naval War Plans and the Second Hague Peace Conference: A Case of Propaganda’, *JSS* 28, no. 5 (October 2005), pp. 833-856.

¹⁰ Andrew Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311; Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 177; Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 290.

¹¹ These, while fitting the general description of ‘war plans’ as strategists and historians generally understand the term, were known in the Royal Navy under a variety of names such as the aforementioned ‘War Orders’.

¹² Battenberg, ‘The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters’, n.d. [late 1904], A[?].1123/04, in Admiralty, *Naval Necessities*, ii, p. 508-519, ADM 116/3093.

¹³ Richard Hough, *Louis & Victoria: The First Mountbattens* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1974), pp. 223-225.

Skagerrak. Such a voyage would be a risky proposition for the main German force, and Battenberg continued that:

‘If we block the Elbe entrance while the body of the enemy is at Kiel, he must if he means to fight do so under a disadvantage. The position of our main fleet would be somewhere within 30 miles of the Skaw, which would fix the position of the headquarters of the destroyers whose duty it was to deal with such of the enemy’s torpedo craft as came from Kiel by the Belts, etc., or with his larger vessels emerging from the same point. This duty they would carry out not by taking up positions in the immediate vicinity of Kiel itself, as they would at Cherbourg or Brest, but by occupying positions between the Skaw and the opposite coasts, pushed more or less forward or backward as occasion demanded.’¹⁴

Unfortunately the feasibility of such a blocking operation was, in Marder’s words, ‘blown to bits by the hydrographer’ (Rear-Admiral Sir William Wharton) in July, owing to the width of the Elbe, the strong riverine current, and the twenty-mile distance upriver that the blockships would have to travel to their scuttling site. This was concurred with by Lord Walter Kerr and, again, a year later, by Rear-Admiral (D) Alfred Winsloe, under whose bailiwick destroyer operations fell. Winsloe, reflecting on the Japanese difficulties in blocking much narrower channels at Port Arthur, thought such an undertaking was ‘absolutely impracticable.’¹⁵

An important aspect of Battenberg’s proposal was the acknowledgement that destroyer flotillas would be operating on the far side of the North Sea and that a forward base would be of great assistance to their operations. Battenberg lamented that best option for such an advanced base, Heligoland, was heavily defended and could not be captured for some time after the commencement of hostilities.¹⁶ The search for an alternative ‘advanced base’ among the many

¹⁴ Battenberg, ‘The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters’, n.d. [late 1904], A[?].1123/04, in Admiralty, *Naval Necessities*, ii, p. 513, ADM 116/3093.

¹⁵ Despite this apparent vetoing by the relevant Admiralty expert, such a blocking scheme would be periodically resurrected over the next few years by various planners. Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 481.

¹⁶ Battenberg, ‘The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters’, n.d. [late 1904], A[?].1123/04, in Admiralty, *Naval Necessities*, ii, p. 511, ADM 116/3093.

islands in the German Bight had a great influence on subsequent planning against Germany, and has in the author's opinion been widely confused with desires by some planners for large-scale amphibious operations against the German mainland.

Another early set of orders—dating from the beginning of May 1905 but probably under discussion prior to then—suggests the German battle fleet was to be dealt with using the same basic strategy drawn up in 1903 to counter Russia's Baltic Fleet.¹⁷ This was a sensible decision. The location of the *Kaiserliche Marine's* main base at Kiel meant they would have to sortie through the Skaw to reach the North Sea, as the Russian Admiral Rozhdestvensky had ultimately proceeded immediately prior to the Dogger Bank incident. The alternative of moving the German heavy forces through the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Kanal to the Elbe and thence to Wilhelmshaven was too ponderous and slow in comparison.

To return to the orders in question, it was decided that in the event of a war involving Germany and Britain on opposite sides, the Channel Fleet was ordered to:

- 1) Watch the enemy naval forces and 'bring them to action if they leave harbour.'
- 2) Capture or sink any enemy cruisers threatening British merchantmen in European waters.
- 3) Prevent any amphibious landings anywhere in the British Isles.
- 4) Assist any British amphibious operations.
- 5) Defend British auxiliaries and store ships from enemy cruisers or other types of raiders.

Exactly what form these amphibious operations would take is not explained, although given the later explicit discussion of occupying Borkum or another of the Frisian Islands—discussed at length below—it can be safely inferred that those locales were the most likely initial objectives.

A month later it seems this arrangement was no longer considered sufficient, and the resultant discussion between Fisher and D.N.I. Ottley in a docket titled 'British Intervention in the Event of an Attack on France by Germany' represents what is apparently the first specific

¹⁷ Admiralty, 'Orders for Commander in Chief, Channel Fleet', 6 May 1905, ADM 116/900B.

official Admiralty discussion of a war with Germany alone. Sadly this important file is one of the multitudes which did not survive the various weeding of Admiralty files. However, Professor Marder viewed it during the 1930s, and included a summary with extensive quotations in his *Anatomy of British Sea Power*.¹⁸

With the Moroccan Crisis in the foreground of his mind, Fisher asked Ottley to prepare a statement that considered ‘the possibility of manning the existing War Fleet in the event of sudden action... in support of France’ and how to best deploy the Royal Navy’s strength against Germany. Ottley replied two days later that there were men enough for the whole of the ‘War Fleet’, and that ‘all our pre-supposed dispositions will require to be entirely modified in view of the exceptionally favourable circumstances of this moment.’¹⁹ The ‘pre-supposed dispositions’ refer to those laid out in the previous month’s orders sent to the C.-in-C. Channel Fleet. Ottley elaborated further:

‘Previous studies of the question of war against Germany have all been based on the assumption that Germany was supported by powerful maritime allies, such as France or Russia, or both, or if not directly supported at least in a position to know that we were so much pre-occupied with them that we could only spare a fraction of our force to deal with the entire German Fleet.

‘Under the circumstances immediately to be considered the situation is entirely different, and our maritime preponderance would be overwhelming, as we would have the French Fleet acting in our support, and the Russian Fleet, even if assisting the enemy, has for the time being ceased to be a factor of importance.’²⁰

Ottley further reminded Fisher that the Admiralty had recently punted the explicit planning of both campaign and fleet distribution in a war—any war—to the C.-in-C. Channel Fleet, a fact

¹⁸ Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 502-505. Nicholas Lambert, rather gracelessly in this author’s opinion, complains that Marder focused on the wrong things in his quotation of this docket. Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 356n94 and *Idem*, *Planning Armageddon: British Economy Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 38. Since the docket itself no longer exists, it has to be wondered what Lambert thinks were more worthy of quotation by Marder.

¹⁹ Quoted in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 502.

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 502-503. It is interesting to observe how Tirpitz’s geopolitical intentions for the expansion of the *Kaiserliche Marine* had now foundered. His *Risikoflotte* had provoked Britannia, not deterred her.

illustrated by the open-ended nature of the previous month's orders. As a result the Admiralty proper had little to do 'except carry out the necessary mobilization and call home the Atlantic Fleet' including the Second Cruiser Squadron.²¹ The recall order was extended to include a portion of the Mediterranean Fleet as well.²² It is a testimony to the flexibility that was an intended feature of Fisher's 1904-1905 redistribution Scheme that this transfer of a sizable portion of the world's most powerful navy could be done with such relative ease.

While the deployment and conduct of the potential war against Germany was left to Admiral Wilson, his strategic objectives were outlined clearly. Wilson was ordered to use his entire command and initiate a commercial blockade of all German ports, up to and including a sortie through the Belts into the Baltic, and Wilson was asked whether he intended to attempt the closure of the Elbe entrances with sunken vessels or, if he felt it advisable, mines. German colonial possessions would be dealt with by the foreign station C.-in-Cs and Marder records the exact allocation of responsibilities:

'Detached cruisers would attack German trade in South America and the East Pacific. The Cape C.-in-C. would blockade German South-West Africa, and the China C.-in-C. would blockade Kiaochow. The East Indies C.-in-C. would deal with German East Africa and German New Guinea.'²³

As noted, it was expected that Admiral Wilson was to be responsible for the nut-and-bolt constructional details of any maritime offensive, and on the night of June 26th he received a drafted précis of the above for comment. Wilson's reply, especially in view of his subsequent statements during the Beresford Enquiry and the fateful August 1911 meeting of the C.I.D., is very significant. Wilson felt that 'No action by the Navy alone can do France any good.'

²¹ Ibid., p. 503.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Effective support of France would have to involve rapid diversionary action to draw off German troops from the critical battles on the frontier. Furthermore:

‘In order to make an effective diversion we should be obliged to expose our ships in the Baltic or on the German coast in a way that would not be necessary if we were at war with Germany alone, but under present conditions, with France on our side, this is a risk that can be accepted.

The efficacy of any blockade depended on the attitude of the minor nations in the region, but regardless Wilson felt the best chance for success involved a combined attack on the Waddenzee focusing on the mouth of the Elbe. Wilson was very specific about what he saw as these operations’ principal object:

‘As the main object would be to draw off troops from the French frontier, simultaneous attacks would have to be made at as many different points as possible. ...

‘If Denmark were on our side, a very effective diversion might be made by assisting her to recover Schleswig and Holstein, including the port of Kiel, and in that case the Fleet might operate very effectively in conjunction with a land force on the coast of the Little Belt or Kiel Bay in addition to the attacks proposed on the mouths of the Elbe and Weser.

‘I am not in a position to judge whether the French would be any more capable of resisting a German invasion now, even with our assistance, than they were in 1870, but certainly if we intervened on her behalf our honour as a nation would be seriously implicated by her failure, and it is only by putting forth the whole military strength of the Empire that we can hope to succeed.’²⁴

Wilson’s suggestions were that he and the Army’s expeditionary force commander should work together for a plan of operations ‘on the largest scale possible’; and that he would require every small craft the Navy possessed, including the gunboats Fisher had stricken but which had not yet been sold for scrap; that the elderly battleships and ironclads such as the *Admirals* and the *Royal Sovereigns* be prepared for coast bombardment missions; and that a sufficient stock of flat-bottomed shallow-draught coastal steamers be obtained for use as landing craft and inshore

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 504-505.

support vessels.²⁵ Ottley agreed, though his tone suggests a certain reluctance; he wrote to historian and Naval War College lecturer Julian Corbett concurring with the latter's view that Britain 'should have to throw and expeditionary force ashore on the German Coast somewhere, in addition to any naval actions we might take.'²⁶

Another scrap of Wilson's plans survives in the minutes of the July 5th, 1907 conference between Beresford, Fisher, and Tweedmouth. During a discussion of Wilson's plans, Beresford expressed his disagreement about Wilson's use of his destroyers. While calling Wilson's plan 'splendid', Beresford added that 'I do not agree with him about sending the destroyers over. I get there with everything you give me.'²⁷ Knowing Beresford's preference for deploying his entire force close on the Bight, his remarks suggest that Wilson's initial force dispositions matched up with both Battenberg's 1904 proposals and the deployments suggested in the 1907 War Plans: destroyers to close with the coast for observation patrols, with the main fleet in support at a suitable distance to seaward.

The value of these papers, even in this sadly incomplete form, is well-nigh incalculable. They lay out Wilson's view of the strategic realities of the time, and his proposals for what actions could resultantly be undertaken by British as a naval and military power. Furthermore, it shows that, despite arguments to the contrary, there was a large amount of continuity in the Admiralty's plans for an Anglo-German naval war from the earliest years through to August 1914. The majority of the war plans and sketches drawn up over the next half-decade, right the whole way down to the very last days of peace in July 1914, share basic elements with Wilson's commentary; furthermore they share much common ground with the early works of Arnold-Forster and Custance's N.I.D. staff. From this and other evidence, it can and will be shown the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 505.

²⁶ Ottley to Corbett, 3 July 1905, RIC/9, Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond MSS, NMM.

²⁷ Admiralty, Untitled print of conference minutes, 5 July 1907, p. 18, ADM 116/3018.

Navy's basic approach to an Anglo-German war changed little in its essentials throughout the Prewar Era. These essentials were: closure of the North Sea and the establishment of as rigorous a commercial blockade as possible (dependent on the stance of the neutral states), varying degrees of joint amphibious action with the Army to pull German troops away from France, and the destruction or neutralization of the *Kaiserliche Marine*. While these essential facets remained basically unchanged, it would be the working details of the various plans—principally the composition of the British forces as well as their basing and deployment—that evolved with the strategic and technological developments during the next nine years.²⁸

Informal Plans, 1905-1906

The Admiralty was not alone in considering an Anglo-German war in the summer of 1905. The July 6th meeting of the C.I.D. included discussion of what should be done if Germany tried to obtain the Dutch East Indies.²⁹ In the meantime, probably buoyed by Wilson's report, Fisher had deployed the Channel Fleet on a cruise in the North Sea and the Baltic,³⁰ but by then the crisis was becoming less and less acute, and as a result the Admiralty moved on to other matters, leaving war planning aside for most of the remainder of 1905. On December 19th, a conference between Esher, Ottley, Clarke, and Lieutenant-General Sir John French set down the

²⁸ An additional element of British policy, at least in the Fisher years, was the principal of deterrence. Fisher was a great believer in the value of the navy as a diplomatic tool based on its use as a deterrent. During the Moroccan Crisis he sent the Channel Fleet on a cruise into the Baltic as a show of force. He also greatly played up intentions for a Nelsonic pre-emptive strike against the German battle fleet, capitalizing on the German fears of such an attack: the so-called 'Copenhagen Complex'. Andrew Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311; Marder, *FDSF*, i, pp. 112-113; Jonathan Steinberg, 'The Copenhagen Complex', *The Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 3 (July 1966), pp. 23-46. See also Rebecca Berens Matzke, *Deterrence through Strength: British Naval Power under Pax Britannica* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

²⁹ Committee of Imperial Defence, 'Minutes of 74th Meeting', 6 July 1905, f. 142, CAB 2/1.

³⁰ Fisher to Corbett, 28 July 1905, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 63; Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 508.

following points on British maritime strategy in an Anglo-French war with Germany.³¹ Again the essential elements were restated almost to the point of being a template for subsequent plans:

- ‘(a.) Destruction or masking of the German fleet.
- (b.) Capture of German commerce at sea.
- (c.) Commercial blockade of German ports.
- (d.) Isolation of German Colonies, such as Kiao-Chau.
- (e.) Securing our own and French coast-lines.
- (f.) Safeguarding French communications with North Africa.’

While a caveat was added that precise details depended on whether Germany had a naval ally, that possibility seemed ‘most improbable.’ Again the rapid redeployment of Britain’s European fleets was emphasized, as ‘the Atlantic fleet and, if needed, part of the Mediterranean fleet could be brought into Home waters’ regardless of if French naval cooperation was obtained, although if it was ‘it would be easily possible to maintain a prepondering naval force on both sides of the Skaw.’ Sadly these meetings were of an unofficial and non-binding character for both services, which was a great shame as they represent the high water mark for British joint strategic planning in the Prewar Era. Interservice tensions, however, ensured nothing would come from the discussion.³²

While these Conferences were in progress, the Liberals took over. As already noted they were disinterested in strategic policy and planning, and as a consequence the frequency of C.I.D. meetings fell drastically. Attitudes towards Germany also changed, though to a less extreme degree. Upon arrival at the Foreign Office, Sir Edward Grey seems to have had some notions of conciliation towards at least a part of the German claims in Morocco:

‘In more than one part of the world I find ... that Germany is feeling after a coaling station in a port. Everywhere we block this. I am not an expert in naval strategy, but I doubt whether it is vy important ... to prevent Germany getting

³¹ Defence Committee, ‘Notes of a Conference Held at Whitehall Gardens, December 19, 1905’, p. 1, ESHR 16/10, Esher MSS.

³² d’Ombrain, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-89.

ports at a distance from her base; and the moment may come when timely admission, that it is not a cardinal object of British policy to prevent her having such a port, may have great pacific effect.’³³

If Grey’s initial openness towards concessions regarding foreign coaling stations was seriously considered by the fledgling Government, it was ultimately scuppered by the Admiralty. In July 1905 Ottley had produced a long memorandum for Balfour on the effect of Germany gaining one or more ports in Morocco.³⁴ Unsurprisingly, he was dead against, and knowing the Prime Minister’s concerns about Indian defence, concluded with a warning regarding a Russo-German alliance: unless ‘German naval power in this part of the world’ was eliminated ‘we should not feel at all safe in sending our transports via the Cape with re-inforcements to India.’³⁵ Now a year-and-a-half later Ottley, doubtless with certain twinges of *déjà vu*, produced a strong letter once again repudiating the idea of allowing Germany, or indeed any other power, to build a base on Spanish territory, especially the potential ‘second Gibraltar’ that was Ceuta.³⁶ Ottley went so far as to suggest influencing Spain so that ‘she will not under any circumstances cede her Moroccan territories to any Power’ even at the cost of ‘some sort of guarantee to uphold her against Powers which coveted the places in question.’ With Fisher and First Lord Tweedmouth in full accord, the minute went to the Foreign Office.³⁷

By the time Ottley wrote this letter, much had already been done in regards to war planning against Germany. The conferences with General French had given the Admiralty new impetus for refining their campaign plans in the spring of 1906. Once again Fisher and Wilson

³³ Grey to Campbell-Bannerman, 9 January 1906, Add MS 41218, f. 49-50, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

³⁴ Ottley, ‘Effect upon the Naval situation of the acquisition by Germany of sea-ports upon the coast of Morocco’, 6 July 1905, Add MS 49711, f.30-34, Balfour MSS.

³⁵ Ibid., f. 34.

³⁶ It would be interesting (albeit not especially relevant) to know if Ottley had considered the historical Arab use of Ceuta as the staging point for their conquest of Visigothic Spain in the eighth century, an event which gave Gibraltar its present name—a corruption of the Arabic *Jabal Tariq*.

³⁷ Ottley, ‘Minute to First Sea Lord’, 14 December 1906, FO 800/87, f. 88-89, Sir Edward Grey MSS.

corresponded, and this time one of Wilson's replies survives in full in Fisher's personal papers.³⁸

From his flagship, H.M.S. *Exmouth*, Wilson wrote:

'The more I consider the possibility of any effective action against Germany the more I am convinced of the importance of bringing forward our obsolete ships...

'We cannot afford to use our best ships against forts and they have very little advantage in this respect over our old ones.

'I think it is absolutely necessary that we should destroy the forts at Cuxhaven and so force our way through the entrance of the Canal and Hamburg.

'For this purpose the old *Admiral* Class if their gun mountings are put in order and sights adjusted are as good as any of the latest ships and it would not much matter if they left their bones there after the work was done. *Anson*, *Benbow*, *Collingwood*, *Hood*, *Nile*, *Trafalgar*, *Sans pareil* [sic], *Conqueror*, *Hero*, would form a force that could easily silence the Cuxhaven forts leaving my fleet intact at the entrance of the Elbe ready to come to their assistance if the German fleet attempts to attack them.'

After a discussion of possible ways of fitting out of these old warships for bombardment duties,

Wilson resumed laying out his strategic vision:

'Once in possession of the Canal we cut Schleswig and Holstein off from the rest of Germany and we might be in a position to undertake the siege of Kiel from the rear.

'Anyway Hamburg would be at our mercy unless they sent a large force to defend it.

'In addition to the old battleships we should want as many vessels of the *Fantome* and *Archer* classes as we could lay our hands on to patrol the rivers and inlets and assist the military.

'If you really think there is a possibility of war you ought to lose no time in putting the armaments of these old ships in fighting condition.

'The condition of their main machinery is not of much importance. If they can steam eight knots it would be all they want.'³⁹

Once again the importance of seizing German coastal territory during the campaign was asserted.

A strong commercial blockade was implicit in Wilson's commentary, even if it was left unmentioned, as was the destruction or neutralization of the German main battle fleet, either

³⁸ Evidence, perhaps, that the informal nature of these early planning arrangements had unappreciated benefits!

³⁹ Wilson to Fisher, 9 March 1906, f. 1-2, F.P. 198, FISR 1/5, Fisher MSS.

during the amphibious phase of the campaign or subsequently in a repetition of the Port Arthur siege. Wilson's goal—perhaps the ultimate goal of the campaign⁴⁰—of threatening Hamburg either by land, sea, or both, was in the best tradition of Sir George Tryon's strategy demonstrated so graphically in the 1888 and 1889 Manoeuvres,⁴¹ and represents again the amount of continuity between the new Fisherite Navy and the old days often called the 'Dark Ages' by disparaging historians.

Wilson, despite his responsibility for planning out the Navy's operational strategy, was not the only one considering how to fight Germany. Edmond Slade at the War College was also considering the problem. Slade is one of the many interesting officers of the period who are sometimes overlooked. The only non-flag officer to be given the post of President of the Royal Naval War College (as a replacement for the respected Rear-Admiral Henry May, whose premature death from gastro-enteritis had been much lamented), Slade was an archetypal sailor-scholar.⁴² Fisher's initial impression of Slade was that he was 'clever',⁴³ which likely explains his appointment as D.N.I. in replacement of Ottley. Slade also had a keen understanding of the importance of joint planning between the Army and the Navy, which has led Nicholas Lambert to call him 'politically rather naïve.'⁴⁴ In hindsight, a more fair description would be that Slade understood the importance of coordination between services that his superiors on both sides of the question were too factionalized to agree about.

⁴⁰ Wilson never divided the campaign into specific phases of the kind which are used with skill as framing in Edward Miller's *War Plan Orange*, no doubt rightly assuming the Germans would have a say in such matters. However as a framework for analysing these plans the concept has its uses.

⁴¹ Rear-Admiral C.C. Penrose Fitzgerald, *Life of Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon, K.C.B.* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1898), pp. 214-224; Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, pp. 193-194; Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, pp. 111-112

⁴² Only a few historians, principally Matthew Seligmann but also John Coogan, have given Slade the respect he deserves. John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899-1915* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 106; Seligmann, *German Threat*, pp. 89-91.

⁴³ d'Ombraïn, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 173. Lambert seems to have taken this judgement from Ruddock Mackay. See Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

In a series of letters to his colleague Julian Corbett in December 1905 he discussed amphibious operations similar to both Wilson's and Ottley's conceptions, indeed he had 'a long discussion about it' with the latter on the 15th.⁴⁵ Slade's own 'proposition' was 'a mobile army of say 10000 or 15000 men embarked in the fastest transports we can get & to send them to with no indication of their objective. A force or perhaps the same force if necessary to seize Antwerp on the slightest infringement of Belgian neutrality, and from these to operate on the flank of the German line of advance. This would do more to assist France I think than anything else as thereby Germany would have to keep a very large force immobilized in their littoral provinces in case of a descent on their coasts.'⁴⁶

The major stumbling point to this proposal—besides the horror with which the Army would have received the suggestion of keeping so many soldiers aboard crowded troopships for an apparently open-ended period of time—was that, as Slade noted in a second letter after consulting with Ottley and George Ballard, 'the W.O. do not consider that any attempts on the coast would cause the Germans to lock up any appreciable number of men and they quote the lack of effect that the expedition to the Baltic exercised on the Crimean War.'⁴⁷ The War Office was not the only detractor of plans for large-scale amphibious operations. Reflecting on these early plans in 1911 during the discussions about the creation of the Admiralty War Staff, Ottley wrote to the new First Lord, Winston Churchill, that after joint-force landing manoeuvres at Clacton 'the War Office and Admiralty jointly came to the conclusion that the operation of landing in the face of a determined enemy was out of the question.'⁴⁸ This however was Ottley

⁴⁵ Slade to Corbett, 16 December 1905, RIC/9, Richmond MSS.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Slade to Corbett, 26 December 1905, RIC/9, Richmond MSS.

⁴⁸ Ottley to Winston Churchill, 2 November 1911, f. 28-29, CAB 17/8.

using hindsight, and it may well be that he was backing away from his earlier enthusiasm for combined operations in the wake of the disastrous Agadir conference of the C.I.D.

As has been shown, up through 1906 the Navy's strategic planning was somewhat fragmented, at least from an administrative standpoint, but it nevertheless had certain coherent groups involved. The Board of Admiralty and the Naval Intelligence Department usually only provided broad policy outlines to the fleet Cs-in-C., who were then left to their own devices to plan their campaigns from an operational standpoint. The officers and faculty of the War College would occasionally contribute informally as well. That Fisher took such an active role is unsurprising since his October 1904 redistribution of business at the Admiralty made the formulation of strategy one of his most important tasks, and he was happy to allow those he trusted to do most of the heavy lifting involved because 'given the options of applying his energy to the formulation of policy or the processing of paperwork,' Fisher chose the former.⁴⁹ This fragmented—it might almost be called 'decentralized'—method of planning would remain the basis of the Navy's *modus operandi* for creating War Plans up until the creation of the Admiralty War Staff in 1912. Sir Arthur Wilson even referred to it, albeit in a somewhat loose fashion, in his arguments against the creation of a Naval Staff, and his description gives one of the only officially written insights into this somewhat unofficial method of war planning:

'The process of thinking out a Naval policy may be said to commence with the Intelligence Department, whose business it is to ascertain the strength of any possible enemy in ships, guns, men, training etc., and the conditions under which they can be used to do us injury.

'These are the data on which our whole policy must be framed. The Navy must be constructed and organized definitely with a view to meeting the actual forces of any combination of nations that is at all probable as they are known to exist now, or as far as they can be foreseen for the future.

'The working out of this problem is spread over every branch of the Admiralty, as well as over the various schools for specialists, and various squadrons and flotillas at sea.

⁴⁹ Sumida, 'British Naval Administration', p. 21.

‘The results are then brought to a focus, through the heads of the various departments of the Admiralty, to the members of the Board concerned, and in all matters relating to Strategy and Tactics, and the actual use to be made of the Fleet in War, they are still further focused in the First Sea Lord as the principal adviser in these matters, who has a Naval Assistant, always one of the ablest Captains in the Navy, to assist him.

‘The preparation of War plans is a matter that must be dealt with by the First Sea Lord himself, but he has to assist him, besides his Naval Assistant, the Director of Naval Intelligence and the Director of Naval Mobilization, and in the latter’s department there is a war division, consisting of a Captain and a Commander especially allocated to this work. The D.N.I. and D.N.M. with the Assistant Secretary form the War Council from whom the First Sea Lord obtains advice, either by minutes on the papers or by verbal discussion as the occasion requires.’⁵⁰

The War Council mentioned by Wilson was a very late creation of the Fisher regime and has never been well regarded.⁵¹ Nevertheless it can easily be seen as a stand in for the various *ad hoc* committees that Fisher used for the purpose of formulating policy. One such body was the Ballard Committee, which Fisher organized for the specific purpose of creating a War Plan.

At the end of 1906, alongside the new Home Fleet organization being set out in detail, Fisher appointed Captain George Ballard to head a Committee ‘to investigate the plan of campaign for a war with Germany.’⁵² Despite not holding an Admiralty appointment, Ballard had extensive experience working at the N.I.D. under Custance, Battenberg, and Ottley. This, in Fisher’s opinion, ‘gave him a more extensive official acquaintance with the subject as viewed by different individual authorities than any other officer then serving.’⁵³ Besides Ballard, the Committee included a gunnery specialist and a mine warfare expert, with Maurice Hankey as secretary and Fisher exercising his usual personal supervision. Slade and Ottley were ‘in the

⁵⁰ Bradford, *Wilson*, pp. 233-234.

⁵¹ See Chapter 5.

⁵² Ottley to Churchill, 2 November 1911, f. 28, CAB 17/8.

⁵³ Ballard, ‘Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War with Germany now at the Admiralty’, enclosure in Ballard to Fisher, 3 May 1909, ADM 1/8997.

secret and were closely associated with the Committee's work.'⁵⁴ The Ballard Committee began work in December 1906 and continued meeting for four months. The final report was 'a comprehensive volume of some sixty pages.'⁵⁵ This report was mostly written at the War College in Portsmouth with the assistance of the College's staff—doubtless including Corbett.⁵⁶ The Ballard Committee, which was kept so secret it is not mentioned in the service records of the known members,⁵⁷ may have worked in tandem with another group of officers, numbering about half-a-dozen, at Whitehall.

Even less is known of this latter group than the Ballard Committee, as the main evidence for its existence apparently comes from Reginald McKenna's testimony during the Beresford Enquiry.⁵⁸ McKenna, who was not First Lord during the preparation of the 1907 War Plans, was speaking from second-hand knowledge and much of his description of what Lambert calls the 'Whitehall Committee' matches Hankey's description of the Ballard Committee of which, as has been noted already, Hankey was secretary. McKenna describes D.N.I. Ottley as leading the 'Whitehall Council' while Slade led the group at Portsmouth.⁵⁹ With the original reports from the Ballard Committee now gone, the accuracy of McKenna and Hankey's recollections cannot be reliably determined. Therefore the existence of a second planning group cannot be solidly confirmed or refuted.

⁵⁴ Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918*, i (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1961), p. 39.

⁵⁵ Hankey, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Ballard, 'Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War with Germany now at the Admiralty', enclosure in Ballard to Fisher, 3 May 1909, ADM 1/8997. Corbett is known to have contributed at least the preamble to the 1907 Plans. He may have assisted in other elements as well. For Corbett's work see Andrew Lambert, 'The Naval War Course, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy and the Origins of the "British Way in Warfare."' in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy (eds.), *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System, 1856-1956: Essays in Honour of David French* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 219-256.

⁵⁷ Martin, 'Naval War Plans', pp. 835-836.

⁵⁸ C.I.D., '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, 1909', October 1909, pp. 245-246, q. 2185-2191, CAB 16/9A. Hereafter cited as Beresford Enquiry Proceedings.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 246, q. 2191.

In a certain sense this does not matter since, whatever the structure of the Ballard Committee and any other interested parties, the resultant 'War Plans' were, McKenna recalled, 'the first plans ever issued by the Admiralty'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, far from Commander Peter Kemp's assertion that the plans were based on studies reminiscent 'of those games of childhood when the youngest member was cast willy nilly in the role of the dragon and the elders took turning to slay him in the garb of St. George' and being almost wilfully blind to the naval situation,⁶¹ the plans were a detailed summation of what the Admiralty felt could be accomplished *at that moment* against Germany. Apart from the sections written by Slade and Corbett with the intent to give the contents a veneer of historical precedent, there was nothing in them suggesting these were to be immutable plans.⁶² This is, in fact, a characteristic of British pre-1914 war planning as a whole, of which an important principle was their allowance for modification on the day.⁶³ In a covering letter written around the time of the Beresford Inquiry, Fisher explained that

'There is no finality in War Plans. Every year, just as the new Shipbuilding Programme varies in extent and design to meet Foreign shipbuilding, so should the War Plan each year be re-cast to meet foreign developments and our own additions of new vessels, and if practicable the Annual Manoeuvres of the Fleet in Home Waters (properly disguised) should exercise our fleet in its War Organization in practicing this War Plan.'⁶⁴

This is in fact what happened. McKenna testified to the Beresford Inquiry that other war plans were drawn up later, and their existence is confirmed in the various surviving Admiralty files.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 244, q. 2175.

⁶¹ Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 317.

⁶² In fact parts of Slade's 'Preamble' were noted at the time to be somewhat contradictory to the actual plans. See for instance the now-anonymous 'Note on Attached "War Plans".', n.d., f. 226-243, in ADM 116/1043B/2.

⁶³ Keith Neilson, 'Great Britain', in Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (eds.), *War Planning 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 175.

⁶⁴ Fisher, 'War Plans and The Distribution of the Fleet', n.d. [c. early 1909], f. 2, ADM 116/1043B/1.

⁶⁵ Beresford Enquiry Proceedings, p. 246, q. 2191, CAB 16/9A.

The 1907 War Plans

The planners involved in writing the 1907 plans stressed Germany's vulnerability to economic pressure, and that Britain's primary objective must be 'to prevent Germany from invading us, to protect our sea communications, and to apply economic pressure.'⁶⁶ None of this was particularly revolutionary thinking in terms of strategy. However the means in which pressure would be applied was different from Britain's past naval strategies. Whereas against the Dual Alliance the original 'close blockade' strategy had given way to flotilla-based observation and interdiction patrols in narrow waters and flexibly-deployed battle fleets,⁶⁷ against Germany it was recognized that a *primarily commercial* blockade would be the heart of any successful strategy. Not only did Germany have few important colonies and only a handful of potential commerce raiders, but Britain's geographical position was a major advantage. 'The British Islands form a huge breakwater 800 miles long barring the ingress and egress of German vessels from the ocean,-- Dover rendered impassable by Destroyers and Submarines, and the Northern passage from the North Sea to the Atlantic can be as completely barred!'⁶⁸

The Admiralty's desire to employ commercial warfare as the centrepiece of the war effort is reflected in the War Plans' introductory remarks. The German fleet was considered 'not of itself a true ultimate objective' and 'no immediate suffering would thereby be entailed upon the national commerce and industries [from its destruction], such as would arise from a stoppage of trade'.⁶⁹ To that end all four plans were focused mainly on what action would be taken within the North Sea since all of them provided for eliminating the German merchant marine through one means or another. These extended from a distant blockade and sweeps by the main fleet in Plan

⁶⁶ Hankey, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Grimes, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-40.

⁶⁸ Fisher, 'War Plans and The Distribution of the Fleet', n.d. [c. early 1909], f. 9-10, ADM 116/1043B/1.

⁶⁹ Admiralty, 'Part III. War Plans Introductory Remarks', Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 363.

(A) to large-scale naval attacks on the German coast in Plan (C), depending on the intensity of pressure on Germany it was thought desirable to inflict. Plan (D), meanwhile, was a contingency against a German invasion of Denmark and targeted the German forces expected to be deployed for the occupation of Sjælland and Fyn.⁷⁰ These brief descriptions only summarize each plan, and detailed descriptions of each will now be given.

Plan (A) is in many ways the most fascinating of the four plans, largely because it resembles, in almost all important respects bar the location of the British battle fleet's principal base, the Royal Navy's standing War Plans in July 1914.⁷¹ Distant blockade of commercial shipping was the key, and the goal was 'total exclusion of shipping under the German flag from all ocean trade.'⁷² The main effort of the campaign would be borne by the Navy's large force of 'unarmoured vessels', meaning the first class protected cruisers and the second and third class cruisers that had been built before and after the Naval Defence Act for trade protection and fleet work.⁷³ These were the same ships which had been relegated to reserve (and ultimate destruction) by the Fisher Scheme. Forty-two of these vessels (thirty-eight cruisers and four torpedo gunboats) were estimated to be required initially for both the blockading line itself and periodic reliefs, and these would be reinforced later by merchantmen taken up from trade and fitted out as auxiliary cruisers. This force, referred to in the plans as the Northern Cordon, was to be an independent flag command directly responsible to the Admiralty and based in the 'Northern Isles'. The patrol grounds would be on a line running Pentland Firth—Orkneys—Shetlands—Stadlandet—

⁷⁰ These two islands contain Copenhagen and Odense, the largest and third-largest Danish cities, respectively.

⁷¹ As with all of the 1907 War Plans, Plan (A)/(A1) is reproduced in its entirety in Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.* (ed.). Plan (A)/(A1) is on pp. 372-394.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁷³ Fisher had written in 1905 that these old cruisers might have military value for the next few years, but none that required anything more than care and maintenance treatment. Fisher, 'Remarks on Ships of Small Fighting Value', in *ibid.*, pp. 9-18. For the background of these ships, see Friedman, *British Victorian Cruisers*, pp. 147-217, and Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, especially ch. 6.

Vaagsö.⁷⁴ The latter point chosen because merchantmen were advised to leave the three-mile limit of Norwegian territorial waters for safe navigation, which avoided potential controversy with neutrals generally and Norway specifically over the interdiction of merchantmen.⁷⁵

The southern counterpart to this cruiser force was called the Southern Cordon or Channel Cordon. It was to be made up of the eight *Sentinels* (referred to in the plan as ‘scouts’⁷⁶) on a line stretching between South Goodwin and Outer Ruytingen sandbanks, backed by an Examination Service in the Downs of six tugs (taken up from local ports and, ideally, ‘to be selected beforehand by the Director of Transports’⁷⁷). A single warship would deal with whatever uncooperative merchantmen were encountered. The Navy’s ‘B’-class submarines were assigned to this cordon for additional support, a task their lack of cruising radius and seakeeping relative to the newer ‘C’ and ‘D’ classes would not hinder. Like the Northern Cordon, this force would be an independent flag command reporting directly to the Admiralty.

Inside the two cordons, the bulk of the Navy’s torpedo-armed craft would scour the North Sea itself as a combined sea denial and observation force. The destroyers were to be split under two commands; the forty-six ship Northern Command would patrol the Baltic entrances from the Tyne and Firth of Forth while the sixty ships of the Southern Command would ‘harry the coast trade between Germany and ports of Belgium, Holland (particularly the outlets of the Rhine), and Denmark’ from their bases at Harwich and Yarmouth.⁷⁸ Fisher’s Coastal Destroyers—now rerated as first class torpedo boats—would be split between the two destroyer Commands for

⁷⁴ The eastern terminus was given as near latitude 62°10’N.

⁷⁵ Christopher Martin, ‘The Declaration of London: A Matter of Operational Capability?’, *Historical Research* 82, no. 218 (November 2009), pp. 731-755. During this period Norwegian neutrality in general was an important consideration in strategic planning, for which see Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940*, first paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 71-77.

⁷⁶ For these ships, see Friedman, *British Destroyers*, pp. 99-101. D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought*, pp. 163-164, mistakenly attributes their origin to proposals by Vice-Admiral FitzGerald.

⁷⁷ Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

anti-invasion duties while the older torpedo boats guarded the three naval ports alongside the earliest submarines.

If the *Hochseeflotte* sortied, the heavy gunships of the Royal Navy were to sail and engage them. The British battle fleet was to be under a single flag officer referred to by Fisher elsewhere, unofficially, as the ‘Admiralissimo’⁷⁹ with the Humber as its initial wartime anchorage.⁸⁰ The Admiralissimo’s fleet would consist principally of the most modern battleships⁸¹ from the Home, Atlantic and Channel Fleets and seventeen armoured cruisers mostly from the *County* and *Devonshire* classes.⁸² The older first and second-class battleships in Home Waters would be attached to the battlefleet to be used at the Admiralissimo’s discretion. This armada would possibly be reinforced as the war continued by the older first and second-class battleships and, political circumstances permitting, the battleships of the Mediterranean Fleet. The most powerful armoured cruisers were to operate under the battle fleet’s C-in-C but were detached to support the cordons against potential attacks by the German fleet, the eight most modern based in the Shetlands and the older ones at Dover. While these ships were available to the Admiralissimo, it was stated in the plans that ‘the withdrawal of these latter vessels from their stations near the cordons should only take place for very sufficient reasons.’⁸³ Of note is that the armoured cruisers attached to the Admiralissimo’s command ‘would be employed very largely in supporting the destroyer flotillas in the North Sea’ against countersweeps by German torpedo craft.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ One instance is Fisher to John Leyland, 22 September 1907, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 136.

⁸⁰ The Humber was regarded as sufficiently far from the operational radius of German torpedo boats as to be a safe anchorage.

⁸¹ In 1907, this meant the *Majestics* onwards.

⁸² Recall that the *Counties* and *Devonshires* had the weakest main armament of the British armoured cruisers.

⁸³ Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 377.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

Plan (B) was very similar to Admiral Wilson's proposals during the Moroccan Crisis, and indeed those plans cannot be ruled out as being the basis for this plan's development.⁸⁵ It was not viewed with favour by the planners, and was 'drawn up...more to demonstrate the difficulties as compared with Plans (A and A1) than as an approved plan of operations.'⁸⁶ The Elbe was to be blocked by a line of sunken hulks to negate the necessity of splitting the main battle fleet, which would remain at six to eight hours out from Kiel to protect the blockading *County*-class cruisers covering the naval base. Detached armoured cruiser squadrons would watch the German ports of Pomerania and East Prussia, the German battleship squadron based at Neufahrwasser requiring the most powerful ships. The German North Sea ports would be watched by destroyer patrols and unarmoured cruisers from Borkum, which would be seized by a Royal Marine brigade carried by the older battleships, which would then guard the North Sea against German efforts to break out from the Baltic or reopen the Elbe. A detailed plan for landing and capturing Borkum was included as an Appendix to the plan.⁸⁷

Plan (C)⁸⁸ was much the same as Plan (B) but included the destruction of German port facilities, coastal defences, and 'whatever other damage we could which is sanctioned as legitimate by international custom.'⁸⁹ The main effort of the campaign would fall on the Baltic ports, where it was hoped to destroy their 'entrances, defences, dockyards, and channels'—the defences of the North Sea ports being too formidable to undertake 'unless under very exceptional circumstances.'⁹⁰ The emphasis on Baltic operations in Plan (C) and subsequent aggressive plans are strongly in line with traditional nineteenth century British maritime strategy *contra* Russia.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 395-432.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 395.

⁸⁷ Admiralty, 'Plan (B)', in *ibid.*, pp. 418-432.

⁸⁸ Admiralty, 'Plan (C)', in *ibid.*, pp. 432-436.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 432

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 433-434.

Geographic realities once again eased the burden faced by Admiralty planners—planning and intelligence for operations against the Russian Empire in the Baltic could, with suitable modification, be employed against the German Empire as well.⁹¹

As in other plans, German islands were to be seized for advanced bases if necessary—Borkum, Sylt, ‘and perhaps also’ Rügen or Femern.⁹² The fleet’s deployment would be the same except that the older battleships would be the force to attack Danzig and the modern armoured cruisers would watch the North Sea. Once the bombardment operations were judged as accomplished and the German fleet was dealt with,⁹³ a raiding force of perhaps 40,000 men—contingent on War Office cooperation—would carry out large scale raids ‘anywhere from Kiel to Memel, which would keep the whole littoral in a perpetual state of unrest and alarm’.⁹⁴ During the bombardment and presumably during the raiding operations, private property was to be off limits to destruction except in the case of items of potential use ‘for the production of war material.’⁹⁵

Plan (D) was, unlike the other three Plans, dependent on a single contingency: German invasion and occupation of Denmark.⁹⁶ This added the further variable of Danish attitudes towards such an occupation. If the Danes were to collaborate with Germany, food supplies into Sjælland would be cut off by the Royal Navy in the hopes the civil population would choose to

⁹¹ Andrew Lambert, ‘Part of a Long Line of Circumvallation to Confine the Future Expansion of Russia: Great Britain and the Baltic, 1809-1890’, in Göran Rystad, Klaus R. Böhme, and Wilhelm M. Carlgren (eds.), *In Quest of Trade and Security: The Baltic in Power Politics, 1500-1990*, i, (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), pp. 297-394; Idem., “‘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 19th and 20th Centuries* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Museum Tusulanum Press, 2003), pp. 147-197.

⁹² Admiralty, ‘Plan (C)’, in *ibid.*, p. 434.

⁹³ Options for which included direct attacks on Kiel’s harbour by torpedo craft.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁹⁶ Admiralty, ‘Plan (D)’, in *ibid.*, pp. 436-445.

support itself over the German garrison.⁹⁷ If the Danes were actively opposed to the invasion a strong landing force would be put ashore to wear down the German garrison whose resupply line was severed, a campaign which would hopefully end in a German evacuation or surrender. The naval side of the campaign would follow the same lines as Plan (C), except which some changes in objectives and timetable.

As has been observed there is plenty of evidence to show the 1907 War Plans were written at least in part to appease the Cabinet by showing the Navy ‘could offer an offensive strategy against Germany.’⁹⁸ However this to a certain extent misses the point. There were, indeed, certain difficulties with these plans. One of them was the provision of an assault force against the Frisian Islands. Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Lowry explained the difficulties to George King-Hall, who duly recorded the remarks in his diary:

‘Lowry told me that when Head of the War College, Fisher told him to arrange for an expeditionary force of 4000 men to seize Borkum or one of the neighbouring Islands in case of War and he went down to Aldershot, but found that they would take a week to have the men ready, and then turning to the Marines he found only about 1000 available, unless the ships were denuded, on account of the reductions that have been made.’⁹⁹

The provision of Marines by stripping the detachments aboard ships was duly incorporated into the plans.

Controversies

If Plans (A) through (D) satisfied the Cabinet, they did not satisfy the senior flag officer afloat, Lord Charles Beresford. We have already seen how he found much fault with the Home Fleet even before it was officially created, but after discussions with Tweedmouth and Fisher the

⁹⁷ It is of interest to emphasise that the plan’s authors assumed that this activity would take the form of refusing to sell food to the German occupation forces, instead of an active revolt.

⁹⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *JNFR*, p. 180.

⁹⁹ George King-Hall diary, 14 June 1909, King-Hall MSS.

matter seemed to have been settled for the time being, and the April 1907 tactical manoeuvres seemed to indicate that the Home and Channel Fleets could function together in reasonable harmony.¹⁰⁰ However the issuance of the 1907 War Plans caused another spasm of revolt by the C.-in-C. Channel Fleet. This particular row seems to have started over Fisher's reluctance to provide Beresford with a copy of Sir Arthur Wilson's war plans while the latter was 'pegging away at my plan of campaign for war with Germany',¹⁰¹ and was intensified when Beresford received the Admiralty's 1907 plans in May. In response Beresford submitted his own 'Sketch Plan of Campaign' on May 13th. Even a generous reading of this plan suggests that Marder had it right when he wrote that 'the whole purpose of this sketch plan, which was based on the War Orders of 1905, was to criticize Admiralty policy.'¹⁰² This was especially galling since Beresford had written just weeks previously to Fisher that:

'There is not the slightest chance of any friction between me and you, or between me and anyone else. When the friction begins, I am off. If a senior and a junior have a row, the junior is wrong under any conceivable condition, or discipline could not go on.'¹⁰³

In light of both Beresford's previous habits and future events,¹⁰⁴ it is astounding that Beresford could have written this with any expectation of being taken seriously. Matters were not helped since Fisher had already offered Beresford the assistance of Ottley's N.I.D. staff and given his approval of certain early proposals of Beresford's including a surprise attack—the details of which are now obscure—by the Atlantic Fleet.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ There certainly seem to have been no complaints from Bridgeman or any of the other Home Fleet flag officers at the time on working with the Channel Fleet.

¹⁰¹ Beresford to Fisher, 2 May 1907, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 123.

¹⁰² Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 93.

¹⁰³ Beresford to Fisher, 22 April 1907, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ In February Rear-Admiral Sir Henry Jackson had complained to Fisher about Beresford's behaviour, and Fisher told Tweedmouth that 'all Jackson says is unanswerable' in that regard. Fisher to Tweedmouth, 18 February 1907, in *ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁵ Fisher to Beresford, 30 April 1907, in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

Beresford started from the (probably reasonable) proposition that any plans needed to include the possibility of an enemy attack ‘when our ships are in the worst position to repel or reply to it,’ specifically during leaves for Easter and Christmas, weekends, or occasions when ‘Fleets are combined for manoeuvres not in strategic waters.’¹⁰⁶ Beresford’s suggestion was to gather the Navy’s principle striking force of battleships and cruisers at Portland, while any ships in Northern waters would retreat to Queensferry and the cover of both the coastal guns there and an anti-torpedo boat patrol by destroyers.

Taken in isolation there was nothing particularly uncouth about this, but Beresford’s recent actions suggested in the strongest terms that he was, at the very least, not being entirely ingenuous. At least this was Fisher’s impression, having had no explanation of Beresford’s sudden departure to North America at the start of 1907.¹⁰⁷

While the fleet gathered in Portland and Queensferry, measures were to be taken against enemy torpedo craft attacks on the East Coast. A fast cruiser/destroyer force would immediately race up ‘as far as the latitude of Flamborough Head’ then ‘sweep to the Eastward’ provided conditions were satisfactory. Simultaneously a second force of the same character would race ‘up the Coast of Holland and the intervening waters and, according to the time of day, should work round the North Coast.’ Both these destroyer groups would later form the inshore squadron for operations off the German coast.¹⁰⁸

In the event of a sudden war with Germany, the commercial blockade would begin by the Navy’s cruisers sweeping up any German merchantmen in the Channel and North Sea before proceeding to the German Coast.¹⁰⁹ Subsequent operations were sketched out in a section dealing

¹⁰⁶ Beresford, ‘Plan of Campaign. Channel Fleet.’, May 1907, f. 16-17, ADM 116/1043B/2.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁸ Beresford, ‘Plan of Campaign. Channel Fleet.’, May 1907, f. 18, ADM 116/1043B/2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., f. 24-25.

with war breaking out after a period of strained relations. The Channel Fleet and the Home Fleet's Nore Division and Fifth Cruiser Squadron were to begin from Portland, while the cruiser squadrons designated for work off the German coast were to be distributed along the East Coast as follows:

	Composition	Base of Operations
Skagerrak Squadron	Cruisers and destroyers	Queensferry
Elbe Squadron	Cruisers, scouts, destroyers	Cruisers at Dover, scouts and destroyers at Harwich, the Humber, and the Nore.
Dover Squadron		Dover

An additional small cruiser force would operate from Plymouth to intercept any German trade entering the Channel from the western approaches.

As described above, there seems to be little in these plans to cause offence, however throughout the 'Sketch Plan' Beresford made unsubtle complaints about the lack of ships under his command and the unsuitability of present peacetime force dispositions. On the possibility of a surprise attack by enemy torpedo boats, he complained '[o]ur ships are not well disposed to meet such an attack.' Furthermore, in what can only be assumed a deliberate shot across the Admiralty's bows, Beresford and his staff designed the Channel Fleet's plans around a force requiring more cruisers and battleships than were actually available so that he could complain 'the Fleets are not nearly up to their proper strength.'¹¹⁰ To hammer that point home, Beresford included his own estimates of the Navy's forces that were immediately available as opposed to being ready on paper but (allegedly) not in reality. Using cruisers as his example, Beresford wrote that of the fifty-three cruisers he would need for specific duties, only thirty-six at most were available.¹¹¹ Elsewhere, Beresford estimated that he would need a total of twenty-seven

¹¹⁰ Ibid., f. 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid., f. 25-26.

battleships and sixty cruisers¹¹² plus subsidiaries such as destroyers and fleet auxiliaries. This list pointedly did not include cruisers needed for other purposes such as patrol of the North Sea entrances.¹¹³

However the main thrust in Beresford's attack was contained in a separate critique of the Admiralty's war plans dispatched at the same time as his 'Sketch Plan'. This letter as well as the resulting correspondence became so lengthy it was ultimately bound in its own Case File.¹¹⁴ The file opens with Beresford's May 8th comment that 'on taking over the command of the Channel Fleet I have been unable to find any papers relative to a plan of campaign to enable the Channel Fleet to take instant action if war had been declared with a foreign Naval Power.' Beresford therefore submitted 'that I may be supplied with the plans of my predecessors, as I should like the benefit of their experiences and ideas on this all important matter.'¹¹⁵ Alongside this request, Beresford took aim at the Admiralty's 1907 War Plans.¹¹⁶

Beresford noted that Part I of the Plans—which was actually Corbett's introductory essay—was 'extremely clever' and contained 'facts that are A.B.C. to anyone who has ever studied war'. Even so he felt that it was useless for planning purposes since it could not be used to draw up a 'practical Plan of Campaign'.¹¹⁷ The intent of the paper as an intellectual justification for the actual plans seems to have never occurred to Beresford. In any case he

¹¹² Twenty-three armoured cruisers, thirty-one unarmoured cruisers, and the eight *Sentinel* class scouts.

¹¹³ Beresford, 'Plan of Campaign. Channel Fleet.', May 1907, f. 32-33, ADM 116/1043B/2.

¹¹⁴ Admiralty, 'Correspondence relating to War Orders and position of C. in. C. Channel Fleet &c. (Lord. C. Beresford) May 1907 — March 1909.', ADM 116/1037. To judge by the handwriting, the title page was filled out by Fisher himself!

¹¹⁵ Beresford to Admiralty, 8 May 1907, No. 355/015, in Beresford, 'Channel Fleet. Plan of campaign for instant action in war.', 8 May 1907, M.490/1907, ADM 116/1037.

¹¹⁶ Beresford, 'War Plans. Part (I).', 8 May 1907, in Beresford, 'Channel Fleet. Plan of campaign for instant action in war.', 8 May 1907, M.490/1907, ADM 116/1037.

¹¹⁷ Beresford, 'War Plans. Part I, II, III, IV.', 8 May 1907, in Beresford, 'Channel Fleet. Plan of campaign for instant action in war.', 8 May 1907, M.490/1907, ADM 116/1037.

included a point-by-point commentary which contains the following statement that lays out Beresford's attitude towards planning in general:

“Forming War Plans” are of no use whatever unless the whole of the details as to what ships are to carry out the work, are minutely calculated out, detailed by name, and corrected each month to date. Re. ships refitting or out of action for that month from unforeseen and often non-preventable circumstances. There has never been, (with the exception of the Mediterranean Fleet), formulated a proper War Plan for the British Navy, i.e., on the same method as the German Army Corps system- Every Corps told off, trained, and practiced in its component parts. With the exception of a few Manoeuvres, Battle Fleets work together, Cruisers work together, T. Craft work together. They are never worked together as one whole, continually practising [sic] and training together for the work that they as a whole Fleet carry out in time of war.’¹¹⁸

Later, Beresford abused the Home Fleet once again:

‘The creation of the Home Fleet under present conditions is an invitation for our enemies to attack. It is in no wise [sic] a strength; it is apparent and palpable weakness; it in no way whatever agrees with the statements made about it, as being able at all to meet an enemy when the tension is strongest. It is a fraud upon the public and a danger to the Empire.’¹¹⁹

Before finally moving on to critiquing the War Plans themselves, Beresford fired a shot at the concept of a fixed base for the British fleet. While admitting ‘no objection’ to an anchorage ‘strategically suitable and quite safe from Torpedo Attack’, he felt that ‘the morale of the officers and crews will deteriorate very soon and the Fleet will gradually become tied to its base,’ gradually losing its ability to act offensively, thus ‘abdicating the command of the sea.’¹²⁰ As for the actual War Plans, Beresford declared Plan (A) ‘radically unsound’ and ‘altogether impossible’. The Northern Cordon was too far from the German Coast to be effective. Beresford felt that to blockade the German ports effectively a cordon should be ‘close to the German bases on the west where German trade is more or less concentrated in the neck of the funnel’. The Admiralty’s Plan did not have enough cruisers to make such a cordon effective.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Beresford also considered the objective, ‘merely destruction of German Merchant Ships’, to be unsatisfactory. Finally, he thought the German fleet could easily sail around through the Skaw to attack the British battle fleet from the rear (Beresford assumed the main British fleet would be operating the southern North Sea alongside the observational patrols from Borkum. Beresford was equally scathing about Plans (B) through (D), all of which necessitated the division of the British battle fleet into two parts, which Beresford considered dangerous, and although he considered the blocking of the Elbe to be ‘sound’, it could not be entirely trusted to succeed.¹²¹

The Admiralty’s reaction to these criticisms was consternation. Regarding Beresford’s complaints about the Northern Cordon, Captain Ballard would later remark that it was ‘evident that he entirely fails to grasp the main idea. These cruisers are not watching cruisers in any sense of the word as regards watching for the exit of the enemy’s fleet, but placed solely to intercept trade.’¹²² Even regarding the German battle fleet, Ballard found Beresford in error:

‘Our object is to force them to proceed to a distance of more than 300 miles from their own sheltered bases to defend their trade and then fall upon them when outside, or cut off their retreat.’¹²³

Fisher went further, producing a sharply worded memorandum complaining of the insubordinate tone of Beresford’s submissions and that his language implied a slur against Sir Arthur Wilson’s work.¹²⁴ Tweedmouth tried diplomacy, writing to Fisher that while ‘[n]o one is more alive to the objections which can be taken to much of the attitude taken up by Lord Charles Beresford and to his methods of action’, his views should not be peremptorily dismissed.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ballard, ‘Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War with Germany now at the Admiralty’, enclosure in Ballard to Fisher, 3 May 1909, ADM 1/8997.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Fisher, ‘War Arrangements’, 25 June 1907, MSS 253/77, Box 3/16, Crease MSS. Though printed in June 1907, this particular memorandum was originally written in May.

‘It is after all only human to grind your own axe and to do what you can to get as much power & control over affairs as you can. Of course it is the duty of the Admiralty to put a severe limit on such aspirations... I am the last person in the world to abrogate one iota of the supremacy of the Board of Admiralty, but I do think we sometimes are inclined to consider our own views to be infallible and are not ready enough to give consideration to the views of others who may disagree with us but who still may give us ideas and information which can be turned to great use.’¹²⁵

From here on the Admiralty’s relationship with Beresford would only get worse.

New Year, New Plans

A new series of plans was published in the summer of 1908.¹²⁶ Their background is clearer than the previous year’s plans. A manuscript draft of one of the six individual plans has survived and the handwriting matches that of Lewis Bayly, then serving as President of the War College. Bayly was an interesting character, Marder describing him as ‘an able tactician with a mania almost for discipline and efficiency’.¹²⁷ An ardent advocate of aggressive action against the German Coast, Bayly’s fire-eating nature can be illustrated by two incidents. The first occurred during the Fashoda crisis when he was first lieutenant of the cruiser *Talbot*. Ordered by Admiral Fisher to ‘get hold of’ the telegraph steamer *Grappler*, Bayly boarded the ship and met privately with the ship’s captain. He then ‘called for two sheets of foolscap and wrote out a duplicate order for him to remain in British waters, reporting his position by cable daily at noon to the *Talbot*; and began the letters with the words, “I, Lewis Bayly, in the name of the British Admiralty, do require you,” etc.’¹²⁸

In Bayly’s postwar memoirs, he described the plans he helped work up:

¹²⁵ Tweedmouth to Fisher (copy), 8 June 1907, MSS 254/442, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹²⁶ Grimes, *op. cit.* describes the 1908 Plans at length. This section was written almost entirely before the release of Grimes’ work, so it serves as an example of how two independent researchers can come to similar conclusions.

¹²⁷ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 408.

¹²⁸ Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, *Pull Together! The Memoirs of Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., C.V.O.* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1939), pp. 81-82.

‘[Fisher] told me to make out one or two war plans for the operation of our fleets against certain enemies. This kept me in frequent communication with him, and these war plans were duly put into a drawer by him, and enabled him to say that the War College took the place of a specially constituted War Staff.’¹²⁹

This recollection is not entirely accurate. These plans were, it seems, issued to the fleet commanders, or at least to Beresford.¹³⁰ Nevertheless Bayly’s memoirs demonstrate that the War Plans were drawn up at the War College, with Captain Henry Oliver assisting.¹³¹ No doubt the D.N.I. also assisted and the whole process took place under Fisher’s supervision.

While the origin of these plans is reasonably certain, their purpose is less so. Nicholas Lambert questions whether they were genuine or simply drawn up by Fisher and his allies to pacify the insubordinate Lord Beresford, whose relations with the Admiralty were now very strained. Suffice to say that one of the points of dispute between the two was the employment of the fleet in a war with Germany, and Nicholas Lambert describes the 1908 War Plans as being ‘so much in accord with Beresford’s personal views... that there must be doubts that they truly represented the Admiralty’s strategic views.’¹³² This, however, is a mistaken assumption.

Plan W.1 dealt with a war between England and Germany only.¹³³ The introduction showed that the plan was rooted in classical Blue Water thinking: ‘The only way in which an enemy can hope to impose his will on England is by defeating our Navy.’¹³⁴ Germany’s presumed hopes for a temporary supremacy at sea, enough ‘to bring us to our knees by making use of their land forces on British soil’ were dismissed as impracticable on any major scale, and

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 131-132.

¹³⁰ Admiralty, ‘War Orders. Channel Fleet.’, 1 July 1908, f. 125-137, ADM 116/1043B/2.

¹³¹ Oliver, ‘Recollections. Volume II.’, p. 65, OLV/12, Oliver MSS.

¹³² Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹³³ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. Germany. W.1’, 1st revision, 10 June 1908, f. 349-402, ADM 116/1043B/1. Later, edited-down copies can be found in Ibid., f. 403-443.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 1, f. 351.

did not alter ‘the basic principle that nothing short of overcoming our maritime supremacy can be of any permanent use’ to Germany.

As a result, German naval policy was expected to be ‘offensive in principle’ but, at least initially, ‘defensive in fact’. Germany would attempt a campaign of attrition, keeping her main fleet safe in port ‘in the hope of being able to reduce British forces by enticing them meanwhile to waste their strength in futile operations against her coast,’ except when the possibility of ‘dealing a blow at some weak detachment’ arose. This prediction was, in fact, more or less what actually occurred when war came in 1914.¹³⁵ The authors of W.1 were therefore in concurrence ‘with Sir Arthur Wilson in advocating that, on the outbreak of war, our battle fleets should, as a rule, be kept well away from the German coast, and from possible interference by hostile torpedo craft’, excepting situations where circumstances justified their approach to shore. Both a close blockade of German harbours by heavy units and operations in the Baltic were deprecated generally in W.1. The German Bight was instead to be watched ‘by a few cruisers and destroyers’.¹³⁶ Any attempt to force the Baltic or carry out major operations within, were characterized as ‘a strategical error.’¹³⁷ The sole exception to this caution was the specific case of a German invasion of Denmark, which was dealt with in a separate paper.¹³⁸ The most likely German operations against British waters were thought to be mining operations and torpedo craft sweeps along the east coast and attempts by commerce raiders (both cruisers and armed merchantmen) to break through into the Atlantic.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 2, f. 352.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 4, f. 354.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ War College, ‘Military Expedition to Zealand in Support of the Danes Against German Invasion.’, 6 April 1908, f. 916-940, ADM 116/1034B/2.

¹³⁹ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. Germany. W.1’, 1st revision, 10 June 1908, pp. 6-7, f. 356-357, ADM 116/1034B/2.

The mobilization details given in W.1—and especially the discussion regarding the Navy’s peacetime disposition—are interesting because they provide the bulk of the material for those suggesting the W series plans were written, at least in part, as a sop to Beresford. It will be recalled that Beresford was critical of the assumption there would be a sufficient period of ‘strained relations’ to mobilize the majority of the Navy’s forces in reserve, thus limiting the chances of surprise attack similar to the Japanese destroyer raid on Port Arthur. The planners wrote ‘In the disposition of our fleets in anticipation of a period of strained relations with Germany, we have two conflicting circumstances to consider.’¹⁴⁰ On one hand, it was ‘an undoubted fact that our east coast ports are all within range of torpedo craft attack’, as were the Channel naval bases, so ‘it would seem advisable to have no fleet or squadron on our east coast while relations with Germany are strained.’ On the other hand, withdrawal of the Navy’s heavy units from the east coast during such a crisis ‘may raise an outcry’ and the east coast, guarded only by the torpedo flotillas at Harwich and Sheerness, would ‘undoubtedly be a tempting bait for German raids and incursions.’

The nub of the matter lay, said the planners, ‘in the present disposition of our fleets in Home waters.’¹⁴¹ For maximum effectiveness the three divisions of the Home Fleet would have to concentrate into a single force, and the rendezvous depended on whether the Channel Fleet was in home waters. In the worst-case scenario so beloved in Beresford’s arguments, the Nore Division would be highly vulnerable to a German surprise attack on the Medway¹⁴² and neither the Channel nor the other two divisions of the Home Fleet could reinforce it. In a concession to this argument, the planners submitted ‘in future, whenever the Channel Fleet is cruising in our

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 10, f. 360.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 11, f. 361.

¹⁴² ‘The channels at the mouth of the Thames are particularly susceptible to hostile mining operations, and this fact accentuates their narrowness, and imposes line-ahead formation on any ships attempting to pass through them.’ Ibid., pp. 11-12, f. 361-362.

western waters, the Nore Division of the Home Fleet shall be sent to Portland to carry out exercises, the Fifth Cruiser Squadron going to Dover.’¹⁴³ The choice of Dover for the Fifth Cruiser Squadron was to allow it to support the Harwich flotillas when they deployed to their observation stations in the Heligoland Bight.¹⁴⁴ In the most advantageous circumstances, the Channel Fleet and other units could proceed to holding areas off the East Coast to await the commencement of hostilities.¹⁴⁵

When the shooting started the battle fleet would remain divided, but would combine when necessary (i.e. before a general fleet action). The Atlantic and Channel Fleets would operate from Cromarty or the Firth of Forth with the Second and Fourth Cruiser Squadrons, and the Home Fleet would work from the Humber. Why the Channel and Atlantic Fleets were to base themselves so far northwards from their peacetime stations is unexplained. The most logical reason was that the Home Fleet, manned as it was partially by nucleus crews, would have to be filled up by reservists on the outbreak of war, thus leaving it at least initially chained to Chatham and Sheerness for ease of distributing the incoming personnel. As in the previous year’s Plan (A), the majority of the Navy’s protected cruisers (the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Cruiser Squadrons) would form a cordon from the Shetlands to Norway, minus a detachment of the Tenth which would operate from Lough Swilly against any German commerce raiders that had reached the Atlantic. The observation lines along the German Bight would comprise ten ‘divisions’ of destroyers supported by the Fifth and Sixth Cruiser Squadrons, as well as the new ‘C’ class submarines. Another four destroyer divisions were to be attached to the Channel and Home Fleets. The Skagerrak was to be covered by the First Cruiser Squadron.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 12, f. 362.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 12-13, f. 362-363.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-14, f. 363-364.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 14, f. 364.

The plan also envisioned a certain number of coastal operations in the opening days of the war. The Channel Fleet was to bombard Heligoland at least once, possibly as a means to ‘bring German Fleet to action [*sic*] if opportunity arises’ by the time-honoured Royal Navy technique of creating its own opportunity.¹⁴⁷ Once again Borkum was selected as a target for an amphibious assault so as to obtain an advanced base for flotilla craft due to ‘the difficulty we should have in maintaining our torpedo craft on the German coast without a base nearer to the area of operations’ than the east coast of Britain.¹⁴⁸ To that end, Borkum was to be attacked ‘AT ONCE’¹⁴⁹ by Royal Marines borne on the ships designated as Special Service Vessels.¹⁵⁰ Finally, Admiral Wilson’s proposal to block the Elbe and Weser with blockships was resurrected in a modified form, involving thirty old merchant steamers which would be scuttled near the Elbe Middle Light Vessel under cover of the Channel Fleet’s bombardment of Heligoland.¹⁵¹

War Plan W.2 was in essence a modification of W.1, framed around a different organization of the Navy’s strength, and the assumption that the Firth of Forth would be a major base for the campaign.¹⁵² Again the battle fleet would be in two parts—the ‘North Sea Battle Fleet’ of the Navy’s sixteen most modern battleships (six Dreadnoughts, two *Lord Nelsons*, eight *King Edwards*), and the ‘Channel Battle Fleet’ of seventeen battleships (of which nine, all *Majestics*, would have nucleus crews). In addition, the Special Service battleships would be in the Medway, ready to sortie and capture Borkum.¹⁵³ As defence against surprise attacks prior to an official declaration of war the following rather amusing bit of sea-lawyering was proposed:

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-22, f. 371-372.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 22, f. 372.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 23, f. 373. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 22-30, f. 372-380.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 28-29, f. 378-379.

¹⁵² Admiralty, ‘War Plan. Germany. W.2.’, 1 June 1908, p. 5, f. 456, ADM 116/1043B/1. The entire plan including an Appendix runs from f. 445 to f. 479. Unfortunately they are no longer in their original order.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 5, 11, f. 457, 462.

‘In the Notice to Mariners No. 1, of 1908, we have an admirable instrument for preventing surprise attacks without prejudicing diplomatic relations. According to the terms of this Notice, we reserve to ourselves the power to forbid all entrance to naval ports at night, even in time of peace, on account of periodical exercises, manœuvres, or otherwise.

‘When relations with Germany become strained therefore, “periodic exercises” will justify our sending torpedo craft outside these harbours at night to prevent any craft from approaching them.’¹⁵⁴

The armoured cruisers would be in squadrons, the First and Second comprising the most modern vessels and ‘attached to the North Sea and Channel Fleets respectively’, with the Third at Dover to support the destroyer forces that would be sent to the German coast.¹⁵⁵ The other five squadrons were ‘constituted primarily with a view to giving us a slight preponderance of power over other countries in foreign waters’ with the secondary objective of ensuring homogeneity among the squadrons.¹⁵⁶ The remaining unarmoured cruisers not attached to the flotillas were formed into five more squadrons—two for operations relating to the seizure of an advanced torpedo craft base, and three for general duties in home waters including the commercial blockade cordons described in 1907’s Plan (A).¹⁵⁷ Destroyer operations off the German coast were given to the *Tribals* and *Rivers*, stated reasons being the seaworthiness of the latter and the ease of refuelling the former.¹⁵⁸ Left unstated is the fact that these destroyers had recently been selected for fitting out with modern wireless sets, making them ideal for observational blockade.¹⁵⁹ Remaining older destroyers and the *Coastals* were assigned to either defensive duties or reinforcement of the observation flotillas. The newest ‘C’ and ‘D’ class submarines were to support the tripwire blockades as well as for patrolling the Kattegat.¹⁶⁰

Upon war’s outbreak there were four mission objectives set out:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 6, f. 458.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5, f. 457.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 7, f. 459.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 8, 19, f. 460, 471.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 8-9, f. 460-461.

¹⁵⁹ H.M.S. Vernon, *Annual Report of the Torpedo School, 1907*, pp. 32-34, ADM 189/27.

¹⁶⁰ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. Germany. W.2.’, 1 June 1908, p. 10, f. 461, ADM 116/1034B/1.

- a) Establishment of the tripwire blockade by ‘the despatch of a squadron of blockade’ to the Bight and the Skagerrak, to be reinforced later by the Second Cruiser Squadron of modern armoured cruisers.
- b) Seizure of Borkum by Royal Marines embarked aboard Special Service Vessels simultaneous with a demonstration bombardment of Heligoland.¹⁶¹
- c) Strangulation of German overseas trade with cordon patrols at Dover and the northern entrances to the North Sea.
- d) Blocking the Elbe and Weser with obstructions supported by a minefield.¹⁶²

The designation War Plan W.3 was actually used for two separate but related plans, the second being named “War Plan W.3 Part II”. The original W.3, first printed in June 1908 and later revised twice over the remainder of the summer, assumed a war placing France and Britain in alliance against Germany, with no violation of Belgian neutrality expected.¹⁶³ Shawn Grimes describes it as an attempt ‘to balance competing options which were all complex, contradictory, and hazardous.’¹⁶⁴ Since French and British naval forces would be working in concert (despite the planners’ note that the French ships might be laid up to provide land forces in a repeat of the events of the Franco-Prussian War), there would be ‘a sharp line of demarcation between the duties agreed upon by the allies for their respective fleets’.¹⁶⁵ The theatre of operations was expected to be North Sea, but ‘may possibly have to be extended in certain circumstances to include the Western Baltic.’¹⁶⁶ W.3’s authors suggested assigning the French responsibility for the Dover cordon as their flotilla bases at Calais and Boulogne were ‘admirably suited for the work, and can be supported by their own cruisers’, which could use the defended harbour of Dover if necessary.¹⁶⁷ The French armoured cruisers, built to ravage British trade in accordance with the *guerre industrielle*, would instead be assigned to protect trade as they were ‘more

¹⁶¹ The parallel with later feint bombardments during the U.S. Navy’s Pacific offensive is of interest here, and suggest that Royal Navy amphibious assault doctrine of the period was not so primitive as has been sometimes claimed.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 18-27, f. 470-479.

¹⁶³ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. England and France v. Germany, W. 3.’, 30 June 1908, f. 480-508, ADM 116/1034B/1.

¹⁶⁴ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹⁶⁵ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. England and France v. Germany, W. 3.’, 30 June 1908, p. 3, f. 483, ADM 116/1034B/1.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 4, f. 484.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-5, f. 484-485.

suitable than the British [armoured cruisers] for the attack and protection of trade'.¹⁶⁸ The French would have responsibility for the Mediterranean and thus allow the British Mediterranean Fleet to be brought home.¹⁶⁹

British peace distribution was to be the same as in Plan W.1 with the exception of the Fifth Cruiser Squadron, which would be permanently based at Dover.¹⁷⁰ Upon the outbreak of war, the initial observation forces assigned to the German coast would be the Fifth Cruiser Squadron, the Harwich destroyer flotilla and its attached scouts reinforced by two destroyer divisions from the Forth, as well as the submarine tender *Vulcan* and a division of submarines. A destroyer division would be stationed off each river mouth by night, while by day only 'a couple of destroyers' would do so. The destroyers' supporting scouts and gun-boats would be kept thirty miles further out. The ships of the Fifth Cruiser Squadron would go in to back the destroyer watches in the morning 'when they are most likely to be attacked by enemy cruisers.'¹⁷¹ The Dover cordon would be comprised of French warships, and another French squadron would patrol between Stornoway and the Faroes to interdict German trade attempting to enter the North Sea, with a 'special reserve' of British warships—specifically unarmoured cruisers—to complete the line from the Shetlands to Norway.¹⁷² The First Cruiser Squadron was to watch the Skagerrak. The Home Fleet would form the initial battlefleet in the North Sea, to be joined later by the Channel and Atlantic Fleets plus their Cruiser Squadrons. The battle fleet would cruise the North Sea, 'always retiring at night beyond the utmost limit which German destroyers could reach if sent out at sunset with orders to return next morning.'¹⁷³ The expedition to capture Borkum was

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 5, f. 485.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 6, f. 486.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 9, f. 490.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 20, 24, f. 501, 505.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 20-21, 23, f. 501-502, 504.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 20, 23-24, f. 501, 504-505.

to sail ‘as closely as possible after the Home Battle Fleet.’¹⁷⁴ Heligoland would be brought under the guns of the battle fleets as well as the Fifth Cruiser Squadron. Once Borkum was taken, the newly-mobilized Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Cruiser Squadrons were to join with the Fifth in stretching a blockade line between Terschelling and Horn Reef.

The authors of W.3 noted that ‘the establishment of a closer blockade of the German coast is contemplated than in War Plans W. 1 and W. 2.’¹⁷⁵ They were not unaware of the implications:

‘The remarks on this project must, however, be prefaced by stating frankly that it is fraught with greater possibilities of danger to the blockading squadrons than the system of cordons across the Straits of Dover and across the northern entrance to the North Sea.’¹⁷⁶

A certain extra risk was considered worthwhile, however.

‘Nevertheless, the cordon system by itself is not a perfect one, and leaves much to be desired in many respects. It does not prevent trade to and from German North Sea ports being carried on in neutral bottoms, should neutrals consider the risks worth accepting, and consequently the offensive value of cordons is confined exclusively to the capture of German merchant-ships or neutral merchant-ships carrying contraband of war for Germany.’¹⁷⁷

The W.3 plan did not presume, however, to stop at commercial pressure only, as is shown by the intent to occupy Borkum and attack Heligoland. In this connection, it seems likely that if Admiral Lowry and the other planners had examined recent N.I.D. reports indicating that the Germans had begun increasing the scale of the Frisian Belt and their northern ports they would have been far less enthusiastic in promoting such a combination of amphibious assaults and inshore blockade work.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 20, f. 501.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 21-22, f. 502-503.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-22, f. 502-503.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 22, f. 503.

¹⁷⁸ Grimes, *loc. cit.*

W.3 Part II appeared in August 1908,¹⁷⁹ ‘predicated on 1904-7 Baltic proposals re-examined during the Baltic and North Sea status quo arbitrations.’¹⁸⁰ Part II specifically dealt with ‘cases in which it is considered desirable to send British troops to operate on the German coasts, the intention being that the uncertainty as to where our troops may strike will compel the Germans to keep large forces in their northern provinces in order to deal with them, thus lessening the pressure against our ally on the Franco German frontier.’¹⁸¹ This is a statement that could have been taken straight from either Wilson’s or Slade’s strategic principles, and given Bayly’s apparent later enthusiasm for amphibious attacks on Heligoland or Borkum, it seems likely this section of the plan represents his views.¹⁸² The British would have to threaten ‘every point on the German littoral in the North and Baltic Seas’ to gain the maximum advantage in such a conflict.¹⁸³ This meant the destruction of the *Hochseeflotte*, or at least a major portion of it, were a clear requirement for operational success. The Baltic coast could not be threatened until after a decisive action or actions had occurred. The problem was forcing such an action.

‘There are very few devices open to England by means of which the German Fleet might be enticed into the North Sea, and if Germany does the right thing she will not touch any such bait.’¹⁸⁴

W.3 Part II consisted of three case studies of situations where British troops could be used in major amphibious offensives, all of which were dependent on the attitude of Denmark.¹⁸⁵ In Case I, Denmark was allied with Germany. In Case II, Germany had violated Danish neutrality by operating in her territorial waters and threatening invasion if the Danes retaliated. Case III had

¹⁷⁹ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. W. 3. England and France v. Germany. Part II.’, 19 August 1908, f. 555-579, ADM 116/1043B/1.

¹⁸⁰ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹⁸¹ Admiralty, ‘War Plan. W. 3. England and France v. Germany. Part II.’, 19 August 1908, p. 1, f. 556, ADM 116/1043B/1.

¹⁸² See Chapter 7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 1, f. 556.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2, f. 557.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3, f. 558.

Denmark joining Britain and France ‘in order to enforce her neutrality and prevent Germany from occupying her territory which commands the Belts.’

Case I was dismissed quickly as being both politically unlikely and a death knell to any hopes of British action in the Baltic. British offensive action would thus be limited to the North Sea littoral—that is an observation blockade of German North Sea ports, the closure of the North Sea to German merchant traffic with a northern blockade line, and the usual operations against Borkum. If Borkum was found to be too strongly fortified—evidence Lowry, Brock, and the other planners had caught up with the N.I.D.’s intelligence reports—Sylt and the surrounding islands of Röm, Föhe, Amrum, Langeness, and Oland would be taken in its stead. There would also be a British landing, presumably in force, on the Eiderstedt peninsula “to threaten the Kiel Canal, either before or after the dispatch of troops to reinforce the French Army, according to which appears most necessary at the time.”¹⁸⁶

Case II, Danish neutrality unhindered by Germany, was “the worst situation we have to contemplate”. The authors dismissed the possibility of a Danish land offensive to retake Schleswig-Holstein, though they retained the hope that Denmark might join a Franco-British coalition once the British had proven their superiority at sea. The possibility of Danish resistance to any German occupation attempts, ‘especially if England offers assistance in the form of troops’, was considered, as was the possibility that Denmark would allow both sides to operate in the Belts so long as her territory remained unimpinged on. Whatever the case, the best course was to ‘accept the disabilities, and force our way into the Baltic at all costs.’ Presuming ‘Denmark’s helplessness’, Case II envisioned ‘the majority of British forces in home waters’ at once being sent to the Kattegat and from there forcing their way through the Great Belt. The Atlantic Fleet and Mediterranean Fleets upon their arrival from Gibraltar and Malta would join

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-5, pp. 18-19, f. 558-560, 573-574.

with the Second and Third Cruiser Squadrons to hold the North Sea supported by the destroyers of the River and Tribal classes and reinforced by the ‘special service cruisers’ as they mobilized.

It was expected the German main force would concentrate to oppose the British thrust towards the Baltic, and even if the Germans decided to make their stand in the North Sea, the Baltic force would press on until their objectives were achieved. The thrust into the Baltic would be led by British submarines, whose immediate task would be to protect British minesweepers from the German fleet as they cleared the Belt of any German mines. Transports following the British Baltic force would, once the way was cleared, land troops at Fehmarn, Sylt, and Röm. Further landings were planned for the Eiderstedt and ‘the peninsula between the Bay of Eckernförde and the Scheiford’, or alternatively Rügen—the latter given a potential base for operations further east. The Elbe would be blocked with scuttled hulks, as would Warnemünde, Travemünde, and Memel, while Swinemünde and Danzig Bay would be blockaded.¹⁸⁷

Case III’s scenario of active Danish support from the outset of war was quite naturally considered ‘the most favourable to the allies, and is therefore the situation which they should endeavour to bring about.’¹⁸⁸ The planners understood the small Danish Army could not put up a prolonged resistance to the estimated German invasion force of 100,000 to 150,000 men, so the British first move had to be a rapid attack into the Baltic in the ten-day period it was estimated that the Germans would require to mobilize such an invasion force. The forces allocated this task were fundamentally identical to those arrangements suggested for Case II, although provision was made for the transport of the 40,000 men of the two British Army divisions at Aldershot to

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-8, f. 560-563.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 9, f. 564.

Denmark once the Great Belt had been cleared by the Navy. Danish naval support was expected to be of minimal utility.¹⁸⁹

The First Operation Unthinkable

Beginning in autumn 1908 and continuing into 1909, a series of plans were written out that examined a war between Britain and both Germany and the United States. The idea of a British-American naval war had become something of a preoccupation to Fisher during 1908, for reasons which have never been adequately explained, although one explanation involves the increasingly tortuous matter of the Two Power Standard.¹⁹⁰ As a German-American combination was the strongest permutation of the Two Power Standard at the time, it seems possible, though perhaps not likely, that the first of these plans—Plan W.4—was intended to be little more than ammunition for the annual battle over the Navy Estimates. Ammunition which, as will be seen in the next chapter, was sorely needed. This impression is reinforced by the delay in W.4's printing, which did not occur until the middle of December, several months after W.3 Part II.¹⁹¹

Certainly, Fisher was no enthusiast of a third war with the United States. Even as the 'W' Plans were being drawn up, Fisher wrote the following covering letter to McKenna for one of Slade's memorandums:

‘I send you a memorandum by Capt. Slade but I don't agree in the possibility of our waging a war with the United States & so deprecate any steps tending to encourage that idea.’¹⁹²

Be that as it may, two more plans on similar lines to W.4 were completed in early 1909: W.5 and G.U. (which may be the same plan under two separate names). Neither of these two plans seems

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-13, f. 564-568.

¹⁹⁰ Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-404.

¹⁹¹ W.4 was printed on December 17th. Admiralty, ‘War Plan, W. 4. England v. Germany and the United States of America.’, 17 December 1908, f. 625, ADM 116/1043B/1.

¹⁹² Fisher to McKenna, 12 May 1908, f. 4, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

to have been officially printed, and both only survive as partially typewritten drafts.¹⁹³ In any case there is reason to believe that these plans were not taken very seriously inside the Admiralty. In addition to Fisher's deprecation of a war with the United States, Slade himself complained in his diary that one of these plans was 'the most hopelessly puerile thing possible.'¹⁹⁴ Puerile or not, they remain of interest, and for more reasons than as an illustration of 'Fisher's often unrealistic approach to war planning.'¹⁹⁵ The essential premise of all these plans was that during a war with a German-American combination the U.S. Navy would send its battlefleet or a part of it, 'across the Atlantic to combine with that of Germany.'¹⁹⁶

Plan W.4¹⁹⁷ was signed by Lewis Bayly, and began with the declaration that as of January 31st, 1909, a German-American alliance would possess thirty-eight battleships to Britain's forty-one.¹⁹⁸ It was expected Germany would, in expectation of the American expeditionary force, hold their main fleet in port while conducting 'incessant attacks on the British Fleet' with their torpedo craft to bleed the Royal Navy's strength down as far as possible, supplemented by minelaying operations off British ports, and sweeps by German heavy units in the Heligoland Bight to bait their British counterparts into range of their torpedo craft. The possible climax of such operations might be the sacrifice of Germany's oldest ships 'with orders to attack the British Fleet at whatever distance'.¹⁹⁹ The expected place for the junction of German and American fleets was given as the North Sea, following a night dash up the Channel by the Americans on the principle that such a course would be 'the least likely to be expected.'

¹⁹³ Admiralty, 'War Plans W.5 & W.6.', 1908, f. 480-718, ADM 116/1043B/2; Unsigned, 'War Plan G. U. War Orders for the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet.', March 1909, MSS 253/84/3, Box 3/23, Crease MSS.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

¹⁹⁵ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Admiralty, 'War Plan, W. 4. England v. Germany and the United States of America.', p. 1, f. 612, ADM 116/1043B/1.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 596-625.

¹⁹⁸ Exclusive of older vessels like the *Indianas* or the *Worths*, or coastal defence ships like the *Odins*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2, f. 613.

However, a rendezvous in the Atlantic or after an American arrival through the northern entrance of the North Sea were not ruled out. It was assumed the American task force would bring their colliers along.

Two rendezvous locations were worked out for British forces. The Channel and Atlantic Fleets would join at 54°N, 1°20'E and the Home and Mediterranean Fleets at 57°10'N, 2°E. Both would be joined by a force of second-class cruisers for supporting duties. The paramount duty of these two combined fleets was to prevent the junction of the American and German battle fleets. The British flotillas would deploy in Heligoland Bight on observation duties, backed by their flotilla cruiser and the First and Second Cruiser Squadrons. Until a 'strong military expedition' could capture Borkum as an advanced base only a single flotilla's worth of destroyers (twenty-four) could maintain a watch in the Bight. Initially these would be divided into three groups:

Borkum Group	Elbe/Jade-Weser Group	Lister Deep Group
<i>Sapphire</i>	<i>Topaze</i>	1 Scout Cruiser
1 Scout Cruiser	2 Scout Cruisers	6 Destroyers
6 Destroyers	13 Destroyers	

When (not if) the Lister Deep and Ems were 'clear of German torpedo-boat destroyers' the entire force would redeploy off the Elbe and the Jade. The Heligoland Bight force would also include the *Apollo*-class cruiser-minelayer conversions, which would be kept 'ready to mine the mouths of the Elbe and Jahde [*sic*] if the German Fleet puts to sea.'²⁰⁰ The remaining destroyers, minus those required for coastal defence, would operate from Harwich in order to back up the

²⁰⁰ This is essentially the same mining strategy adopted in the First World War, and is more proof against allegations that the Royal Navy did little to prepare for mine warfare in the Prewar Era. Examples of such allegations include Captain J.S. Cowie, *Mines, Minelayers and Minelaying* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 42; Peter F. Halvorsen, 'The Royal Navy and Mine Warfare, 1868-1914', *JSS* 27, no. 4 (December 2004), pp. 685-707. This view was present during the First World War. See Rear-Admiral R.S. Phipps Hornby to Admiralty, 23 September 1916, G.04139/16, in Idem, 'Housing, Organization, Duties, Etc., of Torpedo Schools. Reports by Rear-Admiral R.S. Phipps Hornby, C.M.G.', PHI/205/b, Admiral Robert Phipps Hornby MSS, NMM.

observation flotilla or, if the American task force appeared, to join with Dover's defence force and attack it as it passed through the Straits.

As noted, D.N.I. Slade was conspicuously critical of these plans, and it may have been Slade who scrawled the following note regarding W.4's assumption the U.S. Navy would try to cross the Atlantic:

'This is improbable judging by the attitude adopted by the U.S.A. during the Spanish American War. Under any circumstances it would be a very risky proceeding.'²⁰¹

Slade had always been doubtful of this prospect, as illustrated by the following diary entry:

'Sir J.F. said that in case of war between us & Germany combined with America we should base a fleet in Lough Swilly ready to meet the Americans first if it comes over. What was going to bring it over he did not specify.'²⁰²

Slade was correct in his suspicion that there would be no American trans-Atlantic sortie in the event of a third war with Britain, or any other European power for that matter.²⁰³

W.4 was the last of the W Series plans to be formally printed, but it was not the last to be drawn up. A subsequent February 1909 plan along the same general lines was written and named W.5.²⁰⁴ This plan, like W.4, was largely the work of Lewis Bayly of the War College.²⁰⁵ Again a table was given, listing Britain possessing on March 31st, 1909 fifty-four battleships (including the *Royal Sovereigns*, the three second-class battleships, and the turret ships *Hood*, *Nile* and *Trafalgar*) against the same thirty-eight American and German ships given in W.4. The same assumptions of a German attrition campaign and of an American-German junction as W.4 were

²⁰¹ Admiralty, 'War Plan, W. 4. England v. Germany and the United States of America.', p. 2, f. 598, ADM 116/1043B/1.

²⁰² Slade diary, 16 November 1908, MRF/39/3, Slade MSS.

²⁰³ The U.S. planners intended to send their main fleet to the Caribbean and await developments. General Board of the Navy, 'War Portfolio No. 1. Atlantic Station. General Considerations and Data.', Entry 209 (Box 1), Record Group 80, U.S. Navy Department MSS, NARA.

²⁰⁴ Admiralty, 'War Plan W.5. England versus Germany and the U.S.A.', February 1909, f. 482-650, ADM 116/1034B/2. The February 1909 date is somewhat speculative and based on the last date found in the surviving documents.

²⁰⁵ A draft of the introduction exists in his handwriting. See *ibid.*, f. 485.

given. What was new, however, was a section titled 'Flying Base for Destroyers', which laid out the need for an advanced flotilla base and specified Borkum as the best of the possibilities. Of the other two, Heligoland was too heavily defended and would require reduction by bombardment, and Lister Deep was too far from England as well as too easy to be cut off as 'communication between it and England lies across the face of Germany.'²⁰⁶ Once Borkum was taken, operations against Heligoland would begin with a four-day preliminary bombardment by *Renown*, *Centurion*, *Barfleur*, and *Hood*.

Once again the British battle fleet would be in two groups. The first would be the Northern Battle Fleet and comprise both the Home Fleet's active and nucleus crew divisions (the Channel Fleet having now been absorbed by the Home Fleet) plus the Atlantic Fleet and the First Cruiser Squadron and would rendezvous at either 55°20'N, 2°20'E or 57°N, 4°E. The Southern Battle Fleet would be formed of the Home Fleet ships in Material Reserve plus the Mediterranean Fleet when the latter arrived home and, in time, the Fifth Cruiser Squadron. The Southern Battle Fleet's patrol area was set at 54°N, 2°E. *Nile* and *Trafalgar* would be fitted with wireless and come under the command of the senior officer of the Heligoland Bight observation force as mother ships for the flotillas, with *Nile* anchored off Horn Reef and *Trafalgar* off Ameland. Two cruiser lines would be stretched eastwards from the Shetlands and across the mouth of the Channel to watch for the American fleet's approach. Deployment of a cruiser line between the Hebrides and the Faroes, though considered preferable, required too many ships and risked denuding either the other patrol lines or the cruiser forces supporting the battle fleets. The Second, Third, and Sixth Cruiser Squadrons (the latter relieving the Fifth) would support the Heligoland observation forces, with three additional cruisers (*Eclipse*, *Vindictive*, and *Charybdis*) attached to the Second Cruiser Squadron for patrolling the Skaw.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., f. 489.

Both proposed battle fleets were considered superior to either of the individual opposing fleets. The Southern Fleet would intercept the U.S. battle fleet off Dover if it attempted to dash through the Channel, with the Northern Fleet maintaining its station in case the Germans came out. If the American forces tried the northerly route, the roles of the two battle fleets would be reversed.

One last plan in the W Series exists: War Plan W.6. Like W.5 it seems to have not been formally printed, and survives as a mix of handwritten and typed pages.²⁰⁷ Confusingly, the W.6 designation seems to incorporate two entirely different plans. One of these refers to a war between the Triple Alliance and Britain. The other is a brief series of naval strength tables involving another England against the German-American alliance scenario that was written up, or at least signed, by Lewis Bayly. The latter is prefaced with a covering letter that includes this tantalizing comment:

‘With reference to War Plan W.6. previously sent in, the following tables are enclosed showing the distribution of ships should the U.S.A. Fleet remain on the west side of the Atlantic. But before such a powerful British Fleet crosses the ocean it must be reasonably certain that the U.S.A. Fleet will not cross it before it arrives, and so put the fleets in England at a disadvantage.

‘The squadron of unarmoured cruisers for North America is to act as an escort the transports which will carry about 150,000 men across to Canada, within three to four months after the declaration of war.’²⁰⁸

The table referenced in Bayly’s covering letter is reproduced below in full with only minor formatting changes:

	Battleships	Armoured Cruisers	Unarmoured Cruisers (First Class)	Unarmoured Cruisers (Second Class)	Unarmoured Cruisers (Third Class)	Scouts
R.N. (Home)	32	21	8	13	4	8
Germany	22	8	-	17	15	-
R.N. (Americas)	28	10	9	9	-	-
U.S.A.	24	4	3	5	4	3

²⁰⁷ Admiralty, ‘War Plan W.-6. England v. The Triple Alliance’, n.d., f. 653-718, ADM 116/1043B/2.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., f. 714.

Where this overseas squadron was to be based is not stated in the surviving documentation. A Canadian port such as the ex-Royal Dockyard at Halifax seems most likely, although use of the similar facility at Bermuda cannot be dismissed.²⁰⁹

The remainder of the tables in this version of W.6 are devoted to how Britain's battleships and cruisers could be rated against those of Germany and America. The classification of the battleships is of particular interest. These were split into three classes. Class A comprised the *Dreadnoughts*, *Lord Nelsons*, *King Edwards*, and—significantly—the *Invincibles*. Class B included the *Duncan* and *Formidable* classes as well as *Swiftsure* and *Triumph*. Class C was made up of the remaining battleships down through the *Nile* and *Trafalgar*. Distribution was:

North Sea	North America
6 Class A	8 Class A
4 Class B	11 Class B
22 Class C	7 Class C

The North Sea force would comprise the First, Third, and Fourth Divisions of the Home Fleet, while the North American force contained the Second Division of the Home Fleet and the Atlantic and Mediterranean Fleets as well as the five *Canopii*. North Sea cruiser units would be the Second, Third, Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth Cruiser Squadrons. The Fourth, Sixth, and Eighth Cruiser Squadrons would go to North America.²¹⁰

Considering how the Admiralty had spent much time previously arguing reinforcing Canada in such a way would be exceptionally difficult, this provision for an expeditionary force comprising most of the British Army is baffling in the extreme. Just as surprising is the proposed deployment of almost half of the Royal Navy's strength overseas during a war involving Germany. Perhaps this plan was written in relation to that 1909's Colonial Conference in order to

²⁰⁹ Ibid., f. 716.

²¹⁰ Ibid., f. 717-718.

encourage the Canadian dominions to invest in their own naval defence.²¹¹ Another possibility was that the plans were meant as a ‘nightmare scenario’, or as ammunition regarding the maintenance of the Two Power Standard. More likely, it will remain a frustrating puzzle.

Returning to the more complete version of W.6, a major difference from the plans versus an American-German coalition was that it assumed ‘there will be two separate & distinct of War viz: the North Sea and the Mediterranean and that there will be no attempt on the part of Germany to effect a junction between her own naval forces and those of her Medⁿ Allies.’²¹² In addition, ‘The preponderance of British Naval forces over those of the allies combined, is so large as to admit of our being in numerical superiority in both theatres of War, and this has been arranged for in the following plan.’²¹³ This being established, the plan’s author wrote that, ‘The primary British role is ‘preventative’, i.e. to prevent the Command of the Sea passing to the enemy, and to accomplish this, a vigorous offensive must be adopted wherever possible.’²¹⁴

In the North Sea, it was admitted by the planners that little could be done offensively other than the usual observational blockade as well as ‘the capture of an Advanced Base & the complete stoppage of oversea trade in German bottoms[.]’²¹⁵ Once again, *Nile* and *Trafalgar* would be equipped with wireless equipment and all-round net defences as the support anchors for destroyer flotillas.²¹⁶ In a surprisingly frank confession, the planners remarked that:

‘The limitations of Naval Warfare will be acutely felt in this theatre of War by the British, for, unless other countries become involved, there are no Naval means of either forcing or enticing the German fleet out to decisive action, and our Army is too small to adventure anything against that of Germany.’

²¹¹ See, amongst others: Nicholas Lambert, ‘Economy or Empire? The Fleet Unit Concept and the Quest for Collective Security in the Pacific, 1909-14’, in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson (eds.), *Far-Flung Lines: Essays in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 54-83.

²¹² Ibid., f. 654-713.

²¹³ Ibid., f. 656.

²¹⁴ Ibid., f. 664.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., f. 672.

In the Mediterranean, however, there were more options. Since offensive actions or landings in the Adriatic were impractical, the main British objective would be to force Italy to accept a separate peace, for which the capture of Sardinia was considered a practical objective.²¹⁷ Much, however, would depend upon how the naval war played out, and the planners suggested that more destroyers would be needed for covering operations in the Adriatic and the dispatch of a section of submarines from England. In a parallel of the longstanding North Sea plans for Borkum, the island of Pantelleria would be seized by a detachment of Royal Marines from Malta as an advanced base for British flotilla craft.²¹⁸

In the spring on 1909, Fisher and his acolytes were at work on another War Plan, this time titled Plan G.U.—almost certainly because, like W.5 and the fragmentary plan for an American deployment in W.6, it dealt with fighting a German-American combination.²¹⁹ The only surviving portion of this plan that can be positively identified is a document described as the orders to be issued to the C.-in-C. Home Fleet, although it also includes orders to be given to other British naval forces. The overall strategic assumptions were that the United States ‘either at the outset or at some later period’ would enter an Anglo-German war on the side of the Germans. The general scheme of G.U. would ‘remain the same if the war is against Germany alone,’ and ‘the ships and vessels allotted to deal with an attack by the United States being employed after war has broken out to reinforce the fleet in the North Sea as required.’

During the diplomatic crisis it was assumed would precede hostilities ‘the Southern Portion of the North Sea is to be kept clear of Battleships and Armoured Cruisers, the initial defence in those waters being entrusted to the smaller Cruisers and Torpedo and Submarine

²¹⁷ Ibid., f. 665-671.

²¹⁸ Ibid., f. 675.

²¹⁹ Unsigned, ‘War Plan G.U. War Orders for the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet.’, n.d. [c. March 1909], MSS 253/84/3, Box 3/23, Crease MSS.

Flotillas.’ This arrangement would continue ‘until war is certain.’ The phrase ‘initial defence’ is a significant one, suggesting that the main fleet would not be put into harm’s way until preparations were complete. These preparations saw the British heavy units divided into three fleets, the Main Fleet, Second Fleet, and Third Fleet:

Main Fleet	Second Fleet	Third Fleet
Atlantic Fleet and Home Fleet		
First and Second Division		
Battleships		
First, Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Cruiser Squadrons	Home Fleet Third and Fourth Division Battleships	Mediterranean Fleet
First and Second Flotillas	Ninth Cruiser Squadron	
Fifth and Sixth Destroyer Divisions		
Submarine Sections VII and II		

Once the Main Fleet had assembled at a point designated as Rendezvous A it would either anchor there or patrol between Rendezvous A and the Firth of Forth/Scapa Flow, with the cruiser squadrons to the eastwards. Once war broke out the Fifth and Sixth Cruiser Squadrons would take up a patrol line at the entrance to the Baltic ‘near a line drawn from Hantsholm to Ruytingen.’ They would probably be joined by the First and Third Cruiser Squadrons, but the surviving document is unclear on this point. The Seventh Cruiser Squadron would patrol from Lerwick between the Orkneys, the Shetlands, and Norway against German commerce, supported by the Eighth Division of destroyers covering the gap between Pentland and the Orkneys.

Once again there would be an observation blockade of the German coast, comprised of the First and Second Destroyer Flotillas and the Fifth and Sixth Divisions of destroyers—68 destroyers in total. The First Flotilla would watch the Elbe, Jade, and Weser. The Second Flotilla would operate from Sylt to Eider Light. The Ems would be watched by the Fifth Division, while the Sixth watched the entrance to the Baltic. The exact strength totals were given as:

First Flotilla	Second Flotilla	Fifth Division	Sixth Division
1 Cruiser	1 Cruiser	1 Cruiser	2 Scouts
2 Scouts	2 Scouts	1 Scout	16 Destroyers
1 Depot Ship	1 Depot Ship	12 Destroyers	
25 Destroyers	30 Destroyers		

The distance between the areas to be patrolled and the closest British ports made the creation an advanced base very desirable. This was an area where Plan G.U. showed innovation, as a significant change proposed was the abandonment of plans for seizing Borkum and/or Sylt as advanced bases. Plan G.U.'s authors lamented that 'attempts to seize and hold any German harbour suitable to the purpose' could not be guaranteed to succeed. Instead, 'floating bases at sea must be utilized as far as possible.' The observation flotillas were to shelter in and amongst the shallow-water banks just off the coast. The Northern Advanced Base would be in the vicinity of Horns Reef, the Southern Advanced Base off Texel. Each base was to be guarded by one of the *Nile* class turret ships and be supported by two depot ships. If these bases were successfully established, they would be used to support undersea operations by submarine Sections II and VII.

The employment of the Second and Third Fleets were not set out in as much detail, as their employment depended 'upon the circumstances which arise after commencement of hostilities.' The Third Fleet would remain in the Channel during 'the earlier stages of the war', but the Second Fleet would operate either as a southern force in the North Sea, or in the Channel if the American fleet appeared there.

Apparently concurrent with Plan G.U., Fisher produced a long memorandum that enunciated the same details contained in the detailed orders written for the C.-in-C. Home Fleet.²²⁰ However, as fascinating as the Admiralty's plans for opposing a hostile American-German alliance are, they are also a dead end. After Plan G.U., nothing more is heard of such a combination. By the start of 1909, the Navy's planning against Germany had becoming an

²²⁰ Fisher, 'War Plans and the Distribution of the Fleet', n.d. [early 1909], f. 2-19, ADM 116/1043B/1.

intensely personal business involving just Fisher, Wilson, and a few others. ‘I don’t want to disclose my plan of campaign to *anyone*,’ he wrote to Esher. ‘I haven’t even told Ottley and don’t mean to.’²²¹ By way of explanation, Fisher insisted that the plan depended on ‘*suddenness and unexpectedness*, and the moment I tell anyone there’s an end to both!!!’²²² He did let slip, however, that he was working on a scheme that involved transports. ‘I started it about 7 weeks ago and got 3 of my best satellites on it’, he wrote.²²³

The ‘transports’ Fisher spoke of were not troopships but colliers. In a letter to Winsloe, the Fourth Sea Lord, Fisher asked for a revision of planned wartime fleet coaling practices, and explained his proposed distribution for the Navy’s wartime ‘offensive flotillas’. These were to be based at two ‘advanced positions’ if that was possible. The two forces were comprised of the 1st and 2nd Destroyer Flotillas and the 5th and 6th Destroyer Divisions,²²⁴ and the two forces’ strengths, excluding oil burning ships, are given below:

	Parent Ship	Cruisers	Scouts	Destroyers
Northern	1	1	4	46
Southern	1	2	3	31

The exact positions of the two advanced bases are not known, but they are almost certainly off the German Bight, given later references to destroyers returning to east coast ports (Harwich, Yarmouth, Hull, and the Forth) to refuel prior to the establishment of the advanced bases.²²⁵

Concurrent with the devising of Plan G.U., the Admiralty was reworking their plans for the defence of the home ports.

²²¹ Fisher to Esher, 17 January 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 220.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Thankfully the results of this work were uncovered by Warwick Brown in the papers of the Admiralty’s Transport Department, who passed the information on to Shawn Grimes. Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 144n20.

²²⁴ The Northern force comprised the Second Flotilla and Sixth Division, the Southern force the First Flotilla and Fifth Division.

²²⁵ Untitled memorandum enclosed in Fisher to Winsloe, ‘Arrangements for the supply of Coal and Oil fuel, in war, to ships in Home waters.’, 20 February 1909, MT 23/229, Admiralty Department of Transport MSS, TNA.

‘Proposals have been put forward to the Admiralty from time to time that large cruisers, and even in some cases battleships, should be allocated to the local defence of the Home Ports.

‘Their Lordships consider that the most efficient defence consists in maintaining the seagoing fleets and squadrons at the utmost strength possible, seeking for and attacking the enemy on the high seas, and there intercepting any vessels which he may detach for the purpose of attacking our coasts. They cannot agree to any proposals which would involve the weakening of the fleets at sea, merely for the purpose of providing for a more or less sedentary local defence...’²²⁶

The Navy’s big ships had better things to do than rust at anchor as Port Guardships. That interception of enemy raiders is listed as being, at least in certain instances, as a job for the Navy’s capital ships is an indication that Fisher’s strategic vision was not as flotilla-centred as some contend.

It is unknown if any of the 1908-9 plans centred on opposing a German-American coalition were officially issued to the fleet. That the plans within them were serious can be seen in several ways. First is the amount of work undertaken by the torpedo gunboat *Halcyon* to survey the international waters just off Esbjerg, Denmark, under cover of her usual duties as a fisheries guardship.²²⁷ Another comes from the Home Fleet’s Flag Captain, Herbert Richmond. Richmond was caustic about the planned use of destroyers in an observational blockade.²²⁸ Whatever the truth of the matter is, the formulation of Plan G.U. brings us to the last great drama of Fisher’s prewar tenure as First Sea Lord: the infamous circus known to history as the ‘Beresford Inquiry’. By this time, war planning was being overshadowed by the poisonous state of intra-Navy and intra-Cabinet politics. It is to these therefore that we now must turn.

²²⁶ Unsigned, ‘Defence of Home Ports. Draft Memorandum to accompany letters to Commanders-in-Chief.’, n.d. [March 1909], f. 29, MSS 253/84/2, Box 3/23, Crease MSS.

²²⁷ Commander M. Fitzmaurice [Commanding Officer, H.M.S. *Halcyon*] to Admiralty, ‘Anchorage in vicinity off Esbjerg.’, 24 June 1909, f.250-257, ADM 116/866B; Fitzmaurice to Admiralty, ‘Denmark. Anchorages in vicinity of Horn Reef.’, 18 September 1909, f. 258-261, *ibid*.

²²⁸ Richmond journal, 2 May 1909, RIC/1/8, Richmond MSS. See also Grimes, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-132.

CHAPTER FOUR

Politics, Design, and Enquiry, 1908-1909

The 'Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford' was the climax of Beresford's efforts to unseat Fisher as First Sea Lord. Beresford's constant criticism of the new fleet rankled the Admiralty, and Second Sea Lord Sir Charles Drury wrote to Tweedmouth that 'Charlie B. would not be himself unless he was firing a shot 'agin the gov¹ or powers in authority over him. It is his nature. He can't help himself.'¹ Others were less kind. Admiral Sir Day Bosanquet wrote to Arnold White that 'I am personally convinced that on certain subjects he is not sane.'²

Etiological or not, Beresford's complaints could not be ignored, and they were of long standing. Recall Beresford's 1907 fulmination that the Home Fleet was 'a fraud and a danger to the Empire', and the less hysterical observation that a better organization would be both the Channel and Home Fleets being a single combined command. In response to these and his continued truculence over the matter of War Plans, First Lord Tweedmouth attempted once again to solve things with another face-to-face conference at the Admiralty on July 5th 1907. This time, however, either Fisher or Tweedmouth decided to call in a stenographer to take a verbatim

¹ Drury to Tweedmouth, 1 June 1907, MSS 254/618, Tweedmouth MSS.

² Bosanquet to White, 26 May 1907, WHI/75, White MSS, NMM. Bosanquet was not the only senior officer disturbed by Beresford and his allies. Fisher's former shipmate Sir Nathaniel Bowden-Smith wrote James Thursfield that 'Although Custance & others are friends of mine, I don't like this cabal that is going on against the present Board of Admiralty'. Admiral Sir Nathaniel Bowden-Smith to Thursfield, 11 February 1907, THU/1/1, Sir James Thursfield MSS, NMM.

transcript of the meeting, either for posterity or for future reference in quarrels with Beresford.³ Several copies of the resulting lengthy transcript have survived.⁴

Tweedmouth had four questions for Beresford. First, was what Lord Charles thought ‘should be the number and types of vessels to be placed under your permanent command’? Secondly, there was the matter of what exactly was the sort of further information Beresford wanted beyond that already supplied to the Cs.-in-C. afloat by the Admiralty. Third was Beresford’s attitude towards the Admiralty: ‘Why do you not try to cultivate good and cordial relations with the Admiralty?’ Finally, Tweedmouth—and doubtless Fisher too—wanted Beresford to ‘explain to use your reasons for saying that “the Home Fleet is a fraud and a danger to the Empire”?’⁵ Before Tweedmouth could even ask these questions, however, the meeting went off the rails with a long back and forth argument about Beresford’s most recent letters to the Admiralty, of which Beresford, remarkably, could recall neither the contents nor even the dates they had been sent in.⁶

When the discussion returned to war plans, Fisher reminded Beresford that he had asked for ‘your predecessor’s [Wilson] plan.’ Beresford corrected him, saying he had asked for the plans of Wilson’s predecessors as well. Fisher replied that Wilson’s were sufficient since he had been in command for six years. Beresford admitted he ‘thought [Wilson] had only been there three years.’ Beresford had apparently forgotten Wilson had been in command of the Home Fleet before it was renamed the Channel Fleet under the terms of Fisher’s 1904 redistribution scheme. Whatever the case, Beresford felt this mistake was ‘only a detail.’ This brought an

³ Freeman, *Naval Feud*, p. 124.

⁴ Untitled Admiralty print of conference minutes, 5 July 1907, ADM 116/3108. In addition, a first proof copy can be found as MSS 254/576, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 1-3.

uncharacteristically icy retort from Tweedmouth: ‘It is a very big detail.’⁷ In the end, this summit meeting accomplished nothing.

‘Fusion’?

These internecine struggles went on against a background of serious technical discussion about the future British battlefleet’s composition and the specifications of the ships that would be built for it. The immediate follow-on to both the *Dreadnought* and the *Invincible* designs was meant, by Fisher at least, to be a merger of both types, thus fulfilling both Fisher’s arguments to Selborne during the preparation of the original 1904 Scheme, and Selborne’s qualified admission that the battleship and armoured cruiser were merging together.⁸ The result was Design ‘X₄’, drawn up in November-December 1905. It was intended to be a ship ‘which shall embody the offensive and defensive powers of the “Dreadnought” and the speed of the “Invincible”, together with improved protection against torpedo explosion and an improved anti-torpedo boat armament.’⁹ ‘X₄’ was 623 feet long and displaced 22,500 tons, carried the same main armament as *Dreadnought* and a mixed anti-torpedo boat armament of eight 4-inch guns and eighteen twelve pounders, and had a maximum speed of twenty-five knots.¹⁰ Instead of the somewhat clumsy arrangement used for *Dreadnought*, ‘X₄’ would have her ten main guns in four turrets similar to the layout used for the *Invincibles* but with a greater separation of the two echeloned amidships turrets. To maintain the ten-gun battery, the two amidships turrets were to be triples

⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸ Selborne minute, n.d. [October 1904], on Fisher, ‘The Fighting Characteristics of Vessels of War.’, in Fisher, *Naval Necessities*, i, p. 40, ADM 116/3092. Cited in Sumida, *IDNS*, p. 52. Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 31 omits this important minute.

⁹ Sir Philip Watts, ‘New Battleship Design X. 4 (Fusion Type)’, 2 December 1905, in ‘Navy Estimates Committee, 1906-7.’, F.P. 4711, pp. 31-32, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

¹⁰ Unsigned, ‘H.M.S. New Battleship Design, X₄. Statement of Dimensions, Weights, Estimate of Weights, &c.’, unnumbered folio, Ships Cover 222 (*Bellerophon* Class), Department of Naval Construction MSS, NMM.

rather than twins.¹¹ Fisher's hopes for this 'Fusion Type' were short-lived, as 'X₄' was rejected by other members of the 'Fishpond', specifically a 'Committee appointed to consider the Questions of a Parent Vessel for Coastal Destroyers, the Utilisation of Mercantile Cruisers, and the Fusion Design of Armoured Vessel.'¹²

Design 'X₄' was considered too expensive (only three could be built for the cost of four *Dreadnoughts*) and despite the tactical value of a fast division of 'Fusions', the Committee felt 'this function is non-existent until we possess a sufficient superiority in modern Armoured Vessels over other countries.'¹³ For much the same reason, the Committee wished to build four 21-knot battleships instead of more *Invincibles*, 'any improvement meanwhile being in the direction of increased gun-fire.'¹⁴ It seems clear, in fact, that as far as the Committee was concerned, *Dreadnought's* value lay primarily in her main armament:

'The great speed of the "Dreadnought" was essential because her armament is effective at a greater range than that of any vessels afloat, and it was of the first importance therefore that she should be able to choose and maintain her own desired range. But when vessels with the same or an equal class of gun are ranged against each other, speed, though desirable, cannot be assessed at so high a value as superior number of guns. ...

'We consider ... that it should be our first aim to add gun-fire to our Fleet before proceeding in the direction of greatly increased speed, and that the proposed "Fusion" ships are, for the moment, premature.'¹⁵

Built instead were the three *Bellerophons*, near-repeats of *Dreadnought* with some notable improvements such as the addition of a full-sized mainmast and a uniform anti-torpedo boat armament of 4-inchers in place of the mixed battery of the 'Fusion' design. The increase in size was due to the results of gunnery experiments against the old destroyer *Skate* which had

¹¹ Sir Philip Watts, 'New Battleship Design X. 4 (Fusion Type)', 2 December 1905, in 'Navy Estimates Committee, 1906-7.', pp. 31-32, F.P. 4711, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

¹² Admiralty, 'Report of Committee appointed to consider the Questions of a Parent Vessel for Coastal Destroyers, the Utilisation of Mercantile Cruisers, and the Fusion Design of Armoured Vessel.', in Admiralty, 'Navy Estimates Committee, 1906-7.', pp. 31-32, F.P. 4711, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

convinced the responsible parties that nothing smaller than the 4-inch quick-firer could be reliably counted upon to disable enemy surface torpedo craft.¹⁶

The Committee which rejected Design 'X₄' nonetheless left open the possibility that the design 'might well be reconsidered' after 1906 since it undoubtedly could 'form a most useful addition to the Battle Fleet.'¹⁷ However the Committee thought that a new 13.5-inch gun might be ready for adoption by then, which would mean (though this was left unstated) that 'X₄' would have to be completely recast. By late 1906, however, when the Admiralty was considering designs for the upcoming year's programme, 'X₄' seems to have been forgotten or abandoned, and the 13.5-inch gun was replaced by a longer 12-inch weapon.¹⁸

Sir Philip Watts was given the preliminary requirements by the Admiralty in late November of 1906. He produced two sketch designs, marked 'E' and 'F'. In an illustration of Fisher's continued enthusiasm for the type, Design 'E' was an improved *Invincible*. Design 'E' was thirty-five feet longer than the *Invincible* in order to accommodate the new, longer main gun and to maintain a twenty-five knot top speed, and had somewhat thicker armour in places (notably a maximum side belt of nine inches versus six in the *Invincible*). Design 'E' was presented as an alternative to an earlier proposal, Design 'D', which was much the same except with a ten-inch maximum side belt and a twenty-four knot speed. Design 'F' was a battleship. It

¹⁶ Keith McBride, 'After the Dreadnought', in Robert Gardiner (ed.), *Warship 1992* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), p. 99. The original report is in Ships Cover 222 (*Bellerophon* Class), D.N.C. MSS.

¹⁷ Admiralty, 'Report of Committee appointed to consider the Questions of a Parent Vessel for Coastal Destroyers, the Utilisation of Mercantile Cruisers, and the Fusion Design of Armoured Vessel.', in Admiralty, 'Navy Estimates Committee, 1906-7.', p. 21, F.P. 4711, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

¹⁸ This new gun, which ultimately proved something of a disappointment in service, was the 12 inch BL Marks XI, XI*, and XII. It was 50 calibres long whereas previous ships had carried 45 calibre pieces. Norman Friedman, *Naval Weapons of the First World War* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2011), p. 62.

retained the 'X₄' turret arrangement of two twins and two triples and had much the same armour arrangement as 'the new "Dreadnought" [i.e. *Bellerophon*]',¹⁹

These two designs were considered by the Board on December 11th, along with a set of seven other battleship proposals, Designs 'J₁' through 'J₇', which differed from Design 'F' in the details of their main armament. Of those 'J' variants where specific details are given, Design 'J₄' carried eight 12-inch in four twins, Design 'J₆' carried nine 12-inch in three centreline triples, and Design 'J₇' carried twelve 12-inch in four centreline triples. Design 'F' was considered the best all-round design despite several of the 'J' variants having their own advantages, particularly 'J₇' with its heavier broadside (though no sketches survive it can be assumed 'J₇' would have resembled the Russian *Ganguts*). Some reservation was expressed regarding the proposed triple turrets. During the Board meeting '[i]t was pointed out that the three gun-gunhouse could only be considered in an experimental stage, and if it should prove unsatisfactory the J₆ design would be reduced to a six-gun Ship, while the 'F' design would be an eight-gun Ship.'²⁰

As work continued on Design 'F' the question of anti-torpedo boat armament resurfaced. American adoption of the 5-inch gun in their new dreadnought battleships led D.N.O. Jellicoe to ask D.N.C. Watts if such a weapon could be used in the new design in place of the planned 4-inch battery.²¹ It was considered possible but difficult—there was no such British 5-inch weapon available for production, and Jellicoe settled for increasing the number of 4-inch weapons from sixteen to twenty.²²

¹⁹ Sir Philip Watts, 'Designs of Armoured Vessels for the 1907-8 Programme.', f. 1, Ships Cover 225 (Design F), D.N.C. MSS.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jellicoe, 'New Battleship Design. Anti-Torpedo Boat Guns.', 12 March 1907, G.1196/07, f. 5-5A, Ships Cover 225 (Design F), D.N.C. MSS.

²² Unsigned, 'Anti-torpedo boat guns.', n.d. [April 1907], f. 12, Ships Cover 225 (Design F), D.N.C. MSS.

Very late in the day Design 'F' was abandoned. Cold feet at the Admiralty over the new triple turret were likely responsible. The D.N.C. was instructed to replace it with a lengthened *Bellerophon*, and the result was the *St. Vincent* class, which amongst other minor improvements had the 4-inch battery increased to eighteen guns.²³

Flotillas

The initial hope for the 1906-1907 Programme was four armoured ships, twelve submarines, and seventeen destroyers—twelve Coastals and five *Tribals*.²⁴ By 1907 it was clear that the previous 'high-low mix' of Tribals and Coastals was no longer practical. During the June 7th meeting of the Sea Lords and principal department heads to discuss the details of the 1908-09 Estimates it was decided that a new type of destroyer should be built 'of a type embodying superior endurance and sea-keeping qualities to the most recent German Destroyer.'²⁵ The meeting suggested ordering twelve such ships, but by November the number had risen to sixteen. The Estimates Committee felt that 'a large number of our older destroyers will become obsolescent before long, and that in modern boats, after 1910, we shall scarcely be holding our own with Germany.'²⁶ They were also careful not to deprecate the value of the previous programmes:

'It has not been forgotten in making this calculation that the new coastal destroyers ... are not only equal to a considerable portion of the German destroyers ... but are even better adapted than the bigger and more powerful ocean-going destroyers for certain specific services of an offensive nature ... chiefly owing to their lighter draft of water and greater invisibility.'

²³ McBride, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

²⁴ Admiralty, 'Report of Naval Estimates Committee', 16 November 1905, F.P. 4709, p. 46, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

²⁵ Admiralty, 'Notes of Discussion Relative to New Vessels to be Laid Down in 1908-09.', in F.P. 4724, Admiralty, 'Navy Estimates Committee. Report upon Naval Estimates for 1908-9', November 1907, p. 13, FISR 8/11, Fisher MSS.

²⁶ Admiralty, 'Navy Estimates Committee. Report upon Naval Estimates for 1908-9', November 1907, F.P. 4724, p. 6, FISR 8/11, Fisher MSS.

Having made that disclaimer, however, the Committee admitted ‘we must be prepared for a large destroyer programme twelve months hence.’²⁷ The earliest British destroyers were now close to being worn out, and ordering sixteen destroyers in the current year’s programme would avoid a much larger order (more than two dozen) in the 1909-10 Estimates. This increase in destroyer procurement was obtained with no addition to the shipbuilding estimate by sacrificing one of the year’s planned armoured cruisers, with the remaining balance of the savings funding another small, fast cruiser intended to support flotilla work.²⁸

The resultant design marked a retreat from the extremes of the *Tribal* class back to something that was in essence an improved *River* type; an early sketch specification even referred to the design as a 30-knot *River*.²⁹ The Home Fleet got a chance to influence the design of the new ships when Admiral Bridgeman forwarded a paper by Commodore (T) Lewis Bayly to the Admiralty, sections of which were relayed to the D.N.C.³⁰ Bayly felt the duty of British destroyers were ‘[m]ost emphatically to destroy Enemy’s T.B.D.s. and T.Bs.’ To this end Bayly felt British destroyers should devote themselves entirely to this duty, and that attacks by them on enemy capital ships ‘would be criminal ... because the enemy’s ships are doing exactly what the British Admiral wants[.]’³¹ Simply put, Bayly thought a Mahanian fleet action had a better chance of securing the destruction of the enemy battlefleet than a flotilla ambush. Bridgeman generally concurred with Bayly’s analysis, but at the Admiralty D.N.O. Bacon condemned the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁸ Admiralty, ‘Notes of Discussion Relative to New Vessels to be Laid Down in 1908-09.’, 12 June 1907, in Admiralty, ‘Navy Estimates Committee. Report upon Naval Estimates for 1908-9’, November 1907, F.P. 4724, p. 13, FISR 8/11, Fisher MSS.

²⁹ Unsigned, ‘H.M.S. 30 Knot T.B. Destroyer (River Class). Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c.’, n.d., f. 8, Ships Cover 242 (Beagle Class Destroyer), D.N.C. MSS.

³⁰ Bridgeman, ‘Duties of Torpedo Craft in War.’, 10 November 1907, No. 1687/030, f. 11a, Ships Cover 242 (Beagle Class Destroyer), D.N.C. MSS.

³¹ Bayly, ‘Destroyers’, n.d. [Summer 1907], in Bridgeman, ‘Duties of Torpedo Craft in War.’, 10 November 1907, No. 1687/030, f. 11a, Ships Cover 242 (Beagle Class Destroyer), D.N.C. MSS.

submission as one ‘which if concurred in would, I submit, do much harm in the service.’³² D.N.I. Slade thought Bacon too alarmist, though he also thought Bayly went too far in deprecating destroyer attacks on enemy heavy units.³³

By June of 1908, the new specifications were ready. The resulting *Beagle* class were the last destroyers built by individual yards to a broad Admiralty specification. They were to be of roughly 850 tons displacement, to burn coal instead of oil (a step which increased their unit cost substantially), and make 27 knots speed.³⁴ The *Beagles* set the basis for Royal Navy destroyer designs throughout the rest of the Prewar Era, with a notable and abortive exception in 1914.

Return of the Small(er) Cruiser

The controversy surrounding Fisher’s creation of the *Dreadnought* and the *Invincibles* is well known and often cited by historians. However, the interrelated abandonment of cruiser construction, which had provoked an equal storm of controversy at the time, is often overlooked. In fact the lapse in the Navy’s construction of cruisers—or ships not initially designated as cruisers but which would later be designated as such—was shorter than the controversy may make it appear. Only the 1905 and 1906 programmes saw no such ships ordered, and if the three *Invincibles* and the *Swift* are included in the totals, there was no cessation at all. An Admiralty report from 1905 shows that more *Swifts* were to ordered, one in the 1907 programme and two more in 1908.³⁵ Furthermore, an improved edition of the *Sentinel* type scouts was under preparation for the 1905-6 Estimates before being abandoned.³⁶

³² Bacon minute, 9 December 1907, on Bridgeman, ‘Duties of Torpedo Craft in War.’, 10 November 1907, No. 1687/030, f. 11a, Ships Cover 242 (Beagle Class Destroyer), D.N.C. MSS.

³³ Slade minute, 12 December, on Bridgeman, ‘Duties of Torpedo Craft in War.’, 10 November 1907, No. 1687/030, f. 11a, Ships Cover 242 (Beagle Class Destroyer), D.N.C. MSS.

³⁴ D.K. Brown, *Grand Fleet*, pp. 68-69; Friedman, *British Destroyers*, pp. 114-118; March, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

³⁵ Admiralty, ‘Preliminary Statement for Preparation of Naval Establishments Enquiry Committee’, July 1905, in ‘Naval Establishments Enquiry Committee’, July 1905, F.P. 4708, p. 13, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

³⁶ Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

Neither of these proposals came to be, however there was a resumption of cruiser construction beginning in with the 1907-8 Estimates. At the same meetings where battleship Design 'F' was approved it was decided to build a single fast 'Parent Ship for Destroyers' at the Pembroke Royal Dockyard. Officially designated as an 'Unarmoured Cruiser', it was to be laid down in April 1907 for completion in 21 months.³⁷ Fisher entrusted D.N.I. Ottley to produce a justification for such a ship. Ottley, doubtless under Fisher's guidance, set out the ship's *raison d'être* as follows:

'Those who would urge Great Britain to forthwith embark on a heavy expenditure for unarmoured cruisers of moderate speed appear oblivious of the fact that, even to-day, in her numerous flotilla of fast craft (scouts, destroyers, and torpedo-boats) this country already possesses the nucleus of a mosquito fleet, which ... will at all events be able to press home its investigations off enemy's ports fronting upon the *Narrow Seas* and *German Ocean*, with a well grounded confidence that, if chased, it may show a clean pair of heels to an enemy in superior force. This our existing unarmoured cruisers for the most part could not do, and consequently since they can neither fight nor run away, they would apparently be fulfilling a better destiny on the scrap heap than in the war fleet.'³⁸

The new unarmoured cruiser was to be a further addition to this 'mosquito fleet', capable of performing as a mother ship for the new *Tribals* and 'suitable also for many of the multifarious duties' currently undertaken by the older unarmoured cruisers Fisher had been campaigning against since he took office.

The design chosen for building at Pembroke had been under development since April 1906.³⁹ In November 1907, work began in earnest on a 'New *Boadicea*' design to be built under

³⁷ Admiralty, 'Board Minutes. Tuesday and Wednesday, 11th and 12th December 1906.', 26 December 1906, in Admiralty, 'Designs of Armoured Ships to be Laid Down in November 1907.', mid-1907, F.P. 4723, p. 2, FISR 8/10, Fisher MSS.

³⁸ Ottley, 'The Strategic Aspect of Our Building Programme, 1907.', 7 January 1907, in Admiralty, 'Designs of Armoured Ships to be Laid Down in November 1907.', mid-1907, F.P. 4723, pp. 34-35, FISR 8/10, Fisher MSS.

³⁹ Constructor W.H. Whiting to Assistant Constructor C.W. Knight, 21 May 1906, f. 1, Ships Cover 231(*Boadicea* Class), D.N.C. MSS. Friedman mentions Fisher giving the initial requirements to D.N.C. Watts in January 1906. Friedman, *British Destroyers*, p. 111. See also Admiralty, 'Report of Committee appointed to consider the Questions of the Provision of a Parent Vessel for Coastal Destroyers, the Utilisation of Mercantile Cruisers, and the Fusion

the forthcoming 1908-9 Estimates. Early on, it had been decided that the new design should be larger than previous scouts owing to the continued German construction of small cruisers superior to existing British ships.⁴⁰ Initial sketch specifications were for a 4,000 ton, 25 knot ship with a protective deck, armed with twelve 4-inch guns and carrying ‘50% more total of oil & coal than in *Boadicea*’.⁴¹ The growth in size, and especially the large provision of fuel, suggests that from the start the Admiralty wanted ships closer to the classic long-range cruiser type which had gone into abeyance in favour of cruisers designed for flotilla support duties. By January 1908 additional suggestions from the Board had resulted in four designs named ‘A’ through ‘D’.⁴² None satisfied the Board so a fifth design was drawn up, intermediate between Designs ‘B’ and ‘C’. The new Design ‘E’ displaced 4650 tons and carried two six-inch guns and ten four-inch guns plus a Maxim gun.⁴³ This design was considered acceptable and became the *Bristol* class, and the increase in size and gunpower resulted in the type being redesignated as second-class protected cruisers.⁴⁴ The *Bristol* design became the template for a long series of cruisers built for the Navy throughout the remainder of the Prewar Era.⁴⁵

Battles for the Estimates

The kaleidoscope’s worth of designs described above were all predicated on the Admiralty receiving sufficient funds to actually build them. This rather obvious fact should once

Design of Armoured Vessel.’, n.d. [late 1905?], in Admiralty, ‘Navy Estimates Committee, 1906-7.’, 10 January 1906, F.P. 4711, pp. 18-19, FISR 8/6, Fisher MSS.

⁴⁰ Norman Friedman, *British Cruisers: Two World Wars and After* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2010), pp. 18-19.

⁴¹ Unsigned, ‘Re C.N. 9183/07’, 2 November 1907, f. 1, Ships Cover 240 (*Bristol* Class), D.N.C. MSS.

⁴² Unsigned, ‘Comparative Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c. for Cruiser Designs ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’’, January 1908, f. 18, Ships Cover 240 (*Bristol* Class), D.N.C. MSS. Of interest is Design ‘C’, which carried two 6-inch guns in single turrets fore and aft.

⁴³ Unsigned, ‘Comparative Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c. for Cruiser Designs ‘B’ & ‘E’’, 23 January 1908, f. 21, Ships Cover 240 (*Bristol* Class), D.N.C. MSS.

⁴⁴ Unsigned, ‘H.M.S. New 2nd Class Protected Cruiser. Comparative Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c.’, 30 May 1908, f. 22, Ships Cover 240 (*Bristol* Class), D.N.C. MSS.

⁴⁵ David Lyon, ‘The First Town Class 1908-31 Part I’, in Antony Preston (ed.), *Warship*, vol. i (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1978), pp. 50-53.

again, if Fisher's maxim that repetition is the key to success,⁴⁶ underline the importance of matters financial. It has already been demonstrated how in 1906, for example, pressure for economies in naval expenditure were a major—perhaps *the* major—motive force behind the creation of the Home Fleet. From 1907 through 1909, however, the eternal war between the Admiralty and the economists entered a new and vicious stage.

Having received First Lord Tweedmouth's proposed Naval Estimates for 1907-1908, Chancellor Asquith wrote to the Prime Minister that they left him 'much disquieted' because they offered a further reduction from the previous Estimates of only £450,000. Asquith grouched that 'this is a very poor & inadequate fulfilment of our pledge in regard to reduction of expenditure on fighting services.'⁴⁷ Furthermore,

'I confess that, after a year's experience, I have very little confidence in the present lot of Sea Lords, who chop & change as the whims suit them.

'Our naval supremacy is so completely assured—having regard to the sketchy paper programmes & inferior shipbuilding resources of the other Powers—that there is no possible reason for allowing ourselves to be hastily misled into these nebulous & ambitious developments.'

In reply, and possibly remembering his experience during the 1884 'Truth about the Navy' imbroglio,⁴⁸ Campbell-Bannerman assured Asquith that 'I entirely share your dislike & suspicion of the Navy prospects.' He confessed, however, that there was 'desperately little sound standing ground in all this!'⁴⁹ David Lloyd George later floridly recalled that he fellow radicals felt

⁴⁶ 'You must keep on telling the people the same thing, and of course this is the secret of advertisement – Pears' soap, etc.!' Fisher to Arnold White, 17 July 1900, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, p. 157.

⁴⁷ Asquith to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 December 1906, f. 273-276, Add MS 41210, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

⁴⁸ Campbell-Bannerman had been Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty at the time. John Wilson, *CB*, pp. 63-65. For a new perspective on this much-discussed incident and Campbell-Bannerman's part in it, see John F. Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 265-278; and Idem, 'In the Shadow of Briggs: A New Perspective on British Naval Administration and W. T. Stead's 1884 "Truth about the Navy" Campaign', *International Journal of Naval History* 1, no. 1 (April 2002).

⁴⁹ Campbell-Bannerman to Asquith, 4 January 1907, f. 220-221, MS.Asquith 10, H.H. Asquith MSS, Bodleian Library.

dreadnoughts 'a piece of wanton and profligate ostentation.'⁵⁰ Tweedmouth, however, was nonetheless prepared to stand by the Admiralty, and he rebuffed an overture from Campbell-Bannerman to devise a new and more economical alternative to the Two-Power Standard. Such a move would 'be sadly misunderstood' since every government 'for at least twenty-one years have accepted and acted up to the Two Power Standard and it is not to be lightly abandoned now.'⁵¹

The Admiralty and Fisher especially were prepared to join battle on the issue. Fisher recruited Julian Corbett to the cause of defending the *Dreadnought* and Admiralty policy in general.⁵² The resulting works were only partially successful: 'Corbett's articles silenced the Admiralty's loudest critics they did not convince their most dangerous foe, Chancellor Asquith.'⁵³

The problem simmered through the spring and summer, but in autumn it boiled over. Towards the end of the year a group of 138 backbenchers constituting a 'Disarmament Committee' presented a demand for heavy reductions in military and naval expenditure to the Prime Minister.⁵⁴ Apparently in response to this, Sir George Murray, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, produced a memorandum for the Cabinet in which he pointed out that 'unless some substantial reduction is made in the combined total of naval and military expenditure the

⁵⁰ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, i (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1933), p. 6. I strongly concur with Nicholas Lambert's comment on this quote: '[W]hatever that meant.' Nicholas Lambert, *JNFR*, p. 137.

⁵¹ Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 21 November 1906, f. 135, Add MS 41231, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

⁵² Jon Sumida, 'The Historian as a Contemporary Analyst: Sir Julian Corbett and Sir John Fisher', in Goldrick and Hattenborf (eds.), *Mahan Is Not Enough*, pp. 125-140.

⁵³ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴ Howard Weinroth, 'Left Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 4 (1971), p. 97.

Government may be exposed to a serious attack by a considerable section of their own followers.’⁵⁵

Murray’s paper appeared just in time to frustrate Tweedmouth, who had been writing his own memorandum in response to the news that the German government had adopted a modification to their Navy Act which reduced the replacement period of their battleships from twenty-five years down to twenty.⁵⁶ ‘I have just read Sir George Murray’s Paper’, Tweedmouth wrote testily, ‘I do not quite know what is the intention of the... Naval portion of the Paper.’⁵⁷ Although he did not deign to critique Murray’s paper in detail, Tweedmouth objected to Murray’s assumption that future construction would be undertaken along the lines of *Dreadnought*’s rapid and costly building time: ‘Except as a feat, it has nothing to recommend it.’⁵⁸ Furthermore he declared that the Admiralty ‘may be relied on not to propose a new construction programme larger than is absolutely required to maintain our naval supremacy[.]’⁵⁹ Nevertheless, although the destruction of the Russian battle fleet had left the Royal Navy with ‘full possession of a two-Power standard strength for the next year or two,’ in the longer term the picture was less favourable. To maintain the Two Power Standard, defined by Tweedmouth as 10% superiority over the French and German fleets in 1920,⁶⁰ would require the ordering and construction of forty-seven battleships between 1909 and 1920. If, as Tweedmouth felt was probable, the United States possessed the second largest battleship fleet in 1920 after Britain, even more than forty-seven new battleships would be required.⁶¹ Although the Admiralty was content to include only a single new dreadnought in the upcoming 1908-9 Estimates, Tweedmouth’s calculations for the

⁵⁵ G.H. Murray, ‘Naval and Military Expenditure’, 20 November 1907, p. 2, CAB 37/90/98.

⁵⁶ Tweedmouth, ‘Future Battleship Building’, 21 November 1907, CAB 37/90/101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ This combination was selected because the Admiralty possessed ‘fairly reliable data’ on their future naval programmes.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

needs of 1920 were a warning to his colleagues of ‘a need for a much increased programme of new construction in future years.’⁶²

The Admiralty, meanwhile, had been hard at work drawing up their programme for the 1908-9 Estimates. Aside from the single battleship, the initial plans drawn up in June 1907 comprised two small armoured cruisers carrying eight 9.2-inch guns, five improved *Boadiceas*, twelve destroyers and a half-million sterling worth of submarines.⁶³ Shortly afterwards the programme was rearranged, sacrificing one of the armoured cruisers for a sixth *Boadicea* and four additional destroyers.⁶⁴ As Nicholas Lambert notes, neither the Chancellor nor the rest of the Cabinet could honestly ‘accuse the Admiralty of profligacy.’⁶⁵ In fact, had the cost of naval works (see Chapter 3) not been included in the Estimates, the Admiralty would have been able to claim reduction on the previous year.⁶⁶ In addition, several important men at the Admiralty were unhappy with the new programme to say the least. Edmond Slade, the D.N.I., was horrified, moaning to Julian Corbett that ‘They say that we ought to lay down only one battleship this next year, not four as I was told.’⁶⁷

It is unlikely Slade’s feelings would have mattered for very much had he expressed them outside his letter. The other members of the Cabinet, and especially Asquith, were not in a magnanimous mood. The Chancellor was scrambling to find sufficient money for the upcoming Old Age Pensions Bill.⁶⁸ Inevitably, Asquith looked to an assumed peace dividend to provide a solution. When Tweedmouth indicated the 1908-9 Estimates might include a more than £2

⁶² Ibid., p. 3.

⁶³ Admiralty, ‘Proposed Programme of New Construction—1908-1909.’, in Admiralty, ‘Navy Estimates Committee. Report upon Navy Estimates for 1908-9.’, November 1907, F.P. 4724, p. 15, FISR 8/11, Fisher MSS.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Slade to Corbett, 15 October 1907, CBT/13/2 (14), Sir Julian Corbett MSS, NMM.

⁶⁸ Repington, ‘Notes of a Conversation between Mr. Haldane, Mr. McKenna and Colonel Repington at Mr. Haldane’s Houses’, 8 May 1908, ESHR 16/12, Esher MSS.

million increase over the previous year's Estimates, Asquith declared that as Chancellor 'I cannot and will not be responsible for submitting such estimates to the House of Commons.'⁶⁹

Soon thereafter the Cabinet dropped a bombshell on the Admiralty. On November 26th, Tweedmouth was informed that the estimates 'must be completely revised with the view of securing that the estimated expenditure on the Navy for 1908-9 shall not exceed the figures of the last year.'⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Cabinet had decided that 'no Estimate for a new Dreadnought need be included in the Estimates for 1908-9.' Tweedmouth seems to have panicked at this, which forced Fisher to draw up a compromise proposal that would reduce the increase on the 1907-8 Estimates (via some creative accounting and deferred payments) to £560,000.⁷¹ However these would only be temporary reductions and eventually 'the Treasury would still have to cough up an extra half million.'⁷²

Fisher may have been initially willing to compromise, but the other Sea Lords were not so obliging, and quickly brought Fisher around to their views. Collectively they produced a blunt memorandum for Tweedmouth announcing that 'we have got to face largely increased Naval Estimates in order to preserve our Naval supremacy, and it seems a necessity that we should adhere to what really may be characterised as a very modest shipbuilding programme for next year'.⁷³ Furthermore

'Although it is quite true that our preponderance in Battleships at the present might justify the omission of the solitary Battleship proposed, yet with the full knowledge and absolute certainty (now afforded by the German programme just issued) of having to commence a large Battleship programme in 1909-10, it would be most unbusinesslike, and indeed disastrous, to close down the armour plate industry of this country by the entire cessation of Battleship building. It

⁶⁹ Asquith to Tweedmouth, 21 November 1907, MSS 254/924/2, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁷⁰ Cabinet minute, 26 November 1907, MSS 254/924/8, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁷¹ Vincent Baddeley to Sir Henry Jackson, 29 November 1907, MSS 254/924/9, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁷² Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

⁷³ Sea Lords, 'Memorandum by the Sea Lords for the Information of the First Lord', 3 December 1907, MAY/9, Admiral of the Fleet Sir William May MSS, NMM.

would similarly disastrous to abruptly stop the manufacture of heavy gun mountings, which the omission the Battleship would also involve.⁷⁴

The ‘right course’, in fact, would be to authorize *two* Dreadnoughts in 1908 instead of just one. In summary, ‘it is inadmissible to have a less programme than that carefully discussed and decided upon by the Board of Admiralty, and the Estimates as a whole do not admit of any further reduction consistent with the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its readiness for war.’⁷⁵ As additional fortification the Sea Lords told Tweedmouth they were prepared to resign *en bloc* over the issue, so it was not without reason that Slade told Corbett that ‘the Gov^t & the Admiralty are at daggers drawn.’⁷⁶

There now came Tweedmouth’s finest hour. Buoyed by his service advisors’ adamancy, Tweedmouth fought back in Cabinet as ferociously as he ever had. Just a few days after the Sea Lords presented their memorandum, Esher told the King ‘Tweedmouth was on the point of resigning the Admiralty.’⁷⁷ Campbell-Bannerman sent in Sir Edward Grey—regarded by both sides as independent—to look for reductions with a small committee. Unfortunately for the economists, Grey found nothing,⁷⁸ and Tweedmouth privately informed Grey that ‘I cannot hold out any hope that the minimum can be cut down any lower by the Board of Admiralty as at present constituted.’⁷⁹ Campbell-Bannerman gave way and endorsed the original proposed estimates.⁸⁰ Before the Admiralty could celebrate, the Prime Minister suffered a massive and ultimately fatal heart attack and Asquith became deputy leader.⁸¹ Spurred on by the Radicals, Asquith counterattacked.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Slade to Corbett, 3 January 1908, CBT/6/5/(22), Corbett MSS.

⁷⁷ Esher journal entry, 8 December 1907, ESHR 2/10, Esher MSS.

⁷⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁷⁹ Tweedmouth to Grey, 30 December 1907, MSS 254/926/16, Tweedmouth MSS.

⁸⁰ Esher journal entry, 7 February 1908, ESHR 2/11, Esher MSS.

⁸¹ Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, third ed. (London: Collins, 1969), pp. 177-178.

Fisher was called to the House of Commons by Louis Harcourt—and furthermore told to enter through the Ladies' entrance—where the latter ordered the Admiralty to reduce the Estimates by £1,340,000.⁸² When Fisher protested that the Estimates had 'already been approved by the Cabinet and signed', Harcourt 'then adopted a tone which was arrogant and almost uncivil, intimating plainly that either five Members of the Cabinet, or the Board of Admiralty, would have to resign.'⁸³ Fisher declared the Sea Lords would go and leave the Government with the difficult task of rebuilding the Board, Harcourt implied that Lord Charles Beresford would 'at once' agree to be Fisher's replacement, at which Fisher stormed out. Lloyd George and Churchill at a subsequent meeting told Fisher much the same 'only in a more conciliatory style.' At the mention of Beresford becoming First Sea Lord, Fisher remarked that Lord Charles would 'sell' them within three months' time. Fisher also dangled an offer of compromise that the 1908-9 Estimates could be cut provided the deficit was covered by the adoption of one or more Supplementary Estimates later on.

Tweedmouth found the supplementary estimate proposal appealing, and subsequently wrote to Asquith after an evening Cabinet meeting on February 10th that,

'I cannot go to bed without frankly telling you that the only condition on which I can consent to a further reduction of the naval estimates of 1908-9 is that a written engagement should be given me that I shall be allowed a supplementary estimate of £400,000 or such smaller sums as may be necessary to complete the sum required efficiently to carry out the Service for the year 1908-9.'⁸⁴

Immediately after this, Asquith and the Cabinet 'called the Admiralty's bluff', and Tweedmouth was told that only a £900,000 increase would be accepted.⁸⁵ Tweedmouth grumbled that he was

⁸² Esher journal entry, 7 February 1908, ESHR 2/11, Esher MSS.

⁸³ The five Cabinet members, Fisher later determined, were Lloyd George, Harcourt, McKenna, Burns, and possibly Crewe.

⁸⁴ Tweedmouth to Asquith, 10 February 1908, f. 180, Add MS 41231, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

⁸⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.* p. 141.

‘sorry I was not told ... sooner nor ... consulted’.⁸⁶ The First Lord had little choice but to accept, but defiantly insisted that ‘I ought to receive the frank assurance of my colleagues that if supplementary estimates are made necessary by the requirements of the Service of the Navy to the amount of £400,000 or less, I should have their support without consideration[.]’⁸⁷ The First Lord further complained of ‘a very cavalier manner of treating a colleague and the whole Board of Admiralty except the financial secy not to consult them before so grand a matter was decided.’⁸⁸

Neither Campbell-Bannerman nor Tweedmouth saw the affair through to its conclusion. Like his political superior, Tweedmouth was a sick man. The illness was it seems quite literally in his mind—possibly a brain tumour.⁸⁹ Whatever the cause, the First Lord became increasingly erratic in behaviour. Asquith later recounted to Venetia Stanley that Tweedmouth’s decay was ‘a tragic case, for he was one of the sanest & most high-spirited of mankind. I shall never forget my bewilderment when, in the course of a longish tête-à-tête in the Cabinet room, it gradually dawned upon me that he was off his head.’⁹⁰ He used stronger language at the time, calling Tweedmouth ‘a “raving lunatic”’ in conversation with the Chief Whip.⁹¹ Tweedmouth was duly ‘kicked upstairs’ to the position of Lord President of the Council. It was a political death sentence, and Tweedmouth himself would succumb to illness a few months later.

The fact that successive Liberal First Lords, and especially those known as ‘economists’, would continually side with their own department over Cabinet desires for budgetary

⁸⁶ Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 11 February 1908, f. 182, Add MS 41231, Campbell-Bannerman MSS.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 182-183.

⁸⁸ Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 12 February 1908, f. 244, MS.Asquith 19, Asquith MSS.

⁸⁹ [Anonymous], *Edward Marjoribanks, Lord Tweedmouth K.T., 1849-1909: Notes and Recollections* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1909), p. 31, describes Tweedmouth as suffering a severe stroke in the summer of 1908.

⁹⁰ Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 31 October 1914, in Michael and Eleanor Brock (eds.), *H.H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley*, paperback ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 300.

⁹¹ Pease journal, 25 May 1908, quoted in Cameron Hazlehurst and Christine Woodland (eds.), *A Liberal Chronicle: Journals and Papers of J.A. Pease, 1st Lord Gainford, 1908 to 1910* (London: The Historians’ Press, 1994), p. 25.

concessions is an interesting phenomenon, especially so considering how junior most of the First Lords were in terms of standing within the party. To a certain extent Fisher and his fellow members of the Admiralty deserve credit for supplying ammunition for the Ministerial guns, but that cannot be the sole reason for the Admiralty's relative success at fending off many of the more drastic actions demanded by the Treasury. Nor can the skills of the First Lords provide the answer, since the Treasury was represented by equally skilled politicians such as Asquith and David Lloyd George.

The real reason for the Admiralty's success in budget battles was a combination of public willingness to pay the Admirals' Bill and the strong position this gave to First Lords even in the face of great pressure from within the cabinet. In retrospect, the building programme described in the Cawdor Memorandum had never truly been departed from. The proscribed four per year minimum was held to by both Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, as can be shown by the following table:

1906-7	1907-8	1908-9	1909-10
<i>Bellerophon</i>	<i>St. Vincent</i>	<i>Neptune</i>	<i>Hercules</i>
<i>Temeraire</i>	<i>Collingwood</i>	<i>Indefatigable</i>	<i>Colossus</i>
<i>Superb</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>		<i>Lion</i>
			<i>Princess Royal</i>
			<i>Orion</i>
			<i>Conqueror</i>
			<i>Monarch</i>
			<i>Thunderer</i>

Simple arithmetic shows the resolution: $3 + 3 + 2 + 8 \div 4 = 4$. Temporary cuts to capital ship construction in sympathy to the political necessities the Liberals faced ultimately this had little effect on actual construction in the long term. In fairness, however, to those who criticized the reductions in construction, it had been a great struggle simply to maintain this minimum building tempo.

Four? Six? Eight?

Writing on the announcement in Parliament of the 1908-9 Estimates, *The Times* declared, '[t]he most favourable verdict which the country can be expected to pronounce on such a programme is "Not guilty, but don't do it again," with especial stress laid on the latter clause of the sentence and many reserves in regard to the former.'⁹² Others were less restrained, with the *Daily Mail* living up to reputation by asking whether Britain's maritime supremacy would be sacrificed to provide old-age pensions.⁹³ During the debate in the Commons, Balfour raised the question of 'whether in the latter months of 1911 there will not be thirteen ships of the "Dreadnought" and "Invincible" types belonging to Germany and only twelve belonging to Great Britain' due to possible increases in the German building programme. Asquith, by now *de facto* Prime Minister owing to Campbell-Bannerman's terminal condition, replied that while he doubted this would be the case, but that 'without the faintest hesitation' if there was 'a probability or a reasonable probability of the German programme being carried out' as Balfour's figures suggested, 'we should deem it our duty to provide not only for a sufficient number of ships, but for such a date for laying down those ships that at the end of 1911 the superiority of Germany which the right hon. Gentleman foreshadows would not be an actual fact.'⁹⁴

A few weeks after this exchange, which Marder called 'the high point of the navy debates',⁹⁵ Campbell-Bannerman finally resigned and the now-Prime Minister Asquith put his hopes for economies with the young barrister and relatively junior Cabinet member Reginald McKenna. Asquith and McKenna had worked together in the Treasury until the latter replaced Augustine Birrell as President of the Board of Education in February 1907. The choice of

⁹² 'The Navy Estimates.', *The Times*, 25 February 1908, no. 38578, p. 9.

⁹³ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 139.

⁹⁴ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 10 March 1908, Fourth Series, v. 185, col. 1335-1338.

⁹⁵ Marder, *loc. cit.*

McKenna was an indication that Asquith had no intention of letting up on his push for defence economies, for McKenna was regarded by the Prime Minister as a fellow ‘economist’ and was expected to succeed where Tweedmouth had failed. Towards this end even Fisher was considered expendable, as the Admiral later recalled to John Leyland that McKenna was ‘the man who on succeeding Tweedmouth was expected to kick me out!’⁹⁶ It must therefore have been a great shock to Asquith when McKenna ‘went native’ as so many previous First Lords had done.⁹⁷

Any mutual suspicion between Fisher and McKenna died quickly and Fisher soon wrote to McKenna ‘You & I cannot have secrets from each other about the Navy’.⁹⁸ The two men formed a formidable administrative partnership that grew into genuine friendship. Even after Fisher’s departure and McKenna’s sacking after Agadir the two remained in touch.

If he ever seriously had a mandate to remove Fisher, McKenna would likely have come to the realization that Fisher, however unpopular in certain circles, was the only man who had any notion of preserving some sense of fiscal discipline, and the alternatives were politically worse. Beresford was nominally a Conservative Unionist, but was a political wild card at best. In any case there were no credible grounds in early 1908 for dismissing Fisher apart from a tenuous case that he had already served two-and-a-half years as First Sea Lord and thus was nearing the end of his traditional term. This was a non-starter, and Fisher would later explain that there was no traditional term limit for First Sea Lords anyway. Fisher added—sans any subtlety whatsoever—that ‘the real limit is the period of cordial harmony between the First Lord & First Sea Lord. There is no other condition.’⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Fisher to John Leyland, 1 February 1911, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 356.

⁹⁷ Professor Grove uses this term to describe George Ward Hunt, First Lord 1874-1877. Grove, *Royal Navy from 1815*, p. 57.

⁹⁸ Fisher to McKenna, 16 May 1908, f. 7, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

⁹⁹ Fisher to McKenna, 28 October 1908, f. 2, MCKN 6/1, McKenna MSS.

The change in First Lord brought about a new and even more hostile between Beresford and the Admiralty. Beresford's correspondence with Lord Tweedmouth, even during his most violent disagreements with the Admiralty, had always been respectful and in places even genuinely friendly—Beresford's letter of condolence to Tweedmouth after his mother's death was written with genuine sympathy.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps this was on account of their both being titled aristocrats. Whatever the case, Beresford's treatment of McKenna can only be described as exceptionally hostile, with the disclaimer that much of it occurred during or after the most bitter moments of the feud. For instance, McKenna is singled out for practically all the blame in Beresford's 1912 screed *The Betrayal*.¹⁰¹

In May 1908 Fisher offered McKenna a solution that would dispose of Beresford and the related criticisms of the Home Fleet. In two proposed notices (one for Beresford and the other for the press) Fisher stated—only partially disingenuously—that the goal was the further development of the Home Fleet. To this end the Channel Fleet and the First Cruiser Squadron would be absorbed into the Home Fleet, with four of the Channel Fleet battleships being transferred to the Nore Division of the Home Fleet. In addition the Home Fleet would become the senior command, with the Channel Fleet reverting to the older name Channel Squadron, with its commanding officer being termed a Vice-Admiral Commanding instead of a Commander-in-Chief. This change was set to take place after the summer manoeuvres concluded in July.¹⁰²

Fisher's proposal, whatever its genuine intentions regarding the Home Fleet's development, demonstrate that by mid-1908 the fighting between Beresford and Fisher had

¹⁰⁰ Most revealing is Beresford's pronouncement 'A man can only have one mother & life is never quite the same when she is gone.' Beresford to Tweedmouth, 26 March 1908, MSS 254/848, Tweedmouth MSS.

¹⁰¹ Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, *The Betrayal: Being a Record of Facts Concerning Naval Policy and Administration from the Year 1902 to the Present Time* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1912).

¹⁰² Fisher, 'Suggested letter to Lord Charles Beresford for the First Lord's Consideration whenever he decides to make the changes set forth in this Statement', n.d. [1908], and Fisher, 'Suggested Notice for the Press', n.d. [1908], both enclosures in Fisher to McKenna, 26 May 1908, f. 10-12, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

become general within the service. Admiral Sir Edmund Poë told George King-Hall that ‘Sir John had destroyed the camaraderie of the Service and ... Officers were all partisans of Sir John or Lord Charles Beresford and would not speak to each other.’¹⁰³

For Fisher’s part, he was determined to stay in control to the bitter end. His secretary wrote to Captain Ernest Troubridge of the First Sea Lord that:

‘His view is that he is not going to be blackmailed or driven out by Armstrong & company. At one time he fully intended to have gone this October, until the Armstrong campaign & the Beresford inquiry started. Now he says that nothing will induce him to move until the day he is compelled to do so, viz 25 January 1911. He is prepared to be kicked out, if necessary, but not to cave in to the campaign to make him leave voluntarily.’¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile Fisher and McKenna had finally planned to merge the Channel and Home Fleets. The plan was that Beresford would go ashore, May would take command of the Home Fleet, and the Channel Fleet would disappear.¹⁰⁵ As Nicholas Lambert wrote, the end of the Channel Fleet was ‘an ignominious end to his distinguished albeit checkered [*sic*] career’. Worse, it was ‘also the death of his life-long ambition to become First Sea Lord.’¹⁰⁶ To no one’s surprise, Beresford was not prepared to go down without a fight.

Inquiry

The Admiralty enjoyed only a brief respite after Beresford went ashore. Soon, despite writing to Troubridge that as an active naval officer it would be ‘impossible’ to discuss his future plans openly, Beresford resumed plotting the downfall of Fisher and his works.¹⁰⁷ He began by writing to his party chief Balfour.¹⁰⁸ Balfour was torn; he was still loyal to Fisher, yet he could

¹⁰³ George King-Hall diary, 23 October 1908, King-Hall MSS.

¹⁰⁴ Crease to Troubridge, 6 July 1909, C.3, TRO/300/5, Admiral Sir Ernest Troubridge MSS, NMM.

¹⁰⁵ Unsigned memorandum, n.d. [January 1909?], f. 8-13, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS. See also Admiralty, ‘Home Fleet reorganisation.’, 1909, X.1109/1909, ADM 1/8040.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁷ Beresford to Troubridge, 20 February 1909, B.7, TRO/300/5, Troubridge MSS.

¹⁰⁸ Beresford to Balfour, 24 March 1909, f. 186-187, Add MS 49713, Balfour MSS.

not afford to antagonize Beresford at a critical moment for the Conservative Party. Unsurprisingly, Balfour made no promises to the Admiral but did however suggest writing to Asquith.¹⁰⁹ After a March 30th *tête-à-tête* with Asquith failed to achieve the desired results,¹¹⁰ Beresford submitted a lengthy *j'accuse* to him in April.¹¹¹ Predictably, the Home Fleet came in for censure, Beresford claiming that during his time as C.-in-C. Channel Fleet 'the Fleets in Home Waters have not been organized in readiness for war, and they are not organized in readiness for war, now, to-day.'¹¹² Beresford continued on to explain how the fleet *should* be arranged:

'One large homogeneous fleet, complete in all units—battleships, armoured cruisers, protected cruisers, scouts, destroyers, mine-ships, mine-clearers, and auxiliaries, trained under the orders of one Commander-in-chief, maintained at sea, and in full commission; the administration of the various divisions being intrusted [sic] to the Admirals in command of them.'¹¹³

Asquith had, as a result of a previous meeting with Beresford, been so put off that he wanted to 'cashier' him, according to a confession he made to his wife.¹¹⁴ Beresford, naturally, had thought that particular meeting a success.¹¹⁵ This time, however, Beresford indulged in a degree of blackmail, essentially threatening to go public with his allegations if the government did not announce an enquiry by April 14th.¹¹⁶ Asquith went to McKenna, suggesting that the matter could be handled by a Committee of Imperial Defence sub-committee which would provide both cachet and, more importantly, discretion.¹¹⁷ Asquith took this advice, but ignored a further

¹⁰⁹ Balfour to Beresford, 27 March 1909, f. 188-190, Add MS 49713, Balfour MSS.

¹¹⁰ Beresford to Balfour, 31 March 1909, f. 191-192, Add MS 49713, Balfour MSS.

¹¹¹ Beresford to Asquith, 2 April 1909, in C.I.D., 'Appendices to Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford, 1909.', 12 August 1909, pp. 2-4, CAB 16/9B. Hereafter cited as Beresford Enquiry Appendices.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 161.

¹¹⁵ Freeman, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 177.

¹¹⁷ Stephen McKenna, *Reginald McKenna 1863-1943* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948), p. 86.

suggestion that the sub-committee included ‘two distinguished admirals – say, Sir Arthur Wilson and Admiral [Sir George] Neville.’¹¹⁸

When he learned of the details, Fisher let loose his frustration in a letter to Ponsonby, moaning ‘it is almost past belief how Beresford has been pandered to.’ Especially galling was how Asquith had, in Fisher’s view, hemmed and hawed on the members of the inquiry and its scope:

‘The Prime Minister without consulting the Admiralty decides on Sir A. Wilson being a Member of the Committee of Enquiry – a very good decision – but Beresford objects to him and he is taken off the Committee. Esher is especially invited to serve on the Committee at a personal interview by the Prime Minister and is appointed – Beresford objects and Esher’s appointment is cancelled. Beresford summons as witnesses my own personal staff at Admiralty to cross-examine them as to the way I conduct business, and this is to be allowed. Other officers in the Admiralty are called by him for a similar purpose. What has this got to do with the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its readiness for war? Nothing whatever! But the object is to discredit me – *he won’t* – but that has nothing to do with the licence given him.’¹¹⁹

Fisher had reason to worry, but perhaps not as much as he feared. Beresford wrote to numerous officers asking them to appear as witnesses, and the response from the majority were at the very least unenthusiastic. Sir A. Berkeley Milne, Beresford’s successor in command of what was now the Second Division of the Home Fleet, wrote back that ‘Considering my present position, I think it would be inadvisable to name me as a witness before the Court.’¹²⁰ A list in one of the Cabinet Office files relating the Enquiry shows that, aside from Milne, Beresford proposed to call numerous Captains and several prominent Admiralty civil servants.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Fisher to Ponsonby, 24 April 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 247.

¹²⁰ Milne to Beresford, c. 29 April 1909, MLN/227, Admiral Sir Archibald Berkeley Milne MSS, NMM.

¹²¹ ‘List of Witnesses’, enclosure in Ottley to McKenna, 27 April 1909, f. 21, CAB 17/7.

A more helpful response came from one of Beresford's former battleship captains, John de Robeck, to which Beresford wrote a long reply while the enquiry was underway.¹²² De Robeck's letter concerned three of Beresford's questions:

‘Whether during the period 15th Apl 09, to 24th Mch 09 the Fleets in Home waters have been organized in readiness for war and are so organized today.

‘Whether during the same period there was such a deficiency in Home waters in small craft and destroyers as to constitute a grave weakness.

‘Whether the types of British Torpedo Craft were unsuitable for the purposes required.’¹²³

De Robeck submitted that as far as destroyers were concerned, they had not been properly trained to work with the cruisers that would support them off the German coast and that there were too few of them in any case. Furthermore the fleet's Reserve Divisions were too undermanned to be ‘properly trained and organized for war’. This analysis, however, was based on de Robeck's assumption that ‘the British Naval Policy in the event of War with Germany will be the same as in the wars of the Past. That is for the Naval Forces of this country to be off the Enemy's coast and to endeavour to fight and destroy their opponents whenever opportunity offers.’

Whatever the truth of the Home Fleet's condition, it is inarguable that this was never the real issue at stake.¹²⁴ Beresford let slip his real objective to Sir Charles Ottley:

‘So far as he himself [Beresford] was concerned the main object was to drive the present Board of the Admiralty out of office.’¹²⁵

The first meeting quickly went off the rails when Beresford tried to imply Fisher and his supporters were threatening Beresford's witnesses, a charge which just as quickly proved the

¹²² Beresford to de Robeck, 14 May 1909, DRBK 3/13, de Robeck MSS.

¹²³ de Robeck to Beresford (Copy), 5 or 12 May 1909, DRBK 3/13, de Robeck MSS.

¹²⁴ It seems clear there were some potentially serious issues regarding engineering maintenance in the reserve divisions. See Battenberg, ‘Third and Fourth Divisions Home Fleet.’, 7 February 1911, MB1/T8/41, Battenberg MSS. The other documents in this folder are of interest as well.

¹²⁵ Hankey, ‘Note of remarks made by Lord Charles Beresford to Sir Charles Ottley after the meeting of the Sub-Committee, May 19th 1909’, 19 May 1909, CAB 17/7.

result of a misunderstanding between said witness, Assistant D.N.I. Captain Arthur Hulbert, and his immediate superior, Rear-Admiral Bethell.¹²⁶ Then when the committee returned to its actual subject Asquith had to coax Beresford along:

‘22. MR. ASQUITH: You are prepared to deal with each head *seriatim*, are you?

LORD CHARLES BERESFORD: Yes.

23. And to substantiate what you say here under each head?

LORD CHARLES BERESFORD: Yes.

24. MR. ASQUITH: I suppose that would be the most convenient way of taking it?’¹²⁷

This exchange—during which it is easy to imagine the Prime Minister sighing inwardly—was an ill omen, and recalls a comment of Esher’s on Asquith’s manner of overseeing meetings. In Esher’s estimation, Asquith was “‘a timid man’, ‘not imposing as a Chairman’, and lacked ‘some element of character; perhaps decision.’¹²⁸ In fairness to Asquith, Beresford was so discursive a speaker it is hard to imagine another chairman doing better under the circumstances.

In any case, Beresford soon showed he was staggeringly unprepared. On the subject of the 1907 War Plans he repeated his old accusation that they were useless and ‘absolutely theoretical’ and ‘had nothing to do with fighting or with war.’¹²⁹ He then complained of plans listing forces by squadrons instead of individual ships!

‘I went to the First Sea Lord, and I remember throwing the plan on the table and saying to him at the time, “... I throwing the “I want to know where you want me to go, and what you want me to do; and it is no use saying ‘the sixth cruiser squadron’, for I have got to put down on Sunday morning what are the ships in the sixth cruiser squadron, so that if one is away I can fill up her place.’¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Freeman, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

¹²⁷ Beresford Enquiry Proceedings, p. 4, q. 22-24, CAB 16/9A.

¹²⁸ Journal entry, 28 November 1907, ESHR 2/10, Esher MSS.

¹²⁹ Beresford Enquiry Proceedings, p. 8, q. 95, CAB 16/9A. Beresford speaking.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Shortly after this, Beresford failed to remember Julian Corbett's name, referring to him as 'a Mr. Corbett or Corlett, or a gentleman with a name something like that'.¹³¹ When Minister of War Haldane tried to elucidate Beresford's criticisms of the war plans, he was rewarded with a long rambling reply complaining about everything from poor strategy to Fisher's scrapping policy to an attempt—probably for Haldane's benefit—at drawing an analogy between battleships, cruisers, and torpedo craft with cavalry, infantry, and artillery.¹³² Eventually, and after varied abuse was levelled against the Home Fleet, Asquith asked what Beresford would have preferred. Beresford replied:

'I want three divisions of battleships, and there should be 8 ships in each division. I want the component parts of cruisers and catchers [destroyers] with those divisions. I would have two divisions, which will give me my 60 ships always together, with the 60 ships perfectly ready to meet whatever any neighbouring country can send over. The idea of [placing the fleet's wartime base on] the east coast is very good if you had an east coast port, but you have got no port there. Portland is the very best port in the world. ... There is no other place where you can keep your men ready like Portland. If Portland was in Wales it would not very much matter, if you had that fleet ready; because you are never going to have such a very sudden attack, and there is a fleet in being of 60 ships. The third division, or one of the divisions, could be away with the Admiral, together with the cruisers and some of the catchers, the Admiral drilling them and reporting to his Commander-in-Chief what he has done. Then he comes back and you send away another division.'¹³³

Further questioning elicited that each of the three divisions would have its own Admiral, and the nucleus crew ships would be a reserve force and source of replacement ships as the fully-commissioned ships went in for overhauls and refits. Each of the three divisions would also have its own attached cruiser squadron and destroyers.¹³⁴ This was more or less where the first meeting ended except for a revisiting of the matter of Captain Hulbert by Admiral Bethell.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 9, q. 99. Beresford speaking.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 10-11, q. 112. Beresford speaking.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 14-15, q. 152. Beresford speaking.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 16-21, q. 156-230.

The next few meetings covered largely the same ground, and the various members of the committee began showing signs of irritation: ‘Doubtless Grey and Morley, with major departments of state to run, were wondering just how long all this was going to take.’¹³⁵ During the fourth meeting a running argument over Beresford’s time served at sea erupted and continued off and on over several meetings.¹³⁶ Of more relevant concern was Beresford’s charge at the third meeting that current British destroyers were no good for work in the North Sea, Beresford considering them all bad sea boats except for the River class.¹³⁷ The 27-knotters were totally unsuitable and the 30-knotters, which still formed much of the Navy’s destroyer force, would be all worn out after a week of scouting work on the German coasts.¹³⁸ What Beresford would have made of the Admiralty’s reversion to building destroyers which were greatly improved descendants of the *Rivers* can only be guessed at.

Beresford’s own statement ended, mercifully, during the eighth session, and McKenna was finally able to counterattack. Asquith, by now as sick of the whole affair as anyone, imploringly asked ‘Will you proceed, Mr. McKenna?’¹³⁹ The First Lord began with an obvious dig at Beresford’s wandering testimony by proposing ‘to confine myself strictly to the terms of reference.’¹⁴⁰ Despite this it took some time to broach the Home Fleet in detail. The most interesting example occurred during the fifteenth and final meeting. Beresford claimed that if either Bridgeman or May were present:

‘I am satisfied that if I had asked them the question, “Is it the fact that the Home Fleet was ready as a striking force for instant action without an hour’s delay, as every minute may be of vital value?” they would have said, “No,” because it was not fact.’¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Freeman, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 190, 195, 202, 209.

¹³⁷ Beresford Enquiry Proceedings, p. 58, q. 618, CAB 16/9A. Beresford speaking.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 51, q. 580. Beresford speaking.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 198, q. 1883. Asquith speaking.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 198, q. 1883. McKenna speaking.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 322, q. 2658. Beresford speaking.

Shortly afterwards Sir Francis Bridgeman give his evidence, which more or less directly refuted Beresford's claims. Preferring to testify in person 'instead of writing', the former C.-in-C. Home Fleet was there to respond to Beresford's claim that he thought his command unready for instant action.¹⁴² Bridgeman told the enquiry members:

'I do not think that justified. I never made such a statement, that it was not ready. It was ready. Of course, no fleet can be ready like an electric car on the line; but under modern conditions the Nore Division of the Home Fleet was certainly the most ready fleet I have ever known.'¹⁴³

Asquith enquired further whether 'if the question Lord Charles suggests were sent to you, you would say it was ready?'¹⁴⁴ Bridgeman replied

'I should say that the Nore Division, which consisted of 12 modern armoured ships and 24 destroyers, with their attendant craft and submarines, which was the striking force, was as immediately ready as it is possible for a fleet to be under modern conditions.'¹⁴⁵

Bridgeman also confirmed to Haldane that mobilization of the Home Fleet's nucleus crew ships at five hours' notice was possible, and had indeed been done under his command. In his estimation, Bridgeman thought 'the nucleus crew ships could have been mobilized, even as a surprise mobilization, in, say, eight hours.'¹⁴⁶ When asked by Asquith if he thought nucleus crew ships would require six months to work up for active duty, Bridgeman's response was 'Good gracious, No! The nucleus-crew ships with their three-fifths crews were splendid. Look at their firing. You have only got to look at the way they hit the target.'¹⁴⁷

Other of Beresford's claims fell apart just as quickly. When Beresford claimed there were just six battleships out of the Channel Fleet's fourteen ready for battle on September 23th, 1908,

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 326, q. 2676. Bridgeman speaking.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 327, q. 2680. Asquith speaking.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., q. 2680. Bridgeman speaking.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., q. 2681. Bridgeman speaking.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., q. 2684. Bridgeman speaking.

this was short of the truth, since two of Beresford's battleships were detached on gun calibration work on Beresford's own orders (and which 'could have rejoined his flag at any time on receipt of a telegram') and three more were in dockyard hands—two on one hour's notice, another on one day's notice—thus 'making a total of 11 battleships of the Channel Fleet available if an ultimatum had been directed to this country to reply within 24 hours.'¹⁴⁸ Even in gunpower this force was considered, possessing sixty-eight heavy guns versus the sixty-four possessed on paper by the *Hochseeflotte*.¹⁴⁹

'We Want Eight!'

Beresford's case was not made, although the open controversy laid the foundations of Fisher's eventual departure the following year.¹⁵⁰ The Service was just too divided. Nonetheless Fisher had one last victory. A political furore had resulted from the 1908-9 Estimates both inside and outside the Cabinet; the drama surrounding the 1909-10 Estimates surpassed it in every important respect.

On arrival McKenna had evidently tried to carry out a thorough investigation of current policies, and Fisher quickly apologized for the resultant blizzard of documents: 'I have bombarded you with papers but you told me too!'¹⁵¹ Amongst these was a report by the Controller on the ability of Britain to construct 'large armoured vessels' which set the assumed maximum sustainable production capability of the British shipbuilders at 'six large vessels ... in two years from giving the order'.¹⁵² Between this and other discussions, Fisher and the rest of the

¹⁴⁸ Unknown to Haldane, 11 August 1909, f. 2-3, CAB 17/7.

¹⁴⁹ Exact totals were: forty 12-inch, four 10-inch, and twenty-four 9.2-inch British weapons against thirty-two 11-inch and the same number of 9.4-inch German pieces. *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Fisher was bitterly disappointed at the lukewarm tone of the Enquiry's official report. Fisher to McKenna, 19 August 1909; Fisher to Esher, 28 August 1909, both in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 260-262

¹⁵¹ Fisher to McKenna, 20 April 1908, f. 1A, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

¹⁵² Report by Jackson, n.d., in Fisher to McKenna, 7 May 1908, f. 3, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

Sea Lords were able to secure McKenna's consent to include 'FOUR Dreadnoughts, AND IF NECESSARY SIX' in the 1909-10 Estimates.¹⁵³

Outside the Admiralty there was already suspicion—and in some cases, hope—that the next year's programme would be greatly increased. McKenna had barely consented to the Sea Lords' proposal for a quartet when an article in J.A. Spender's *Westminster Gazette* on the German and British naval programmes ventured 'to throw out the assumption that we shall lay down at least six "Dreadnoughts" next year.'¹⁵⁴ The responsible correspondent was, as Fisher emphasized to McKenna,¹⁵⁵ no death-or-glory militarist—he was in fact the pro-German J.L. Bashford, who had rarely missed an opportunity to declare for Germany's generally pacific intentions.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile Archibald Hurd wrote concernedly that the situation *vis-à-vis* the Two Power Standard 'may become critical unless foresight is shown'.¹⁵⁷

Under these circumstances it was unsurprising that the Admiralty would depend on their received intelligence during the subsequent process of hashing out the new building programme. The intelligence obtained by the Admiralty regarding German intentions was not encouraging. Furthermore, this intelligence was more detailed and of better quality than has been sometimes claimed.¹⁵⁸ Early in 1908 the British naval attaché in Berlin, Captain Philip Dumas, wrote in his annual report summarizing the *Kaiserliche Marine's* development during 1907 that there was popular agitation for continuing the current four battleship tempo past its planned termination in 1911, though he noted that these efforts had been received with ill will by Tirpitz and the German

¹⁵³ Fisher to Esher, 5 May 1908, in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹⁵⁴ 'The German Navy and British Programmes.', *The Westminster Gazette*, 18 May 1908.

¹⁵⁵ Fisher to McKenna, 19 May 1908, f. 8, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, J.L. Bashford, 'Is Germany's Navy a Menace?', *The North American Review* 186, no. 623 (October 1907), pp. 225-236.

¹⁵⁷ Archibald S. Hurd, 'A British Two Power Fleet', *The Nineteenth Century and After* 63, no. 373 (March 1908), p. 485.

¹⁵⁸ Matthew Seligmann, 'Intelligence Information and the 1909 Naval Scare: The Secret Foundations of a Public Panic', *War in History* 17, no. 1 (January 2010), pp. 37-59.

Navy League. Nevertheless, Dumas '[thought] it likely that some such programme will shortly be brought forward as the ideal to be arrived at instead of the present one of 38 battleships and 20 armoured cruisers.'¹⁵⁹

Of particular interest to the Admiralty was German's shipbuilding capacity. As one of the underpinnings of British naval supremacy was the efficiency of its shipbuilding industry, the growth of Germany's industry was naturally looked upon with alarm. Dumas' predecessor, Captain Reginald Allenby, had estimated in 1905 that German could build a maximum of nine battleships, three armoured cruisers, thirty-four small cruisers and ninety-nine destroyers with a building time of two years and nine months. The next year Dumas reported a similar figure: Germany could build six Dreadnoughts in two years.¹⁶⁰ While actual German warship construction proceeded at a rather more sedate pace, the attachés' estimates suggested that Germany had the ability to greatly accelerate their rate of naval expansion. Britain had put *Dreadnought* into water in a year, was it unreasonable to believe Germany might accomplish a similar feat? D.N.I. Slade thought so, writing in mid-1908 that when the expansion of the Krupp heavy gun factory was complete Germany could possibly double their shipbuilding output without outpacing demand for heavy guns and mountings, thus enabling a maximum German building tempo of eight or nine heavy ships every two and a half to three years. This compared worryingly with an estimated British maximum tempo of six heavy ships every two years, even after Britain's lead in capital ship construction was taken into account.¹⁶¹

Of course, these were paper figures, drawn up without account of all the things which can hobble industrial production. As long as there were no signs or evidence of German

¹⁵⁹ Philip Dumas, 'Report on the German Navy for 1907', 12 February 1908, German N.A. Report 9/08, in Seligmann (ed.), *Naval Intelligence*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁰ Seligmann, 'Intelligence Information', p. 42.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 46.

acceleration—either actual or implied—there was no trouble. Unfortunately, such evidence began appearing in late 1908. Dumas heard whispers of this just prior to his departure from Berlin at the end of July, probably from the same sources as the U.S. Navy’s attaché, Reginald Belknap.¹⁶² Fisher reported to McKenna in mid-August, likely on the basis of Dumas’s report that the German navy was ‘going to lay down an extra Dreadnought to take advantage of slackness of work in German Dockyards.’ Fisher made no mention of acceleration, or of certainty regarding the report, instead merely commenting that ‘By November we ought to know the truth of this.’¹⁶³ Worrying information continued to trickle in, and on October 21st the new naval attaché, Captain Herbert Heath, reported that while the next year’s estimates had not been published, ‘there seems no doubt that the contracts for two of the battleships for that year’s programme have already been placed.’¹⁶⁴ Admiralty suspicions were further aroused by the persistent stonewalling Heath encountered in gaining admission to German shipyards such as the Schichau works at Danzig where one of the suspected acceleration battleships was build built. With evident frustration, Heath observed in May 1909 that it ‘would have been interesting to see how far she had advanced’.¹⁶⁵

The Admiralty was inclined to take these reports seriously. Slade fretted in his diary that ‘Germany intends to lay down 8 ships between now and next Christmas year’.¹⁶⁶ The Fourth Sea Lord, Sir Alfred Winsloe, wrote privately to Sir Henry Jackson, now commanding the Third Cruiser Squadron, that:

‘There has lately been enormous activity in Germany. The Govt have been lending money to contractors to advance the ships before the contract time and

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Fisher to McKenna, 14 August 1908, f. 19, MCKN 3/4, McKenna MSS.

¹⁶⁴ Captain Herbert Heath, ‘Germany N.A. Report 47/08’, 21 October 1908, Seligmann (ed.), *Naval Intelligence*, p. 195.

¹⁶⁵ Heath, ‘Germany N.A. Report 15/09’, 24 May 1909, in *ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁶⁶ Slade diary, 22 October 1908, MRF/39/3, Slade MSS.

they also gave the orders in Nov for the ships which should be laid down in March next, thereby advancing them by 4 months. ... They have also made enormous purchases of Nickel for armour[.]
'We now calculate that by April 1912 she will have 17 Dreadnoughts completed and if she were to go on again next year as this, it would be possible for her to have 21.'¹⁶⁷

By this time the Admiralty were in the midst of deciding their own building programme for the coming year. At the start of November, Fisher told Esher that the Admiralty was considering laying down '4, perhaps 5, ships.' Esher thought that if the Admiralty consented to less than six, 'you will be condemned on all sides ! No quarter !'¹⁶⁸ Subsequent events show the Admiralty took this advice seriously.

While the Admiralty was convinced of the danger, they would face an uphill fight to convince the Cabinet. Asquith reminded McKenna in July 1908 that 'I have for a long time been growing vy skeptical [*sic*] (in the matter of shipbuilding) as to the whole "Dreadnought" policy.' The Prime Minister wished to hear McKenna's views on future shipbuilding 'for the next few years' now that the new First Lord had 'surveyed the whole situation from inside', and so as to leave McKenna in no doubt as to gravity of the issue, Asquith ended his letter thusly: 'There is much money in it, & more than money.'¹⁶⁹ In addition to pressure from inside the Cabinet, the Radicals were still determined to avoid increased defence expenditure: a repeat of the 1907 petition for armaments reduction gained even more signatures in 1908.¹⁷⁰ Harcourt denounced concerns over Britain's naval position as the 'diseased imagination of inferior minds.'¹⁷¹ The stage was thus set from the beginning for a contentious fight in December 1908.

¹⁶⁷ Winsloe to Jackson, 19 January 1909, JAC/81, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Jackson MSS, NMM.

¹⁶⁸ Esher journal, 3 November 1908, ESHR 2/11, Esher MSS.

¹⁶⁹ Asquith to McKenna, 4 July 1908, f. 2a, MCKN 3/3, McKenna MSS.

¹⁷⁰ Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 142.

The Cabinet had already discussed the Two Power Standard at their meeting on November 25th, about which Asquith informed the King that requirements ‘are practically satisfied under existing conditions by the provisions which the Admiralty is making.’¹⁷² Existing conditions meant a four ship programme, and Asquith had recently defined the Two Power Standard as a ten per cent superiority over the next two navies.¹⁷³ Then McKenna presented his initial Estimates, including six Dreadnoughts, six protected cruisers, twenty destroyers, and the usual half million in submarines. The total increase over the 1908-9 Estimates was £2,923,200.¹⁷⁴ An indication of the Cabinet’s reaction can be seen by Asquith’s admission to the King that McKenna’s Estimates required the entire Cabinet sitting on December 18th to approve, and then ‘in substance’ only and with two of the six Dreadnoughts being held for consideration until January.¹⁷⁵

The issue festered over the holidays, with Churchill telling Esher the shipbuilding programme has caused ‘discords – very grave ones – in the Cabinet’. The Radicals were naturally opposed, while Haldane and Grey backed McKenna. ‘The question is,’ Esher wrote, ‘which way will the P.M. incline.’¹⁷⁶ Churchill was well placed to know, being one of the economists; Lloyd George had written to him expressing his ‘deep obligation for the assistance you rendered me in smashing McKenna’s fatuous estimates & my warm admiration for the splendid way in which you torn them up.’¹⁷⁷ Of interest at this juncture is a remark by Edward Hobhouse, that Lloyd George ‘has an extraordinary power of picking up the essential details of a question by conversation. He *refuses* to read any office files or papers, but likes people to come

¹⁷² Asquith to King Edward VII, 25 November 1909, f. 65, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

¹⁷³ Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 142, 145-146.

¹⁷⁴ McKenna, ‘Navy Estimates, 1909-10.’, 8 December 1908, CAB 37/98/37. Another copy is in f. 14-15, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS.

¹⁷⁵ Asquith to King Edward VII, 19 December 1908, f. 75-76, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

¹⁷⁶ Esher journal, 28 December 1908, ESHR 2/11, Esher MSS.

¹⁷⁷ Lloyd George to Churchill, 21 December 1908, in Randolph Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II: Young Statesman 1901-1914* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1967), p. 937. Hereafter *YS*.

and *talk*.’¹⁷⁸ McKenna, meanwhile was providing detailed information to Grey and Asquith.¹⁷⁹ Grey had in November declared ‘There is no half-way house between complete security and utter ruin.’, so very likely he appreciated McKenna’s memoranda.¹⁸⁰

Matters were not made easier by the Sea Lords’ conviction that the German acceleration was real, presenting McKenna with a memorandum on January 15th urging an increase in the shipbuilding programme from six heavy ships to eight.¹⁸¹ Lloyd George was aware of this via Whitehall whispers, and was furious: ‘I feared all along this would happen. Fisher is a very clever person & when he found his programme was in danger he wired to [Sir Arthur] Davidson for something more panicky--& of course he got it.’¹⁸² Why Lloyd George saw fit to implicate Sir Arthur Davidson, an Assistant Private Secretary to the King, in a Fisherite conspiracy is unclear. What is clear, however, is Lloyd George’s own estimation of the suspected German acceleration: ‘Frankly I believe the Admirals are procuring false information to frighten us.’ The First Lord’s actions, however, were less mercenary and in the Chancellor’s estimation, ‘McK feels his personal position & prestige is at stake.’¹⁸³

By the time the Cabinet resumed discussion of the Estimates on February 1st,¹⁸⁴ the issue was at or near the boiling point. The following day Lloyd George warned Asquith of dire consequences:

‘I will not dwell upon the emphatic pledges given by all of us ... to reduce the gigantic expenditure on armaments built up by the recklessness of our predecessors. Scores of your most loyal supporters in the House of Commons take

¹⁷⁸ Diary entry, 5 August 1908, quoted in Edward David (ed.), *Inside Asquith’s Cabinet: From the Diaries of Edward Hobhouse* (London: John Murray, 1977), p. 73.

¹⁷⁹ McKenna to Grey, 30 December 1908, in Stephen McKenna, *McKenna*, pp. 71-72; McKenna to Asquith, 3 January 1909, *ibid.*, pp. 72-74.

¹⁸⁰ Esher journal, 21 November 1908, ESHR 2/11, Esher MSS.

¹⁸¹ This memorandum is reproduced in Admiral Sir Frederic C. Dreyer, *The Sea Heritage: A Study of Maritime Warfare* (London: Museum Press Limited, 1955), pp. 68-69; Seligmann, ‘Intelligence Information’, p. 54.

¹⁸² Lloyd George to Churchill, 3 January 1909, in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 516.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Asquith to King Edward VII, 2 February 1909, f. 79-80, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

these pledges seriously and even a £3[,]000[,]000 increase will chill their zeal for the gov^t & an assured increase of £5 to £6,000,000 for next year will stagger them. ... When the £38,000,000 navy estimates are announced the disaffection of these good Liberals will break into open sedition & the influences of this Parliament will be at an end.’¹⁸⁵

Asquith, meanwhile, bought time by asking McKenna to provide the Cabinet ‘an anticipatory estimate of German & English naval expenditures from now to 1912’.¹⁸⁶ Churchill, meanwhile, had written up a paper of his own on the subject—with help from *Dreadnought* opponents Admiral Custance and Sir William White—which concluded the British margin in existing ships through 1912 plus new construction left no argument to be made for building six ships.¹⁸⁷ McKenna wrote a detailed critique of Churchill’s calculations before passing both along to Fisher.¹⁸⁸ The First Sea Lord was unimpressed by Churchill’s reasoning and concurred with McKenna’s judgment, noting that, ‘It seems to me upon reflection that Winston Churchill is doing the red-herring trick and leading off the controversy into comparatively minor issues, as to the relative value of non-Dreadnought types on both sides, whereas the main issue – THE ONLY ISSUE – is the number of Dreadnoughts!’¹⁸⁹ Churchill returned fire with a critique of McKenna’s critique that ended with the observation that the Admiralty were ‘prepared to prove that this superiority [*contra* Germany] is so great that it will meet the whole Two-Power standard formula with 10 per cent. To spare -- *if 2 more battleships are added*.’¹⁹⁰

By late February, as Asquith wrote to his wife, the economist faction was ‘in a state of wild alarm, and Winston and L.I.G. by their combined machinations have got the bulk of the

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd George to Asquith, 2 February 1909, f. 61-62, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS.

¹⁸⁶ Asquith to King Edward VII, 2 February 1909, f. 80, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

¹⁸⁷ Churchill, ‘A Note on Naval Estimates, 1909-10.’, 2 February 1909, f. 74-75, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS. For the involvement of Admiral Custance and Sir William White, see Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁸⁸ McKenna, ‘A Reply to Mr. Churchill’s Note on Navy Estimates, 1909-10’, 5 February 1909, f. 78-80, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS.

¹⁸⁹ Fisher to McKenna, 10 February 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 221.

¹⁹⁰ Marginal note by Churchill on McKenna, ‘A Reply to Mr. Churchill’s Note on Navy Estimates, 1909-10’, 5 February 1909, in Randolph Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II: Companion Part 2, 1907-1911* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), p. 950. Hereafter cited as *YS Companion 2*.

Liberal press into the same camp.’¹⁹¹ Fisher, for his part, thought Asquith ‘*weak as water!*’¹⁹²

Matters were not eased by any of the principals’ behaviour. During one discussion in late January,

Lloyd George exploded over an intelligence report on German heavy gun manufacturing:

‘I think it shows extraordinary neglect on the part of the Admiralty that all this should not have been found out before. Don’t think much of any of you admirals, and I should like to see Lord Charles Beresford at the Admiralty, and the sooner the better.’

McKenna snapped back:

‘You know perfectly well that these facts were communicated to the Cabinet at the time we knew of them, and your remark was, ‘It’s all contractors’ gossip’—or words to that effect.’¹⁹³

What Asquith would have made of the Chancellor’s Beresford proposal can only be guessed at.

Churchill hinted to Lord Morley that he would quit the Government instead of accepting six ships, ‘that there was no bluff about this, and that the Government would break up.’¹⁹⁴

Surprisingly, it was Asquith who seems to have made the next move. During a Cabinet meeting on February 15th he decided to create a committee on the issue made up of himself, Morley, Grey, and Lloyd George, who would interview the Board of Admiralty.¹⁹⁵ This committee, minus Morley, met in conference in Asquith’s room at the House of Commons on February 23rd.¹⁹⁶ Attending were Asquith, Lloyd George, Grey, McKenna, Fisher, Jellicoe, and a stenographer. It should be noted that a compromise proposal—whereby four Dreadnoughts would be ordered immediately with the possibility of another four to be added later based on circumstances—was already on the table during the February 15th Cabinet meeting.

¹⁹¹ Asquith to Margot Asquith, 20 February 1909, quoted in Stephen McKenna, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁹² Fisher to Knollys, 17 February 1909, in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁹³ Jellicoe, ‘Memo from myself to Mr. McKenna, First Lord, after a Meeting in Sir E. Grey’s Room at the Foreign Office’, 24 January 1909, quoted in Dreyer, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁹⁴ Esher journal, 12 February 1909, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS. Esher himself was quite sceptical about Churchill’s willingness to make good the threat.

¹⁹⁵ Asquith to King Edward VII, 15 February 1909, f. 84, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

¹⁹⁶ Unsigned, ‘Minutes of a Conference held in the Prime Ministers Room, House of Commons, on Tuesday, February 23, 1909.’, f. 110-154, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS.

The discussions carried on at the February 23rd conference were, if one judges by the surviving minutes, wide-ranging indeed. At one point when the matter of the French Navy advocating dreadnought construction over the objections of their finance minister Joseph Caillaux, Asquith quipped that, ‘Like a good Chancellor of the Exchequer, he is putting the brake on.’¹⁹⁷ Apart from this, and a possibly half-hearted suggestion by Lloyd George that if German acceleration proved true an Act of Parliament could be arranged (possibly contingent on the Admiralty declaring their future building programmes for the next few years in advance in a manner akin to the German Navy Laws), little seems to have been achieved at this conference; the discussion in the surviving minutes is quite divagatory in places.

How much influence the conference had on later events is unclear, but the next day Asquith secured the four now-four later programme.¹⁹⁸ Outwardly Fisher appeared satisfied by this, and he jocularly observed to Churchill that ‘it would be quite lovely’ to name the four supplemental ships *Winston*, *Churchill*, *Lloyd*, and *George*.¹⁹⁹ Privately however he had serious concerns. He besieged Sir Edward Grey, waving ‘definite information’ on the German programme at the Foreign Secretary and imploring that all eight ships be ordered immediately. Grey shared the First Sea Lord’s anxieties, but McKenna took a more relaxed attitude, arguing nothing much would be gained by ordering all eight ships immediately.²⁰⁰

The matter now passed to the House of Commons,²⁰¹ where it immediately became political theatre best summed up by Conservative M.P. George Wyndham’s famous declaration ‘We want eight, and we won’t wait.’ Another Conservative, Arthur Lee, brought a censure

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., f. 128. Asquith speaking.

¹⁹⁸ Asquith to King Edward VII, 24 February 1909, f. 87, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

¹⁹⁹ Fisher to Churchill, 4 March 1909, in Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

²⁰⁰ Grey to Asquith, 4 March 1909, f. 157, MS.Asquith 21, Asquith MSS.

²⁰¹ Meanwhile, an instructive discussion of the entire matter of naval standards had taken place at the RUSI, chaired by former First Lord the Earl Cawdor. See RUSI Members, ‘A Discussion on the Standard of Naval Strength’, *JRUSI* LIII, no. 372 (February 1909), pp. 157-184.

motion against the Government reading: ‘That in the opinion of this House the declared policy of His Majesty’s Government respecting the immediate provision of battleships of the newest type does not sufficiently secure the safety of the Empire.’²⁰² It was defeated 353-135. As spring turned to summer the issue of the four contingency ships continued to fester, with Sir Edward Grey at one point hinting at resignation should they not be ordered.²⁰³ Finally, the new Austro-Hungarian construction programme forced the Cabinet’s hand.²⁰⁴ When the Cabinet reconvened on July 21st it was decided to order the four contingent ships.²⁰⁵ McKenna subsequently announced this to the Commons on July 26th.²⁰⁶

The Germans were being honest. In March, Metternich admitted two battleships had been ordered ahead of schedule, but only due to reasons which would have been familiar to the Admiralty: ‘the German Government had found that the shipbuilders were forming a Trust to put up the prices... and in order to prevent the formation of this Trust contracts for these two ships were promised in advance... on the understanding that the Reichstag would be willing to vote the money subsequently.’²⁰⁷ It mattered not a jot. No matter what late in the day assurances the German government gave, the British—especially Fisher—were not inclined to believe them. They probably would not have been any less suspicious had the Germans been upfront from the beginning. ‘The fact is we must have a large margin against lying!’ were Fisher’s words to Sir Arthur Davidson.²⁰⁸ Of interest in this matter are the extraordinary lengths the British went through to obtain the barest scraps of information on German building progress, an extreme

²⁰² Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29 March 1909, Fifth Series, v. 3, col. 146.

²⁰³ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 170.

²⁰⁴ For the Austro-Hungarian programme, see Lawrence Sondhaus, *The Naval Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1867-1918: Navalism, Industrial Development, and the Politics of Dualism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1994), pp. 170-203.

²⁰⁵ Asquith to King Edward VII, 21 July 1909, f. 134-135, MS.Asquith 5, Asquith MSS.

²⁰⁶ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 26 July 1909, Fifth Series, v. 8, col. 855-858.

²⁰⁷ Grey to Edward Goschen, 18 March 1909, in G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, vi (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1930), p. 245.

²⁰⁸ Fisher to Sir Arthur Davidson, 27 March 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 236-237.

example being a dead of winter trek by an agent across the frozen Bay of Danzig to reconnoitre the ships under construction at the Schichau works.²⁰⁹ This ramshackle piece of espionage is perhaps reminiscent of those carried out in John Le Carré's bleak novel *The Looking Glass War* by the moribund and ineffectual Department.

In any case, by the end of 1909 Fisher had got his margin, beaten off Beresford and his co-conspirators, and been ennobled as Baron Fisher of Kilverstone. This was perhaps a sign that he was on the way out. The Palace, formerly a source of strength, was unhappy at the deep partisan divisions in the Fleet. Furthermore, the First Sea Lord was by now not entirely reluctant to retire from the service. But who could replace him, and would they maintain his policies against all comers?

²⁰⁹ Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 211n1.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sir Arthur Wilson as First Sea Lord, 1910-1911

In a certain sense, Sir Arthur Wilson's tenure as First Sea Lord is something of an interregnum. Falling as it does between two great turbulences at the Admiralty—Fisher's departure and Churchill's arrival—it is tempting to write this period off completely. Partially this has to do with the fact that, with the exception of the Agadir Crisis, there are no great historical landmarks to describe, although Agadir's importance counterbalances this somewhat. Historians have thus proven ambivalent in their judgments of Wilson as First Sea Lord. Marder describes him as 'not a successful First Sea Lord.'¹ Nicholas Lambert uses Wilson's arrival to launch into a discussion of the 'Grand Fleet of Battle' concept, which he declares in his chapter title to be an 'Aberration' from Fisher's doctrine of flotilla defence.² Sumida writes that Wilson's obstruction 'played an important role in the disruption of the development of the Pollen system, new model armour-piercing projectiles and probably director firing as well.'³ Another writer states 'the process of finding a worthy successor to Fisher went disastrously awry.'⁴

To an extent, the general tenor of these comments is merited. Compared to his predecessor, and indeed his two successors, Wilson's term of office was not a particularly productive one, and in some cases it proved damaging to the Navy as a whole. Specific examples include Wilson's poor showing at the C.I.D. meeting on strategy during the Agadir Crisis, his aloof and undynamic actions during that same crisis, and his bitter opposition to both delegation of authority and responsibility and, relatedly, to the establishment of any sort of Admiralty Staff.

¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 213.

² Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 199.

³ Sumida, *IDNS*, p. 220.

⁴ Malcolm Murfett (ed.), *The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten* (Westport, CT: Praegers, 1995), p. 3.

In connection with the latter, evidence on war planning during Wilson's time as First Sea Lord is more fragmentary than any other period included in this study—no single example of a complete War Plan remains from the Wilson administration. This situation is due—even more than from historically pernicious weeding of the files—to Wilson's methods of operation. Reserved 'to the point of secretiveness',⁵ Wilson trusted no one with his own schemes. Whereas Fisher had, for all his oft-cited refusal to disclose Admiralty plans, used committees of men he felt sound in order to hammer out the fine details of many of his schemes—including the Navy's war plans—Wilson seems to have eschewed even this form of delegation. Nevertheless, several significant fragments regarding Wilson's intended doctrine have survived; enough, at any rate, to reconstruct the general tenor of his strategic thinking, if not the exact intended movements.

Unsurprisingly, this situation has much to do with Wilson's character, which Marder described as 'obstinate and full of *idées fixes*.'⁶ Although he tended towards martinetcy he was almost universally respected within the Navy, and although the lower deck called him 'Old 'Ard 'Art', they recognized he worked himself as hard as he worked them—a fact of which his Victoria Cross won at El Teb was the most obvious reminder. Although aware that 'his natural talents ... were for executive command rather than for administrative duties',⁷ this did not stop him from being generally unable to delegate responsibility—either to his juniors at sea or his colleagues on the Board, who 'resented his obstinacy, high-handedness, and secretiveness.'⁸ Several weeks before taking office on January 25th, Wilson publicly told Sir Francis Bridgeman, now Second Sea Lord, that he was 'only his second' and treated Bridgeman 'as if he were a

⁵ Marder, *loc. cit.*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁸ Ibid., p. 213.

second lieutenant on board a ship.’⁹ This was hardly unexpected within the fleet, Prince Louis Battenberg wrote to Frederick Hamilton that Wilson would make the other Board positions into very humble ones.¹⁰ This was a longtime tendency of Wilson’s, Bridgeman having written to Fisher that:

‘I know from experience with him that there is no joy to be found in serving either with him or under him! Deadly dull and uncompromising as you know! He will never consult with anyone and is impatient in argument, even to being impossible!’¹¹

Fisher himself had forwarded a letter written to him by Captain Christopher Cradock to Lord Tweedmouth in late 1906 ‘so that you may see it is not ‘all jam’ about Wilson!’ Fisher then continued that ‘It’s a great failing in him that he never can evoke enthusiasm and is well named ‘‘ard’ ‘eart’ by the men!’¹²

Battenberg had also pointed out Wilson’s weaknesses. When in June 1904 the question had arisen of who should be appointed as Commanders-in-Chief of the Home and Mediterranean Fleets, Battenberg wrote a private report for Lord Selborne noting that ‘Beresford and Wilson are, I take it, our two Naval leaders—practically the only ones until men like Lambton, May, etc, come on. Beresford trains the Flag-Officers and Captains under him, but Wilson does not.’ Worse, Wilson knew ‘quite well what an enormous fleet he will have under him in a war, as I supply him with the Order of Battle every month, and I know that he is making elaborate plans, but it is all done by himself alone and personally.’¹³ This combination of solitariness and obstinacy were hardly an ideal combination for a First Sea Lord at the best of times, and especially after such a gregarious one as Sir John Fisher.

⁹ Esher to M.V. Brett, in Brett (ed.), *Esher*, ii, 4 January 1910, p. 433.

¹⁰ Battenberg to Hamilton, 5 December 1910, HTN/118A, Admiral Sir Frederick Hamilton MSS, NMM.

¹¹ Bridgeman to Fisher, 21 November 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 282.

¹² Fisher to Tweedmouth, 16 October 1909, in *ibid.*, p. 101.

¹³ Battenberg to Selborne, June 1904, quoted in Admiral Sir Mark Kerr, *Prince Louis of Battenberg* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1934), pp. 178-179.

Nonetheless it is still unfair to dismiss Wilson's time as First Sea Lord too hastily. Unbending and obstinate as he was, Wilson was not the Admiralty or the Navy *in toto* any more than Fisher had been, and important work was certainly done during his time in office. This is especially true in terms of the Home Fleet, where the C.-in-C. set the stage for the changes and reforms that occurred after Wilson passed from the scene. Even Wilson himself was not above advocating change if he felt it appropriate. As Channel Fleet C.-in-C. Wilson had argued for the abolition of pistols. In the wake of a tragic death aboard one of his ships during shooting practice, Wilson argued the case to D.N.O. Jellicoe, ultimately unsuccessfully.¹⁴ Furthermore, Nicholas Lambert suggests a connection between Wilson's strategic planning—apparently at variance with remarks made during the Admiral's testimony at the Beresford Enquiry—that suggests Germany's belated development of the submarine as an element of the *Kaiserliche Marine* affected his views on the blockade of the German coast.¹⁵

The Reluctant Candidate

The choice of Sir Arthur Wilson was made, as Nicholas Lambert noted, 'more out of desperation than inspiration'.¹⁶ Of other possible candidates, the former Second Sea Lord Admiral Sir Charles Drury was seen as being a Fisher acolyte and therefore unsuitable.¹⁷ Another possible candidate, Sir William May was unpopular with some in the service. Jack Sandars was under the impression 'that May is wholly unfit for this great command of the Home

¹⁴ Admiral Wilson, "'Albion': Accident causing the death of James Frederick Coleman, Ordinary Seaman, Official Number 226,216.", 18 March 1906, D.192/1906, ADM 1/7865.

¹⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-210.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁷ 'There is a rumour that Drury!! is to come [as Beresford's replacement as C.-in-C. Mediterranean]. It sounds too absurd for words, but I suppose he has to be rewarded for having been so complaisant to J. F. at the Admiralty for so long. It's rather dreadful to contemplate.' Captain Rosslyn Wemyss, quoted in Lady Wester Wemyss, *The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wemyss, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., Admiral of the Fleet* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935), p. 87.

Fleet.’¹⁸ Lewis Bayly is known to have disliked him.¹⁹ Bridgeman ‘had a contempt’ for him,²⁰ and probably told his friend Sandars of an incident where, in answering ‘his second [in] command as to what the C in C. had been doing, the answer was “nothing”!’²¹ Whatever the truth, once Bridgeman threatened to resign from his post as Second Sea Lord rather than serve under May or Wilmot Fawkes, the matter was effectively settled. Neither Fisher nor McKenna wished to part with Bridgeman’s services at the Admiralty.²²

At the same time Bridgeman refused to serve under May or Fawkes, he told Fisher ‘he would gladly remain as First Sea Lord’ with his erstwhile cruiser commander Sir George Callaghan as the new Second Sea Lord.²³ Despite this apparently sudden fit of ambition on Bridgeman’s part,²⁴ Fisher and McKenna took the offer seriously, but on reflection became less favourable to it, as Fisher informed Arnold White that November:

‘Originally it had been intend[ed] th[at] Ad[miral] Bridgeman sh[oul]d be 1st Sea L[or]d but he had not develop[ed] [the] particular qualities require[ed] in the office – especially hold[in]g his own in [the] Defence Com[mittee] against practice[e]d debaters & militant soldiers[.]’²⁵

By the time White learned this, the decision had been taken to offer the position to Wilson. The fact that Wilson ‘to use his own words, had completely given up all idea of ever serving again’ was of little consequence.²⁶ Wilson was duly invited to Fisher’s estate at Kilverstone on October 27th where he found both Fisher and the King awaiting him. Having evidently not received a

¹⁸ Sandars to Esher, 25 August 1909, ESHR 5/31, Esher MSS.

¹⁹ Fisher to Jellicoe, 10 March 1911, f. 10, Add MS 49006, Jellicoe MSS.

²⁰ Fisher to McKenna, c. 12 October 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 272.

²¹ Sandars to Esher, 25 August 1909, ESHR 5/31, Esher MSS.

²² Fisher to McKenna, c. 12 October 1909, in Marder, *loc cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ McKenna’s Naval Secretary, Captain Charles Madden, told his boss that Bridgeman’s desire ‘had all come about in the last two days... but he didn’t know how.’ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Arnold White, Shorthand notes titled ‘Nov 18th, 1909’, WHI/199, White MSS. A copy in typescript also exists as F.P. 4272, FISR 5/17, Fisher MSS.

²⁶ Bradford, *Wilson*, p. 223.

satisfactory response the first time, the King commanded Wilson's attendance at Sandringham on November 6th, where the Admiral once again expressed his reluctance.²⁷

Subsequently, McKenna wrote to Wilson on November 19th, noting that his words would doubtless be 'no surprise' to the Admiral. McKenna continued that 'The King has already told you how necessary it is in the interests of the Service that you should become First Sea Lord in succession to Sir John Fisher, and I am only now repeating what you have already heard from His Majesty in saying that your acceptance of this great office is of the highest national consequence.'²⁸ This letter may not have been necessary, for whatever passed between Wilson and King Edward during their interviews, it profoundly influenced the old Admiral's thinking, as his response to McKenna shows:

'After my interview with the King I cannot refuse to accept your offer of the post of First Sea Lord, and though as I told H. M. it is very much against my own judgment I must now do my best'.²⁹

In this connection, it is sad to note that one of the first major matters that Wilson had to face as First Sea Lord were the preparations required for King Edward's funeral.

The news of Wilson's appointment was not greeted by any great shock by interested parties. After all, Wilson had been marked as a 'high flyer' even by outside observers. In early 1904, the U.S. Naval Attaché had reported that 'Vice Admiral Wilson, in the estimation of many of his fellow officers, stands second to none as a possible Commander-in-Chief of a British force in time of war.'³⁰

Even if Wilson was not appointed to smooth over the rift in the service, many of the disaffected officers regarded his return with approval. Gerard Noel—no longer employed but still

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 223-224.

²⁸ McKenna to Wilson, 19 November 1909, MCKN 3/9, f. 34A, McKenna MSS.

²⁹ Wilson to McKenna, 20 November 1909, MCKN 3/9, f. 43A, McKenna MSS.

³⁰ Captain Charles H. Stockton to Chief of Bureau of Navigation, 27 April 1904, 'Records of the Office of Naval Intelligence, 1887-1927', Entry 278 (box 22 of 40), f. 26, Record Group 45, U.S. Navy Department MSS, NARA.

in contact with many officers who were—likely shared similar sentiments, having written at the time of Wilson’s promotion to Admiral of the Fleet that he was ‘delighted’ that Wilson ‘will now be available in case of trouble.’³¹ From a comfortable retirement, the much-respected Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour wrote:

‘If it is true, as I see in the Times, that Sir Arthur Wilson is to succeed Fisher, I sincerely congratulate you on your choice. He will have the confidence of the Service, and I very much hope that Bridgeman will remain on as 2nd Sea Lord, which I rather fancy he wd not have done had some other officer been app^d. He & Wilson will make an excellent combination’.³²

Both Sir Charles Drury and Sir George King-Hall shared this opinion, the latter writing in his diary ‘We both agreed that it would be a good thing if Wilson should succeed Fisher’, at least until Sir William May could take over.³³

Even before Wilson took office, McKenna had concerns. In January 1910 Esher wrote to his son that ‘McKenna finds Wilson “very difficult”’.³⁴ Nevertheless, if the primary reason for Wilson’s appointment was a desire to maintain continuity of policy, Wilson proved a success—several months after Wilson became First Sea Lord, Ottley told A.J. Balfour that ‘there has been no material change of naval policy since Sir Arthur Wilson succeeded Lord Fisher at the Admiralty.’³⁵

Planning for War

One of the most recent assessments of the Wilson regime states that he ‘contributed little to the Admiralty’s strategic policy compared to earlier administrations.’³⁶ While strictly true, this is not really a fair assessment. First of all, the previous two Admiralty administrations, Fisher’s

³¹ Noel to Tweedmouth, 4 March 1907, MSS 254/607, Tweedmouth MSS.

³² Culme-Seymour to McKenna, 18 November 1909, MCKN 3/14, f. 33, McKenna MSS.

³³ George King-Hall diary, 23 September 1909, King-Hall MSS.

³⁴ Esher to M.V. Brett, 4 January 1910, in Brett (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 433.

³⁵ Ottley to Balfour, 17 October 1910, f. 209, MS.Eng.hist.c.761, Sandars MSS.

³⁶ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

and Lord Walter Kerr's, had seen the adoption of the submarine, the affirmation of commercial blockade as a principal strategic objective, the redirection of war preparations away from the Dual Alliance to Germany, and several major reorganizations of the Royal Navy's active strength. With such great shifts in the immediate past, any policies spawned under Wilson would naturally seem quite minor no matter their importance. Secondly, since Wilson had been involved in the creation and implementation of many of those earlier policy changes, especially in terms of war planning, his time as First Sea Lord should probably be described as being concerned with the continuation of those policies instead of a break with the past. Finally, and this is phrased probably more cruelly than is strictly justified, Wilson's approach to the problem of planning for a North Sea campaign left subsequent administrations and planners with a very clear example of what *not* to do.

From a historian's perspective this is illustrated by the fact that a full edition of Wilson's war plans simply do not exist. Even more so than Fisher, Wilson believed in keeping his cards as close as possible. This was true to the extent that he revealed in August 1911 that the details of the Admiralty's war plans were not even known to Admiral Bridgeman, the Home Fleet's C.-in-C.³⁷ This in comparison to Fisher, who it will be recalled provided copies of his plans to, among others, Channel Fleet C.-in-C. Lord Charles Beresford.

Nonetheless, the principles of Wilson's thinking can still be outlined, and the resulting plan is consistent with both Wilson's earlier proposals during the Moroccan Crisis and with the plans drawn up under Fisher's supervision in 1907-1909. This is not surprising, since the latter plans, of course, were partially influenced by Wilson, who had been one of the many informal advisors employed by Fisher in their formulation process. The differences, however, are

³⁷ C.I.D., 'Minutes of the 114th Meeting, August 23, 1911.', 23 August 1911, p. 14, CAB 2/2. Admiral Wilson speaking. See also Asquith to Crewe, August 1911, quoted in Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, third ed. (London: Collins, 1969), p. 164.

important, and one major difference between Fisher's plans and Wilson's was the use of the heavy ships of the fleet.

A surviving set of 'preliminary orders' drawn up for the Commodore (T) and signed by Admiral May (and likely under instruction from Wilson), emphasizes that the British forces to be deployed immediately off the German coast would not lack for teeth.³⁸ The Commodore (T) would command 'for the purposes of watching the German coast' two destroyer flotillas backed by four armoured cruisers ('HOGUE', 'CRESSY', 'SUTLEJ', and 'EURYALUS', or similar ships)' with a third flotilla for reinforcements and relief purposes. Three *Apollo* class cruiser-minelayers plus two submarine sections would also operate on the German coast 'and may be employed under the Commodore T.'³⁹

The principle behind this deployment is a familiar one:

'It is essential that the mouths of the Elbe and Weser should be closely watched during the period immediately following mobilization by a strong Inshore Squadron, which will be well supported by armoured cruiser squadrons in order, if possible, to prevent the enemy breaking out without being reported and brought into action.'

The cruising ground of this inshore force was to stretch on a line roughly from Horns Reef to Borkum.⁴⁰ Reflecting the importance of commercial blockade, in addition to watching the German fleet:

'Measures should also be taken to prevent the passage into the North Sea of the enemy's cruisers, armed merchant steamers, or transports, and to capture the merchant shipping of the enemy, and neutral vessels carrying contraband of any nature and liable to capture under international law.'

Despite this proscription to attack trade where possible,⁴¹ Wilson intended the Commodore's force as being principally a reconnaissance line rather than a tight blockade of the sort usually

³⁸ May, 'Heligoland Blockade Squadron. Preliminary orders for Commodore T. in Command.', 23 May 1911, p. 1, ADM 116/3096.

³⁹ The cruiser-minelayers were *Andromache*, *Apollo*, and *Thetis*. The submarine sections were Sections VII and II.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

pictured when the term ‘close blockade’ is used. The difference between this plan and the previous forward destroyer deployments was the presence of a strong force of armoured cruisers in the immediate vicinity. The Commodore’s force would be ‘supported by the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cruiser Squadrons, which will be to seaward of the flotillas’.⁴²

This large inshore force does not equate to a return to the traditional close blockade, as the orders themselves make clear. The vulnerability of the heavy ships was recognized, and they were to form the inshore watch during daylight hours only. In addition, the initial deployment was not meant to be permanent. The intent was to ‘enable the destroyers and inshore ships to gain experience of the local conditions off the enemy’s ports at the earliest possible date, which will be very useful in arranging for their most economical distribution afterwards.’⁴³ These orders were not meant as irrevocable holy writ. Furthermore, once mobilization had been completed ‘so close a watch of the Heligoland Bight will not be essential, and it may even be advisable to remove the inshore watch at times to tempt the enemy out.’

The message here is unmistakable: even a valuable forward reconnaissance could be done without if the conditions for a decisive battle could be gained in exchange. How exactly the British would learn of a German sortie in the absence of their advanced scouts is never made clear. The occupation forces landed among the Frisian Islands or on Heligoland (assuming the assault on that island had been successful) may have been intended as bait—a garrison with wireless communications would at the very least give a hint of trouble if routine traffic was blacked out by the kind of jamming that an enemy bombardment force would likely use. As

⁴¹ Of interest in this regard is the following from Sir Henry Oliver’s memoirs: ‘As regards Dover Strait [Wilson] made the Coastguard keep a record of the shipping passing through every 24 hours over a considerable period and when satisfied that too many passed for boarding at sea arranged for the Downs examination anchorage.’ Oliver, ‘Recollections. Volume II’, p. 70, OLV/12, Oliver MSS.

⁴² May, ‘Heligoland Blockade Squadron. Preliminary orders for Commodore T. in Command.’, 23 May 1911, p. 6, ADM 116/3096.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 2.

tempting as this hypothesis is, it remains entirely supposition. There is no direct evidence for or against it; the relevant surviving papers are too scanty.

Handsome Willie May's Revolution

While Wilson and his few confidants within the Admiralty were continuing work on a maritime strategy based on close observational blockade by cruisers and flotillas, the Home Fleet was in the process of establishing the system that would ultimately eclipse this strategy. This was the 'grand fleet of battle', which involved the union of scouting forces, torpedo craft flotillas, and battle squadrons into a single integrated package rather than as separate loosely connected forces as had been previous practice. The man who led this revolution was Home Fleet C.-in-C. Admiral Sir William May. May has already been briefly discussed in connection with his proposed appointment as First Sea Lord, but he deserves more consideration.

Like both Fisher and Jellicoe, he was from relatively humble circumstances by the standards of the Royal Navy's executive branch. Born in 1849, May's father was a Royal Navy officer, his grandfather a Dutch Admiral. According to his own account, he was only granted a nomination to the Navy with difficulty and had to attend a 'crammer' school before taking the entrance exam, which he passed twenty-second out of fifty-three entrants.⁴⁴ As a Lieutenant, he joined a Polar expedition (losing several toes in its course) and then served alongside Percy Scott and Prince Louis of Battenberg aboard the frigate *Inconstant*. Although he had ambitions to be gunnery specialist, May soon became involved in the early development of the Whitehead torpedo, ultimately becoming not only the first commander of the torpedo ram *Polyphemus*, but

⁴⁴ Mary Jones, "'Handsome Willie May': A Reappraisal", *Mariner's Mirror* 89, no. 3 (August 2003), p. 310; Admiral of the Fleet Sir William Henry May, *The Life of a Sailor: Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir William Henry May, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., 1863-1930* (London and Eccles: William Clowes and Sons, Limited, 1934.), p. 2.

also Director of Torpedoes.⁴⁵ From there he joined the Mediterranean Fleet under Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, under whose command were a galaxy of future flag officers such as Jellicoe, Hugh Evan-Thomas, William Goodenough, Arthur Leveson, and Osmond Brock.⁴⁶

When he succeeded Bridgeman, May faced a difficult situation. This was not at all surprising considering the events of the previous two years. Long afterward, he recalled, ‘There had been a great deal of jealousy between Beresford’s Fleet and Bridgeman’s Fleet, and when they came together under my command, this jealousy persisted, chiefly with the Senior officers in Beresford’s old Fleet’.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he seems to have made a decent job of integrating the former Channel Fleet into the Home Fleet whatever the attitudes of the pro-Beresford camp.

Nicholas Lambert claims that prior to 1910 ‘nearly every senior British admiral’ including Fisher thought that naval battles would be fought almost entirely between battleship squadrons with a few cruisers for scouting and signalling purposes.⁴⁸ This is at the very least an overstatement, for there was a school of thought in the Royal Navy that advocated the use of destroyers in fleet actions. The roots of this can be traced back to the early days of the self-propelled torpedo, when the Royal Navy tried several times to create a torpedo-carrying vessel capable of fleet work, including defence against enemy torpedo craft.⁴⁹ As the head of the Mediterranean Fleet, Fisher had encouraged the development of such tactics, partially to offset the inability of the Fleet’s destroyer force to carry out the sorts of covering operations against French torpedo boat stations that were the basis of destroyer operations in Home Waters.⁵⁰ Possibly as a result Fisher became interested in the use of destroyers to screen the fleet against

⁴⁵ Jones, ‘May’, pp. 312-313.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 314.

⁴⁷ May, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁴⁹ Friedman, *British Destroyers*, pp. 24-34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 69-72.

enemy flotilla attacks, and from there it was a short step to consider their possible offensive use in a fleet action.⁵¹

Ironically, Fisher's ascension as First Sea Lord resulted in these developments falling out of favour. Instead, as seen in Chapter 3, the British destroyers would be used for observation work off the Waddenzee while the battle fleet was held back awaiting a suitable opportunity to engage the *Hochseeflotte* on its own. Thus Fisher abandoned the doctrine he had built up in the Mediterranean in favour of an adapted version of the Channel doctrine that had—formerly in Fisher's eyes at least—kept the Admiralty from providing sufficient destroyers to the Mediterranean.⁵² This apparent *volte face* was, as Norman Friedman observes, a frustrating surprise to Lord Charles Beresford, who had been building upon the notion of integrating destroyers into the battle fleet.⁵³

For his part, Admiral May eventually came to regard the attachment of destroyers to the battle fleet as a *fait accompli*:

‘The main question as to whether a Fleet operating in Home waters should be accompanied during the daytime by a flotilla of destroyers is practically solved for us by the fact that at least one foreign nation is known to carry out tactical exercises with destroyers taking part. Consequently it may be assumed as probable that an enemy putting to sea in force with the object of bringing on a general action may bring his destroyers out with him, and it therefore appears essential for us to be in a position not only to meet any possible attack from them during any particular stage of an engagement by day, but also to know how to use our own destroyers to the greatest advantage.’⁵⁴

Even so, as late as 1910 May wrote officially that although ‘it may become occasionally necessary to have Destroyers with a fleet’ and that their primary duty was to destroy enemy

⁵¹ See for instance Fisher to Lady Fisher, 29 September 1900, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, pp. 161-162.

⁵² Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Admiralty, ‘Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.’, 19 September 1911, p. 411, Eb 012, NHB. Herbert Richmond was also involved in the production of this volume, snidely describing it as a ‘precious book on Tactics’ and complaining much of his work was cut out for being ‘too dogmatic’. Richmond journal, 25 January 1911, RIC 1/8, Richmond MSS.

flotilla craft, they were not to be a permanent component of the battle fleet and under ‘no account whatsoever’ were to travel with the battle fleet at night.⁵⁵ The longstanding knowledge that a ‘foreign nation’ (i.e. Germany) was working destroyers with their seagoing fleet meant combined destroyer/battle fleet exercises continued, with a notable example being the April-May 1910 strategic and tactical manoeuvres carried out by the Atlantic and Home Fleets during a combined cruise.⁵⁶ Soon afterwards, a general survey of the principal fleet officers was undertaken on the subject of working destroyers together with a battle fleet. The results showed division within the fleet, with some officers such as May, Battenberg, and the flotilla commanders themselves supporting such a marriage, while others, notably Milne and Sturdee, were against.⁵⁷ D.N.I. Bethell thought the increasing range of the torpedo would make a fleet turning away from attacking destroyers more effective than adding flotillas to the battle fleet.⁵⁸ The matter was still undecided when in 1911 May had published an immense volume on the tactical exercises conducted by the Home Fleet since 1909.⁵⁹

By then May’s appointment had run its course. His successor was none other than Sir Francis Bridgeman. When Bridgeman had been offered a second bite at the apple of command by McKenna, he replied from his home at Copgrove Hall, Yorkshire that he was ‘delighted to accept the responsibilities of the Home Fleet, & I sincerely hope I may prove a success & do justice to your confidence in me!’⁶⁰ No doubt part of Bridgeman’s delight was the relief at

⁵⁵ May, ‘Home Fleet Destroyers. Instructions for Training.’ (London: HMSO, 1910), pp. 11-12, Dg 68, NHB.

⁵⁶ Admiralty, ‘Strategic & Tactical Exercises carried out by combined Home & Atlantic Fleets.’, 1910, X.1056/1910, ADM 1/8119.

⁵⁷ Rear-Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall, ‘Remarks by D.N.M.’, 9 June 1910, in Admiralty, ‘Employment of Destroyers in Fleet Actions’, 1910, X.1751/1910, ADM 1/8120.

⁵⁸ Bethell, ‘Remarks by D.N.I.’, 15 June 1910, in Admiralty, ‘Employment of Destroyers in Fleet Actions’, 1910, X.1751/1910, ADM 1/8120.

⁵⁹ May, ‘Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.’, 19 September 1911, Eb 012, NHB.

⁶⁰ Bridgeman to McKenna, 22 November 1910, MCKN 3/10, f. 81, McKenna MSS.

escaping from under Sir Arthur Wilson's thumb, but his love of sea duty and fleet work was almost certainly the principal reason.

As C.-in-C., Bridgeman dutifully continued May's work, and one result was 'an interesting paper' written by Captain Walter Cowan of the *Gloucester* on destroyer operations. Later, as First Sea Lord, Bridgeman later passed the paper on to the First Lord, noting that 'Cowan has had large experience, & is a good authority on these subjects'.⁶¹ Cowan was 'strongly of the opinion that a Battle Fleet at sea and likely to fight should always have its attendant Flotilla' in company, operating ahead and on its flanks ready to either counter enemy flotillas or dash at the enemy main force according to the circumstances of the action. Cowan allowed that:

'Some Flag Officers and Captains who have only served in armoured ships will perhaps disagree with this, and have said ... that Destroyers acting as I have described would be annihilated by gun-fire before ever getting within striking distance; but I cannot think it, as no system of [fire] control in the Navy is quick enough to cope with vessels closing each other at perhaps nearly 50 knots' speed, and very few brains cool enough, especially after the ships have taken a certain amount of punishment and are heavily engaged elsewhere as well.'⁶²

As for watching duties, Cowan felt scouts or even armoured ships were preferable until the enemy emerged, at which time destroyers could be vectored in *via* wireless, with a consequent reduction in fatigue to both crews and ships.

Bridgeman's second tenure as C.-in-C. Home Fleet would last just a few months before events elsewhere intervened.

⁶¹ Bridgeman minute, 26 February 1912, on Bridgeman, 'Destroyer & Light Cruisers in War', 26 February 1912, BTY/2/3/2, Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty MSS, NMM.

⁶² Captain Walter Cowan to Bridgeman, 9 October 1911, No. 122, in Bridgeman, 'Destroyer & Light Cruisers in War', 26 February 1912, BTY/2/3/2, Beatty MSS.

Agadir

In the spring of 1911, France had begun working to remove the last vestiges of independent Morocco by sending a military column to Fez. Germany, alarmed by this disruption of the *status quo* began diplomatic counter-manoeuvres but overplayed their hand by demanding excessive compensation for the loss of their (largely theoretical) commercial claims in Morocco in the form of French Congolese holdings and by impetuously sending the gunboat *Panther* to Agadir in defence of their position.⁶³ It is worth noting that in both cases the impetus came from the German Foreign Ministry, as Tirpitz for all his faults knew better than to make such an obvious challenge to British maritime pride. Sir Edward Grey and the rest of the Foreign Office understood the German grievances but nonetheless regarded them with the suspicion of a conspiracy theorist. Helping them to this conclusion were the usual diplomatic rumours of the time, especially one of French provenance that the Germans were desirous of a great African territory that would ultimately threaten South Africa and Rhodesia.⁶⁴

The Admiralty, who were not privy to such rumours and in any case understood the reliance on seapower that such a move would entail, took a much more relaxed view of the entire crisis. Much ‘to the consternation of Crowe and Nicolson’, the Admiralty’s initial reply to the *Panthersprung* was to note the fact that the crisis posed little threat to Britain’s maritime interests.⁶⁵ This response was, in retrospect, a very good example for those who wish to paint the Navy as a retrograde institution. It was entirely correct but politically naïve—the diplomats and cabinet politicians wanted something more than a blithe assurance of safety, and the Admiralty would not stoop to give it.

⁶³ Geoffrey Barraclough, *From Agadir to Armageddon: Anatomy of a Crisis* (Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd., 1982), pp. 71-107.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Frustration was not limited to the Cabinet. From his flagship, Admiral Bridgeman complained to Battenberg in an unusually forceful manner at the end of September about recent events. Hearing garbled (and, in fact, inaccurate) reports of German warships operating in the Orkneys and Shetlands, Bridgeman sent first ‘a Scout & some Destroyers’ to the islands and then took his own flagship, the dreadnought *Neptune*, to Lerwick in response to rumours of German cruisers being seen in nearby waters. ‘It’s difficult to say what particular cruiser she was,’ Bridgeman stated ‘but I am led to believe she was one of those in charge of the Submarines & most possibly she was accompanied by them!’ These reports convinced Bridgeman that ‘Germany has laid her plans for attacking our fleet in these Northern ports with Her Submarines, Destroyers and Mines—the instant they declare war!’ Germany, he thought, would go to war using their flotillas as the tip of the spear. Their rumoured infiltration of the northern islands was disturbing enough, but ‘what is so disconcerting to all of us Sailors in the Home Fleet’ was that the Cabinet ‘will permit no precautions being taken to prevent a surprise.’ Bridgeman complained further that he ‘was forbidden to take the Fleet to Sea, or take the necessary precautions while laying in Harbour, exception having been taken to getting nets out at night!’ What were the point of War Orders providing precautionary measures for ‘Strained Relations’ when those Orders ‘were disregarded just as much as if they had not existed!’ The experience had even soured him on the use of Scapa and Cromarty and the Firth as bases. ‘Are we never to take precautions for fear of the press? If so, then I am no longer in favour of using these Northern Harbours for our Battleships! For if we are not to go to sea, and not defend ourselves, the fleet will be gone before we can fight an action!’⁶⁶

On August 23rd, 1911, in the context of the crisis a famous meeting occurred in London. Despite recent efforts to downplay its importance, there is still the impression of a bureaucratic

⁶⁶ Bridgeman to Battenberg, 30 September 1911, MB1/T9/44, Battenberg MSS.

coup d'état to the proceedings.⁶⁷ The Army could hardly have prayed for better circumstances. The Navy's best advocates were either absent or *hors d'combat*.⁶⁸ Also absent were Lewis Harcourt and Lords Morley and Crewe, who if not sympathetic to the Navy's cause, were unlikely to favour the Army's 'continental commitment';⁶⁹ in any case they were furious regarding their enforced absence.⁷⁰ The Navy's case was thus left to McKenna, Wilson, and Bethell. It is not an understatement that 'the meeting constituted a gathering of the *entente* faction'.⁷¹ The stage was set for what amounted to the Navy's Ides of March.

The subject of the meeting was officially described as 'Action to be Taken in the Event of Intervention in a European War'.⁷² Zara Steiner observed that this would be the only time that the Committee 'actually reviewed the over-all pattern of British strategy before 1914'.⁷³ Wilson and McKenna began the meeting by denying that the Admiralty could provide men or ships to transport a major expedition across the Channel:

'The whole force at the disposal of the Admiralty would be absorbed in keeping the enemy within the North Sea. Ordinarily the Navy would furnish transport officers and protecting ships. These could not be furnished in these circumstances.'⁷⁴

Unfortunately, this argument was diluted when General Wilson observed that in any case the Channel would likely 'be covered by the main operations' in the North Sea, and resultantly the risk to the troop transports would be 'very slight', especially since in the first few days of

⁶⁷ Keith Neilson, 'Great Britain', in Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig (eds.), *War Planning 1914*, pp. 175-197.

⁶⁸ Esher was in Scotland recovering from surgery. Fisher was abroad and in any case was determined to at least feign being a *matelot Cincinattus*.

⁶⁹ d'Ombraïn, *op. cit.*, p. 101; Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁷⁰ Asquith to Haldane, 9 September 1911, Haldane 5909, Haldane MSS.

⁷¹ d'Ombraïn, *loc. cit.*

⁷² C.I.D., 'Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of the 114th Meeting, August 23, 1911.', 23 August 1911, p. 1, CAB 2/2.

⁷³ Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 200.

⁷⁴ C.I.D., 'Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of the 114th Meeting, August 23, 1911.', p. 2, CAB 2/2. Admiral Wilson speaking. For clarity, the two Wilsons will be referred to as either Admiral Wilson or General Wilson.

mobilization many of the Navy's warships activated from reserve would be 'traversing the Channel on the way to their stations.'⁷⁵ When pressed for details on the opinion of Admiral Groome, the Admiralty Director of Transports, McKenna said the Admiralty had not sufficient men to mobilize the fleet and ferry the expeditionary force to France simultaneously.⁷⁶ Bethell added that a previous report on transport availability had 'assumed the Fleet had already been mobilized.'⁷⁷ Asquith grew increasingly impatient over the whole issue and finally ended the discussion, instructing McKenna to look into the matter of transportation because the Army's plan required simultaneous mobilization of the British forces alongside the French Army, making 'the question of time... all important.'⁷⁸

General Wilson was then able to commence his 'masterful, well-planned exposition'.⁷⁹ Seven British divisions (six infantry, one cavalry) plus Army-level assets totalling some 160,000 men would cross the Channel and marshal at Maubeuge, where they would be available to assist the French forces defending against the main German thrust, which Wilson said would happen in 'the 90-mile gap between Verdun and Maubeuge.' Limitations of the local road network meant the Germans could employ at most forty divisions against a French defensive force of thirty-seven to thirty-nine. In these circumstances, General Wilson said it 'was quite likely that our six divisions might prove to be the deciding factor.'⁸⁰ Doubts over whether Germany would violate Belgian neutrality only south of the Liege fortress were dismissed by Wilson when they were

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3. Admiral Wilson speaking.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 2. McKenna speaking.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3. Bethell speaking.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 4. Asquith speaking.

⁷⁹ Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War*, paperback ed. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Ashfield Press, 1990), p. 188.

⁸⁰ C.I.D., 'Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of the 114th Meeting, August 23, 1911.', pp. 4-5, CAB 2/2. General Wilson speaking.

raised by Churchill and, later, General French.⁸¹ When the question of a French defeat along the Meuse was raised, Wilson simply said the British forces would remain alongside the French left flank. This did not satisfy Churchill, who 'did not like the idea of the British Army retiring into France away from its home country.'⁸² After a discussion of potential Russian contributions to a European war, and a suggestion by Churchill that Russia could be supported by a forcing of the Dardanelles which Grey felt would be 'an insuperable difficulty',⁸³ the meeting adjourned for lunch.

The Admiralty spoke their case that afternoon. The First Sea Lord began by offering three related objections:

1. The effect on public morale if the entire regular Army went abroad.
2. The effect of such a deployment on the Navy's defence of the British Isles.
3. The consequential loss of the ability for the Navy to carry out combined operations.

On the second point, Admiral Wilson emphasized that his statements were in no way a capitulation on the unending invasion argument. It was not 'a question of invasion by 70,000 men,' he said. 'The guarantee of the Navy against any number like that was absolute, but small raids might cause serious damage unless very promptly met.'⁸⁴ The third objection allowed Admiral Wilson to segue into the Admiralty's own plans of war against Germany.

Wilson's strategy was consistent with his proposals during the previous Moroccan Crisis. Landing operations would be undertaken to seize Heligoland 'as soon as possible after the outbreak of war' using the Royal Marines for the assault, and afterwards other islands and points on the coasts on the German Bight would be taken by Army forces covered by the fleet. Wangeroog, Schillighorn, and Büsum are named explicitly in the Minutes, the first to prevent its

⁸¹ Sir John French, of course, led the British Expeditionary Force into action, nowhere near Maubeuge, when the Germans did in fact violate Belgian neutrality.

⁸² Ibid., p. 8. Churchill speaking. Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 189, notes the similarities to 1940.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 10. Grey speaking.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 11. Admiral Wilson speaking.

use as an inconvenience for the British destroyer flotillas on observation duties or as a German signal station, the second for its potential as an advanced base, and the last because of the threat it would pose to the Kiel Canal if in British hands. No mention is made of Borkum, presumably because Heligoland was designated as an essential target, making the former's capture redundant. Admiral Wilson's estimate was that these operations would 'probably require one division, perhaps more', especially if at a later phase of the war the British felt 'obliged to try and destroy or drive out the German Fleet at Wilhelmshaven', presumably if they had not previously sortied to attack the earlier British landing forces *en masse*. Anticipating arguments on the vulnerability of the transports to attack or the landing forces to counterattacks from the German shore, the First Sea Lord claimed that by 'having its transports close at hand' the British amphibious assets 'would be highly mobile, and could be landed and embarked again before superior forces could assembled to destroy [them].'⁸⁵

Summarizing the plan's objectives, Admiral Wilson launched into a barbed attack on his Army counterpart:

'If in this way we could retain the 10 German divisions of which General Wilson had spoken on the North Sea coast, we should make a material contribution to the Allied cause by keeping these men not only from the theatre of war elsewhere, but from normal productive labour, possibly in dockyards or kindred industries. That meant that we should intensify the economic strain upon Germany.'

This excerpt should remove any doubt that Admiral Wilson was supportive of economic warfare or that he was blind to the possibility of these landings being faced by German reserve units or even the *Landstrumm*, instead of first-line regiments pulled back from the Western Front. After all, why would a redeployment of active duty troops pose a danger to the availability of shipyard labour?

⁸⁵ The issue of operational fatigue after opposed amphibious landing operations became clear only during the Pacific campaigns of the Second World War. See Miller, *War Plan Orange*, p. 196.

How McKenna took all this in is not recorded, although Nicholas Lambert suggests he ‘listened in horror’,⁸⁶ which may be true as Battenberg would later write that neither McKenna nor Haldane knew of this plan before Wilson presented it.⁸⁷ In any case, the counterattack came quickly. When Churchill observed that the taking of Wilhelmshaven would involve ‘regular siege operations’, the First Sea Lord ‘assented’, and further observed he did not anticipate any difficulty in the Heligoland operation—despite previous N.I.D. studies of such an operation suggesting otherwise⁸⁸—since the Admiralty ‘knew what guns were there, and those we could easily fight.’ The only intelligence that the First Sea Lord was concerned with involved mortar batteries on Heligoland, presumably due to the danger of plunging fire.⁸⁹ As for the other operations ‘we could not foresee how much we could do; but the nature of the enemy coast, with its numerous creeks and islands providing shelter for the enemy’s torpedo craft, would make its blockade very arduous’ without ‘regular troops to assist [the Navy] in their operations.’⁹⁰ Field Marshal Sir William Nicholson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, noted that Admiral Wilson’s comment on keeping transports close to hand was a departure from a statement he had previously written for a book on the invasion/conscription issue. The First Sea Lord retorted that ‘the difference was that we should have command of the sea.’ Furthermore, the guns of the fleet could protect the landing forces. This provoked Nicholson to sum up the Army’s position on the matter:

⁸⁶ Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁸⁷ Battenberg statement, 24 June 1916, MB1/T39/378, Battenberg MSS.

⁸⁸ Ottley to Churchill, 2 November 1911, f. 28, CAB 17/8.

⁸⁹ Heavy-calibre mortars were common in the latest generation of coastal defence batteries, particularly in those built by the United States. The mortars’ high-angle ballistic trajectories allowed shells to strike the armoured decks of capital ships much more effectively than any other weapon by bypassing the vertical armoured belts that formed the primary protection against naval gunfire at typical engagement ranges, although at long range naval shells too were fired at high enough angles to plunge through the armoured decks. Japanese siege mortars had wrought havoc on the Russian ships bottled up in Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War.

⁹⁰ C.I.D., ‘Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of the 114th Meeting, August 23, 1911.’, p. 12, CAB 2/2. Admiral Wilson speaking.

‘The truth was that this class of operation possibly had some value a century ago, when land communications were indifferent, but now, when they were excellent, they were doomed to failure. Wherever we threatened to land the Germans could concentrate superior force.’⁹¹

Things only got worse for the Navy after this. Churchill’s comment that landing operations would tie the fleet to the coast was met by Wilson observing that those ships ‘would be tied to the coast by the necessity for blockading it.’⁹² Nicholson thought siege operations against Wilhelmshaven were out of the question given the Japanese experience at Port Arthur. When Wilson said a successful fleet battle in the North Sea might open the Prussian and Pomeranian coasts to attack by the Royal Navy, Haldane scoffed it would ‘not cause the Germans a moment’s anxiety, for they had always ridiculed the idea of fortifying Berlin despite its comparative proximity to the sea.’⁹³ Churchill, meanwhile, thought entering the Baltic would ‘incur great risks’ to the fleet.⁹⁴

Churchill would later remark to Asquith that he had lost all confidence in Wilson and ‘[n]o man of real power could have answered so foolishly.’⁹⁵ The War Minister now had his opportunity and went on the offensive, informing the Prime Minister that ‘the Admirals live in a world of their own. The Fisher Method, which Wilson seems to follow, that war plans should be locked up in the brain of the First Sea Lord, is out of date and impractical. Our problems of defence are far too numerous and complex to be treated in that way.’ Furthermore, ‘I have after mature consideration come to the conclusion that this is... the gravest problem which confronts the Government to-day and that unless it is tackled resolutely I cannot remain in office.’⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 12-13. Nicholson speaking.

⁹² Ibid., p. 13. Admiral Wilson speaking.

⁹³ Ibid. Haldane speaking.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Churchill speaking.

⁹⁵ Churchill to Asquith, 13 September 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 532.

⁹⁶ Haldane to Asquith, August 1911, quoted in Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, *Haldane: The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan, K.T., O.M.*, i (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), pp. 283-284.

In addition, Haldane took the opportunity to embarrass the Admiralty further on August 25th. He submitted the details of the latest revision of the Army's transport requirements with a demand for immediate comment, despite knowing he was on leave. After three weeks Haldane complained to the Prime Minister about the (predictable) lack of response, and Asquith swallowed the bait whole, writing to McKenna telling the First Lord to 'Please see to this, for though there is every reason to hope that we are well out of the wood, all possible contingencies ought to be studied.'⁹⁷ There seems little doubt Haldane had by now fixed his eyes on the First Lordship. He claimed the Board of Admiralty could not be counted upon to move with the times, complaining 'the doors of the Admiralty are closed to all new ideas and new developments.'⁹⁸

In the end, it seems unlikely that the Admiralty could have carried the day, even if Wilson had put forward what Sir William May might have described as a significantly more *au fait* presentation of his schemes of campaign against the German coast. At this distance, with the horrors of the Somme and Ypres and Passchendaele defining—for better or worse—public conceptions of the Great War,⁹⁹ and the many successful amphibious operations seen during the Second World War and subsequent conflicts, it is tempting to see Wilson's proposals as a great 'what if'. This is, however, to put too much stock in hindsight. Whatever their chances of success, they were politically naïve in the face of the Army delegates' emphasis on cooperation in an assumed Anglo-French coalition. An expeditionary force deployed to the Continent, even a body of only two corps, was a direct show of material assistance that a naval blockade could not be, no matter how many German divisions were kept pinned to the Waddenzee by British landings.

⁹⁷ Asquith to McKenna, 18 September 1911, f. 2, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS. I concur with Nicholas Lambert's interpretation of this incident as an effort by Haldane to undermine McKenna, for which see Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁹⁸ Esher to Balfour, 30 September 1910, in Brett (ed.), *Esher*, iii, p. 25.

⁹⁹ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the Great War*, paperback ed. (London: Cassell, 2004).

Enter Winston Churchill

Even sympathetic navalists felt Wilson had done them a wrong. Lord Fisher wrote that Wilson ‘was magnificent at sea but he has wrecked McKenna ashore.’¹⁰⁰ Asquith felt, according to Esher, that ‘McKenna has done fairly well as a defender of Admiralty Policy in Parliament, but that he has been entirely dominated (a) by Jackie, (b) by Wilson, and that he would never be inclined or able to reorganize the internal naval policy of the Department.’¹⁰¹ The Prime Minister subsequently made noises to McKenna on October 10th on the pretext that ‘As we are on the eve of completing our sixth year of office, I am contemplating a certain amount of reconstruction both inside & outside the Cabinet.’¹⁰² Now came the choosing of McKenna’s successor.

The most obvious candidate at the time, thanks mostly to his self-promotion, was Haldane. His letter to Asquith that threatened resignation illustrates this, for Haldane wrote ‘Five years[’] experience of the War Office has taught me how to handle the generals and get the best out of them and I believe that the experience makes me the person best qualified to go to the Admiralty and carry through a reorganization’.¹⁰³ However, ‘Haldane had been a very vocal critic of the Admiralty and would not have been well received there.’¹⁰⁴ This is something of an understatement, in fact. Originally a supporter, Fisher had by this time developed a violent loathing for Haldane, going so far as to call him ‘Napoleon B’.¹⁰⁵ Haldane was also now in the House of Lords, which went against Asquith’s desire that the new First Lord ‘ought to be in the

¹⁰⁰ Fisher to Churchill, 26 October 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1299. Balfour told Lloyd George he had ‘no confidence in Wilson’s capability for direction and leadership.’ Lloyd George to Churchill, 15 September 1911, Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 534.

¹⁰¹ Esher journal, 4 October 1911, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS.

¹⁰² Asquith to McKenna, 10 October 1911, f. 3, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹⁰³ Haldane to Asquith, August 1911, quoted in Maurice, *Haldane*, i, pp. 283-284.

¹⁰⁴ Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, *Former Naval Person: Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy* (London: Cassell, 1968), p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ For an example of Fisher’s invective regarding Haldane, see Fisher to McKenna, 20 August 1911, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 380-381.

H of Commons'. Asquith additionally worried about Haldane's potential reform schemes, fearing 'the Navy would not take kindly... to new organization imported direct from the War Office.'¹⁰⁶

Fortunately there was another candidate in the offing. Winston Churchill at the end of September indicated he would very much like to leave the Home Office, where he had grown especially tired of dealing with the Women's Suffrage issue—as indeed had the Suffragettes in dealing with him.¹⁰⁷ Having previously been one of the leading economists during the 1909 fight over shipbuilding, he would have credibility with the Radicals—he certainly had the backing of his good friend Lloyd George.¹⁰⁸ He had also shown some extracurricular interest in naval affairs quite unrelated to matters of economy. In 1904 he had been involved in a long talk with Sir Michael Hicks Beech and Sir George King-Hall about naval policy, which left King-Hall to note that Churchill had 'a very good opinion of himself.'¹⁰⁹ Much later—in March 1911—he circulated a memorandum to the Cabinet titled 'The Mediterranean Fleet' that began with the statement 'I AM anxious that the Mediterranean position should be examined *de novo*.' The rest of the memorandum laid out, in general but informed terms, the arguments against maintaining the Mediterranean Fleet at its present strength. Churchill concluded that it was 'a matter for consideration whether the Mediterranean establishments should not be reduced to that of a cruiser squadron, capable of discharging all minor measures of police,' and whether the occasional visit by 'the periodical visits at convenient junctures of a preponderant battle fleet.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Asquith to Crewe, 7 October 1911, Randolph Churchill *YS Companion* 2, p. 1295.

¹⁰⁷ As late as 1913, Churchill was writing to his wife warning her to 'Be vy careful not to open suspicious parcels arriving by post without precautions. ... These harpies are quite capable of trying to burn us out.' Presumably he was not referring to opponents of his work at the Admiralty! Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 1 February 1913, in Randolph Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Volume II: Companion Part 3, 1911-1914* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), p. 1715. Hereafter cited as *YS Companion* 3.

¹⁰⁸ George Riddell diary, November 1911, in John M. McEwen (ed.), *The Riddell Diaries, 1908-1923* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), pp. 24-25.

¹⁰⁹ George King-Hall diary, 23 October 1904, King-Hall MSS.

¹¹⁰ Churchill, 'The Mediterranean Fleet', March 1911, CAB 37/105/27.

In other words, Churchill felt that the same principles Fisher and Selborne had applied to the armoured cruiser squadrons in 1905 could be expanded to include battle fleets as well.

It was not without reason, therefore, that Asquith wrote that ‘On the whole, I am satisfied that Churchill is the right man’.¹¹¹ Churchill was also under the influence of Lord Fisher. The two men had met in Biarritz during April 1907 and become fast friends, with Fisher regaling the young M.P. into the late hours with ‘wonderful stories of the Navy and of his plans—all about Dreadnoughts, all about submarines, all about the new education scheme, all about big guns, and splendid Admirals and foolish miserable ones, and Nelson and the Bible, and finally the island of Borkum.’¹¹²

Haldane learned of this at a visit to Archerfield in late September. His autobiography certainly shows his disappointment. Although he claimed to have ‘no desire to be First Lord’, Haldane felt ‘if a real Naval War Staff were to be created and the Admiralty to be convinced of its necessity, that must be done by someone equipped with the knowledge and experience that were essential for fashioning a highly complicated organization.’¹¹³ It was thus fairly distressing to find that Churchill ‘had been pressing Asquith hard.’¹¹⁴ Subsequently matters came to a head:

‘I took the initiative. I told [Churchill] that his imaginative power and vitality were greater than mine, and that physically he was better suited to be a War Minister. But at this critical moment it was not merely a question of such qualities. The Navy and public had to be convinced, and they would be most easily convinced of the necessity of scientific preparation for naval war by someone who already had carried out similar preparations in the only Service in which they had been made or even thought of. I was satisfied that in all probability I could accomplish what was wanted within twelve months, and if he would look after the Army till the end of that time I would return to it and he could then take over the Admiralty.’¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Asquith to Crewe, 7 October 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1295.

¹¹² Churchill added, revealingly, that ‘I even remembered the island of Borkum when my teacher had ceased to think so much of it.’ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 53.

¹¹³ Viscount Haldane, *Richard Burton Haldane: An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), p. 230.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

This rather strange proposal left both Asquith and Churchill unmoved. Churchill got the job.

There remained McKenna to be disposed of. In the same letter that Asquith had informed the soon-to-be ex-First Lord of the ‘certain amount of reconstruction’, Asquith referenced a rumour that McKenna had ‘been willing in the Summer to take Sir G. Murray’s post [as Master of Elibank].’¹¹⁶ Noting that he was thankful this had not come to pass, lest he lose McKenna’s ‘legal training & ... large & tried administration experience and capacity’ altogether, Asquith went on to offer him ‘one of the most difficult and responsible places in the Government – the Home Office.’ McKenna was under no illusions about the reality of the situation, nevertheless he knew his position was untenable, and wrote to the Prime Minister that ‘It is repugnant to me not to acquiesce in any proposal made by you.’¹¹⁷ However McKenna had no wish to leave immediately and he wished to remain until December, which raised the Prime Minister’s ire.¹¹⁸ Asquith had hoped McKenna ‘would have recognized the cogency of the reasons’ he had given.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Asquith said that he ‘cannot at all assent to what you say about the Estimates ... To bring in a new First Lord in December for the first time, does not appear to me to be giving him a fair chance.’ McKenna hastily replied that he had been misinterpreted.¹²⁰ McKenna ultimately left the Admiralty in October. He would not forgive Churchill for his transfer.¹²¹

Churchill arrived at the Admiralty with a dual brief. Besides the now-familiar mission of reigning in the Navy Estimates,¹²² he was to create a Naval War Staff.¹²³ The new First Lord was

¹¹⁶ Asquith to McKenna, 10 October 1911, f. 3, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹¹⁷ McKenna to Asquith, 17 October 1911, f. 8, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹¹⁸ Asquith telegram to McKenna, 18 October 1911, f. 9, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹¹⁹ Asquith to McKenna, 18 October 1911, f. 10, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹²⁰ McKenna to Asquith, 19 October 1911, f. 13, MCKN 4/1, McKenna MSS.

¹²¹ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

¹²² Though the Duke of Connaught noted that ‘I don’t think you will find him agree [*sic*] to a dangerous reduction of the Navy.’ Duke of Connaught to Princess Louise, 8 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 538-539.

a young man in a hurry, and resultantly some of his ideas bore 'traces of great haste and little thought.'¹²⁴ As one of his Naval Secretaries wrote, Churchill was 'clever and hard-working, but he was also impulsive, headstrong, and even at times obstinate.'¹²⁵ Esher wrote, 'I fear Winston as a First Lord of the Admiralty. Will he play up? He has one eye undoubtedly on the Navy and to be a popular First Lord. But the other is not unnaturally on the radical tail.'¹²⁶

The Need for a Staff

The issue of the creation of a staff organization at the Admiralty had been a long-festering one. The supreme and decisive success enjoyed by the Prussian Army during the Franco-Prussian War was seen as being primarily due to the work of the Prussian General Staff. It was natural, then, that agitation for a similar such organization at the Admiralty would follow. The first steps, in the minds of many, had already been taken when a Foreign Intelligence Committee had been established in 1882, partly through the enterprise of the Naval Secretary, Captain George Tryon. In 1886 this body was expanded into the Naval Intelligence Department partly, but not entirely, due to the public harangues of Lord Charles Beresford, who Lord Salisbury had made Junior Naval Lord.¹²⁷ The N.I.D. was for the next decade led by some of the most capable and intelligent men in the Navy, beginning with Captain William Hall.¹²⁸ Though not a true general staff, it performed many of the functions of one, especially concerning war planning.¹²⁹

¹²³ Black, *Naval Staff*, p. 56.

¹²⁴ Captain Osmond de Brock to Slade, 29 December 1911, MRF/39/1, Slade MSS.

¹²⁵ Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, *The Sea is Strong* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 149.

¹²⁶ Esher journal, 28 November 1911, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS.

¹²⁷ Matthew Allen, 'The Foreign Intelligence Committee and the Origins of the Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty', *The Mariner's Mirror* 81, no. 1 (February 1995), pp. 65-78.

¹²⁸ Hall's successors as D.N.I. were equally talented men, including Cyprian Bridge, Reginald Custance, Prince Louis of Battenberg, Charles Ottley, Edmond Slade, Alexander Bethell, and Hall's son William 'Blinker' Hall.

¹²⁹ For a further analysis, see Grimes, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-40.

Fisher himself flirted briefly with the idea of a staff prior to becoming First Sea Lord.¹³⁰ In February 1902, Prince Louis of Battenberg wrote a memorandum, described by his biographer as ‘an example of a clear-sighted improvement for the Admiralty Staff’.¹³¹ This memorandum proposed ‘enlarging and strengthening’ the existing Naval Intelligence Department and placing the First Sea Lord in direct charge of this new body, freeing him of ‘the heavy burden of his general work, especially routine matters,’ which Battenberg felt ‘prevents him from devoting as much attention to “Preparation for War” as he should and probably would wish.’ Further relief would come from, preferably, the redistribution of business among the other Sea Lords. This proposal, minus the creation of a staff body from the Naval Intelligence Department, was otherwise similar to the reforms of the Board of Admiralty that Sir John Fisher undertook as part of his 1904 Scheme.¹³²

While there were numerous officers who felt a Naval Staff would be a good idea, there were others in the Navy, however, that deprecated the idea that the Navy needed a staff. Fisher had after his appointment as First Sea Lord embraced the latter position, preferring to work with committees—both formal and informal—made up of trustworthy men. Fisher felt a permanent 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!’¹³³ Black notes that ‘in place of a reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II, the reader should more properly substitute the name of

¹³⁰ Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-260.

¹³¹ Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 144-154.

¹³² Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259. For Fisher’s 1904 alterations to the responsibilities of the Board, see Board of Admiralty, ‘Statement showing present Distribution of Business between the various Members of the Board of Admiralty, Dated 20th October 1904; and that which it Superseded, Dated 1st January 1904.’, 1905, GEE/2, Sir William Graham Greene MSS, NMM.

¹³³ Fisher to Esher, 3 January 1912, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 425.

Lord Charles Beresford.’¹³⁴ This is especially true remembering N.I.D. Captain Henry Campbell’s pro-Beresford testimony at the Beresford Enquiry.

Another officer who was publically in opposition to a Staff was Sir Cyprian Bridge. Bridge felt that ‘a navy is so constituted that it contains its General Staff in itself, and consequently does not need an excrescent body to co-ordinate its elements and their efforts.’¹³⁵ As an explanation, Bridge cited the self-sufficiency of each warship. ‘From the *St. Vincent* to the *Cadmus*, every man-of-war—no matter to what class she belongs—is self-contained, and therefore no General Staff is needed to evoke her full belligerent efficiency.’¹³⁶ Sir Arthur Wilson was also in the anti-Staff school. Like Fisher, Wilson felt ‘that the First Sea Lord, and he alone, was responsible for the preparation and conduct of the war at sea’.¹³⁷ This might not have been a problem had Wilson been willing to make use of the informal system Fisher had used. Instead he kept his own council to an extreme degree, and even Fisher’s insurance that the talented Sir Alexander Bethell would remain D.N.I. during Wilson’s tenure did nothing to help matters.¹³⁸

Fisher had made one concession in the wake of the Beresford Enquiry by creating a ‘Navy War Council’ with the First Sea Lord as President that would consider issues relating to strategy and war plans. The records of its few meetings make sombre reading.¹³⁹ Most of the discussions involved manning and mobilization questions, although some specific strategic issues were brought up as well. The Navy War Council has largely been dismissed as a con job by Fisher. Herbert Richmond hyperventilated that it was ‘the most absurd bit of humbug that has

¹³⁴ Black, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

¹³⁵ Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, ‘Navy War Councils and General Staffs’, in T.A. Brassey (ed.), *The Naval Annual 1910* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin & Co., 1910), p. 84.

¹³⁶ Bridge, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹³⁷ Herbert King-Hall, *Naval Memories*, p. 218.

¹³⁸ Black, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹³⁹ Admiralty, ‘Navy War Council. Minutes.’, ADM 116/3090.

been perpetrated for a long time'.¹⁴⁰ The Navy War Council deserves more consideration, and Marder's disapproving comment that the Council was a 'modest reform' and 'not a true naval staff', while true, misses the point.¹⁴¹ The Council was, in effect, a linear evolutionary development of Fisher's method of forming committees to tackle policy questions; the Navy War Council was a permanent version of those committees.¹⁴² While it would never 'hush the agitation of those who were urging a "thinking department"... corresponding in function to the General Staff of the Army',¹⁴³ it was probably never expected to.

By the autumn of 1911, however, the Navy War Council appeared very much inadequate. In large portion, this was due to Wilson. Sir Herbert King-Hall, who as Director of Naval Mobilization had been a regular attendee at Council meetings from the start, sadly recalled that 'for whereas Sir John suckled the infant on skim-milk, Sir Arthur denied it even that nourishment, and starved it to death.'¹⁴⁴ While the Council met four times during Fisher's last months in office, only seven meetings occurred in Wilson's tenure as First Sea Lord.¹⁴⁵

Churchill at first seems to have made a good faith effort to bring around Sir Arthur Wilson to the creation of a Naval Staff. C.I.D. Assistant Secretary Adrian Grant Duff considered it 'vain to try and change the views of a man of 69 – more especially when acknowledgement of the need virtually implies blame to himself.'¹⁴⁶

In reply, Wilson wrote several memoranda that restated his opposition to a Naval War Staff. In passing one of these to Asquith, Churchill remarked that it was 'decisive in its opposition, not only to any particular scheme, but against the whole principle of a War Staff for

¹⁴⁰ Richmond journal, 27 October 1909, in Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral*, p. 62.

¹⁴¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 248.

¹⁴² Fisher himself alluded to this: 'It never signifies anywhere whether you have a Board or a Committee – the ablest man runs the show!' Fisher to Churchill, 6 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1324.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Herbert King-Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹⁴⁵ Admiralty, 'Navy War Council. Minutes.', ADM 116/3090.

¹⁴⁶ Adrian Grant Duff diary, 6 November 1911, f. 110, AGDF 2/1, Lt. Colonel Adrian Grant Duff MSS, CCAC.

the Navy.’¹⁴⁷ The core of the First Sea Lord’s argument was a familiar one—it was very close to what Cyprian Bridge had written for the *Naval Annual*: an Army-style General Staff could not work for the Navy because ‘the conditions and problems to be solved are so entirely different that no analogy can be drawn between them.’¹⁴⁸ An army on the march demanded the services of ‘a very large staff of highly trained officers’ to tackle problems of topography, transport, defence of lines of communication, and other issues.¹⁴⁹ Naval squadrons, however, ‘contain[ed] in themselves all they require for war’ and ‘have no lines of communication to defend.’¹⁵⁰ His next paragraph expounded at length on this matter, noting that while the movement of an Army Division from Aldershot to the Norfolk Coast in battle readiness ‘would require the consideration of many more details than anyone not conversant with the difficulties of moving large bodies of troops can think of’, the orders for a Division of the Home Fleet to proceed into the North Sea ‘could be carried within the limits of a single short telegram and without any preliminary plans.’

This was not to deny a great deal of detailed work was required by the Navy. In fact, ‘[i]n the aggregate probably more thinking has to be done to produce an efficient Navy than an efficient Army’. However this thinking was ‘entirely on different lines.’¹⁵¹ The Navy’s thinking was predominantly ‘occupied with producing the most perfect ships, guns, and machinery, with crews trained to make the most perfect use of them, and constantly practiced under conditions approaching as nearly as possible to those of war.’¹⁵² Furthermore, the Navy’s requirements for thinking out the various important matters a staff would tackle already existed:

¹⁴⁷ Churchill to Asquith, 5 November 1911, quoted in Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Bradford, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

‘It is composed of the principal members of every department at the Admiralty, supplemented by the Admirals, Captains, Executive Officers, and heads of the different departments in every ship afloat, all organized for one end.’¹⁵³

Like Bridge, Wilson claimed the Navy was its own general staff. While Battenberg’s 1902 memorandum had suggested that a staff could only work if it was advisory to the Admiralty Board, he had not made any claim this broad. In support of this position, Wilson claimed that:

‘The Navy has learned by long experience thoroughly to distrust all paper schemes and theories that have not been submitted to the supreme test of trial under practical conditions by the Fleet at sea, and the whole Admiralty has been gradually developed to make the most of the experience so gained.’¹⁵⁴

Correctly sensing that compromise was impossible, and with the annual argument over the Estimates fast approaching, Churchill concluded that Wilson had to go. He may have been encouraged by the Prime Minister. Asquith was ‘strenuously in favour’ of a Naval Staff according to Esher, and saw that ‘while Wilson is First Sea Lord such a Reform is hopeless and that it must wait until next April.’¹⁵⁵ It would not be surprising if Churchill felt to a certain extent pressured by Asquith’s views.

Prompting from on high or no, the First Lord acted decisively. Captain Dudley de Chair would write in his diary that ‘Wilson said he was dismissed like a butler’,¹⁵⁶ and one of the Admiral’s few surviving letters to his sister Katharine suggests this was a fair comment:

‘When you return from your visit to Aunt Ellen you will find me no longer a Lord of the Admiralty. They have let me off the last three months of my hard labour. One Wednesday last, when I got home after dinner with the Markhams, I found a letter from Mr. Churchill to say he had decided to have a new Board, and Admiral Madden, Sir George Egerton and myself, were to go.’¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 232-233.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁵⁵ Esher journal, 4 October 1911, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS.

¹⁵⁶ Dudley de Chair diary, 29 November 1911, Reel 1, PP/MCR/C4, Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair MSS, IWM.

¹⁵⁷ Wilson to Katharine Knyvet Wilson, 27 November 1911, in Bradford, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

The change of command was set for December 5th, when Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman would take over as First Sea Lord. Wilson admitted he was ‘very glad to get away, as if I stayed I should have a very anxious time in the next three months.’¹⁵⁸ The Second Sea Lord, Sir George Egerton, was less acquiescent, and Sir George King-Hall wrote that he ‘boiled over with rage, at this summary dismissal’.¹⁵⁹ Now the Churchill regime began in earnest.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ King-Hall diary, 28 December 1911, King-Hall MSS.

CHAPTER SIX

The Churchill-Bridgeman Regime, 1911-1912

If Wilson's tenure as First Sea Lord is remembered harshly, and Nicholas Lambert writes, with reason, that 'Wilson left office in 1911 with his professional reputation severely damaged among naval and political leaders',¹ then Sir Francis Bridgeman's is at best seen as a placeholder appointment. Bridgeman's biographer, Stewart Ross, wrote that 'If his near contemporary Bonar Law is the forgotten Prime Minister, then Bridgeman is the forgotten First Sea Lord.'² Bridgeman, who prior to his appointment as First Sea Lord had been the first C.-in-C. of the Home Fleet and a rock of stability and good sense during Beresford's assaults, and who would later return to that post in time to lead it during the Agadir Crisis, deserves better. Bridgeman's term of office, though little over a year long, nevertheless saw a great many changes in the Royal Navy, many of which were the result of the drive and energy of irascible First Lord Winston Churchill. Though Bridgeman and Churchill, in Marder's words, 'simply did not get along', the 'root trouble' of this being, in Marder's judgment, 'Bridgeman's resentment of the First Lord's interference in everything',³ the twelve months that their professional relationship lasted saw much of importance happen in which Bridgeman's role has often been overlooked.

The Appointment

Like Sir Arthur Wilson, Bridgeman's appointment as First Sea Lord was by no means a straightforward choice. Churchill, as already noticed, originally hoped he could retain Wilson's services, until the First Sea Lord's total opposition to the creation of any form of a Naval Staff became clear. At that point Churchill, with more alacrity than manners, decided Wilson had to be

¹ Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett Wilson, V.C. (1910-1911)' in Murfett (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 49.

² Ross, *Bridgeman*, p. 1.

³ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 258.

replaced. With Asquith in full accord, Churchill began looking for a successor to Old ‘Ard ‘Art.’⁴ Churchill was convinced that the change would have to be made by ‘January at the latest’, but as of the beginning of November he had no definitive suggestions beyond replacing Second Sea Lord Egerton with Prince Louis of Battenberg, although he could ‘if it were imperative, propose to you a new Board for submission to the King at once.’⁵ The problem was that, as in 1909 and even 1904, the available choices for First Sea Lord were ‘narrow’,⁶ and unlike in 1904 there was no obvious Fisher among the top echelon of the flag list. Churchill’s initial inclination to bring back Fisher had only been abandoned ‘with extreme reluctance’ on the First Lord’s part.⁷ Fisher’s own suggestion was either Admiral Edmund Poë, a sea dog with little Admiralty experience who Fisher felt would be an amenable First Sea Lord,⁸ or Prince Louis of Battenberg, who possessed ‘to perfection the German faculty of organizing a great Naval Staff’, and with the right choice of subordinates would be ‘incomparable’ in C.I.D. debates.⁹ The King also had suggestions; initially he favoured his friend Sir Hedworth Lambton Meux—who had changed his surname on the request of society widow Valerie, Lady Meux—despite his prominent membership in the Syndicate of Discontent and hatred of Prince Louis.¹⁰ However he

⁴ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

⁵ Churchill to Asquith, 5 November 1911, f. 58A-59, MS.Asquith 13, Asquith MSS.

⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 59.

⁷ Marder, *loc. cit.* In one letter, Fisher wrote ‘I would offer to be your ‘Chief of the Navy General Staff’ – there is room for an immense ‘coup’ there but I don’t want to embarrass you.’ Fisher to Churchill, 26 October 1911, f. 5, CHAR 13/2, Chartwell MSS. This letter is reproduced, with several transcription errors, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, pp. 1298-1300.

⁸ Fisher to McKenna, 20 August 1911, f. 47, MCKN 6/4, McKenna MSS; Fisher to Churchill, 4 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1320; Fisher to Churchill, 9 November 1911, in *ibid.*, p. 1326.

⁹ Fisher to Churchill, 26 October 1911, f. 4-5, CHAR 13/2, Chartwell MSS. Fisher pronounced Battenberg as ‘ideal for First Sea Lord’.

¹⁰ In 1906 Prince Louis had vented to Fisher that while on a visit to Germany:

‘I heard by chance what the reasons were which Beresford & Lambton and all that tribe gave out ‘urbe et orbe’ against my going Second Lord—or any other Lord and fleet command presumably—viz: that I was a d—d German who had no business in the British Navy & that the service for that reason would not trust me. I know the latter to be a foul lie ... the mere fact of my flag flying is a public proof that I still enjoy T.L.’s confidence. But I feel that I can never forget this. Of course I know that this precious band of malcontents probably only said this as a ready means of keeping the coveted billet open for one of themselves—the confederate also was to let

subsequently advocated Admiral Sir John Durnford, President of the Greenwich Royal Naval College whose Admiralty experience proper had been limited to a term as Junior Naval Lord under Lord Walter Kerr.¹¹ Durnford apparently came within an ace of securing the job, should the following anecdote from Fisher be believed:

‘When the *Medina* left England it was considered sure that Durnford would be First Sea Lord and a private telegram to that effect was actually despatched to the Mediterranean!’¹²

Durnford’s undoing seems to have been his opposition to the various education reforms undertaken by Fisher during Selborne and Cawdor’s First Lordships.¹³ Finally, Sir William May was apparently under consideration but was considered unsuitable for reasons unknown.¹⁴

Even as Fisher was writing what he described as his ‘Machiavellian idea’ of using Poë as a figurehead, Churchill had apparently discovered that Battenberg as First Sea Lord was politically untenable, and therefore cast his eyes elsewhere. Elsewhere happened to be the Admiral’s cabin of the Home Fleet flagship *Neptune*. Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman, though only recently reappointed as C.-in-C. Home Fleet, had better qualifications than any of the other candidates. While as Marder observed wisely, Bridgeman was not a natural administrator,¹⁵ Bridgeman’s work as the Home Fleet’s original commander-in-chief left him possessed of better understanding of North Sea operations than anyone else in the Navy. In addition, he had recently served at the Admiralty as Second Sea Lord to both Fisher and Wilson, and thus had (as has

the burglars into the house they meant to rob [the Admiralty]—but it is none-the-less a drop of poison in my cup of happiness of a life-time devoted truly & wholly to our great service.

‘It was a my great ambition to be Second Lord sometime or other merely as a stepping stone to First Sea Lord. Now, I doubt this will ever come about.’

Battenberg to Fisher, 24 July 1906, F.P. 203, f. 13, FISR 1/5, Fisher MSS.

¹¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 257.

¹² Fisher to Bridgeman, 8 December 1911, Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman MSS, IWM.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Fisher to Churchill, 9 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1326.

¹⁵ At least, not at the Admiralty. Bridgeman’s seagoing administrative abilities were first rate, although as has been demonstrated often throughout naval history, running a fleet is a completely different species of beast from running an entire navy.

already been described) been a leading candidate to replace Fisher. Fisher, whose respect for Bridgeman has already been noted, was generally pleased with Churchill's suggestion:

'I love Bridgeman! He is what you say – a splendid sailor and a gentleman – but he has no genius for administration. However he would command immense confidence so it would pay you to have him as First Sea Lord.'¹⁶

Fisher took pains to emphasize Bridgeman's credibility, claiming he 'would cast a 'halo' of integrity and firmness round the Board of Admiralty.'¹⁷

Even without this glowing recommendation, Churchill seems to have been confident in his choice, writing to Asquith that:

'I pronounce decidedly in favour of Sir Francis Bridgeman as First Sea Lord. He is a fine sailor, with the full confidence of the Service afloat, and with the aptitude for working with and through a staff well developed.'¹⁸

Churchill wasted no time in making his offer to Bridgeman. The next day he wrote to the Admiral that 'I have come to the conclusion that the public interest will be served by the appointment of a new Board of Admiralty, & that the change should take place without any delay.' Believing that he and Bridgeman were 'in general agreement upon the broad principles of naval strategy', especially the creation of a Naval Staff, and that the 'opinion of the Sea Service shall be effectively represented at the Admiralty & that their confidence shall be sustained by the appointment of a First Sea Lord fresh from the handling of great fleets & in the closest touch with actual operations', Churchill offered him the First Sea Lordship.¹⁹ Though his biographer describes the letter as being rather brusque for an invitation to the top position in the Royal Navy, Bridgeman nonetheless accepted dutifully.²⁰

¹⁶ Fisher to Churchill, 10 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1328.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Churchill to Asquith, 16 November 1911, f. 8, CHAR 13/1, Chartwell MSS.

¹⁹ Churchill to Bridgeman, 17 November 1911, Bridgeman MSS.

²⁰ Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.

Dutifully, but not immediately. After his dismissal in December 1912, Bridgeman's friend Jack Sandars wrote to A.J. Balfour that 'Bridgeman begged & begged to be excused' from taking up the post, 'but Winston was insistent and so Bridgeman yielded, sorely against his own wishes.'²¹ Marder writes that Lady Bridgeman wept at the news he would return to the Admiralty.²² This reluctance can be confirmed by another letter from Sandars to Balfour:

'I asked Bridgeman how he came to leave command of the Home Fleet. He said that Winston had sent for him, never mentioning what he wanted him for, and to his great surprise he was pressed to accept the post of First Sea Lord, although he had been Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet less than a year. He did his best to decline, but Winston was insistent. Winston told him he should never be able to work with Wilson, and that he had satisfied himself that he could work with him (Bridgeman). In the result much against the grain Bridgeman had to consent.'²³

Bridgeman, for his part, gave Lord Fisher his own reasons for ultimately accepting the offer:

'Two reasons forced me to do it—

'1st Within the Admiralty, there were designs for wrecking the whole Scheme of Education, that had to be stopped, & I saw no means of doing so other than coming here myself!

'2^d I do feel that I was perhaps needlessly standing in the way of younger men, who its very desirable sh^d go ahead! So long as I remained, there could be no real advancement for, say, Jellicoe, directly I go, up he comes automatically to Command of the 2^d Div, & a splendid opportunity for him!'²⁴

Regardless of Bridgeman's reluctance, there was genuine enthusiasm regarding Bridgeman's appointment. Fisher wrote to him that 'it is a splendid act your coming as First Sea Lord and I don't wonder that Lady Bridgeman weeps!'²⁵ Fisher meanwhile wrote Churchill that 'I've heard from two Fleets of heartfelt joy universal at Bridgeman, Battenberg, & Jellicoe'.²⁶

²¹ Sandars to Balfour, 5 December 1912, f. 20, MS.Eng.hist.c.765, Sandars MSS.

²² Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 418.

²³ Sandars to Balfour, 14 December 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 541.

²⁴ Bridgeman to Fisher, 4 December 1911, F.P. 547, f. 8-9, FISR 1/11, Fisher MSS.

²⁵ Fisher to Bridgeman, 8 December 1911, Bridgeman MSS.

²⁶ Fisher to Churchill, 3 December 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1349.

To Build a Staff

The most pressing issue that Bridgeman faced upon arrival, and indeed the very reason he had been summoned back to the Admiralty from the *Neptune*, was the creation of a Naval War Staff. Work progressed well, which was not surprising since much had already been done semi-unofficially in spite of Wilson's opposition. By New Year's Day of 1912, Churchill could provide Haldane with a draft memorandum laying out the organization of the new staff.²⁷ Of its contents, Haldane wrote back 'there is not a word I should have wished to change had I wanted to.'²⁸ Grant Duff of the C.I.D. was also complementary: 'Nearly all the points which we have pressed for are included and it is a very good half-loaf.'²⁹ The Admiralty War Staff 'was finally born' a week later on January 8th, with Rear-Admiral Ernest Troubridge as the Admiralty's first Chief of the War Staff.³⁰ The organization seems, in fact, to have been partially operating rather earlier than that: Troubridge saved the first minute he received as Chief of War Staff. It was from Churchill and dated December 10th, 1911.³¹

If he was pleased by the contents of Churchill's announcement, Grant Duff was far less charitable the new Chief of Staff. He described Troubridge as 'an idle and self indulgent fellow'.³² Historians have largely followed this lead. Probably not coincidentally, Troubridge is largely remembered for his decision not to engage the German battlecruiser *Goeben* with his four armoured cruisers in the opening days of World War One, one for which he was court-martialled but acquitted, in large part because of the garbled orders he had received previously.³³ That one

²⁷ Enclosure in Churchill to Haldane, 1 January 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, pp. 1485-1491.

²⁸ Haldane to Churchill, 3 January 1912, in *ibid*.

²⁹ Diary entry, 11 January 1912, AGDF 2/1, Grant Duff MSS.

³⁰ Black, *Naval Staff*, p. 57.

³¹ Churchill to Troubridge, 10 December 1911, C.2, TRO/300/5, Troubridge MSS.

³² Grant Duff diary, 11 January 1912, AGDF 2/1, Grant Duff MSS.

³³ Andrew Gordon, 'The Transition to War. The Goeben debacle, August 1914', in Ian Speller (ed.), *The Royal Navy and Maritime Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 13-32; Marder, *FDSF*, ii, pp. 20-41; Geoffrey Miller, *Superior Force: The Conspiracy Behind the Escape of Goeben and Breslau* (Hull: University of

of the nicer evaluations claims that while ‘he had many friends in the service, he was never admired for his intellect’, says a great deal.³⁴ Sometimes serving as an accompaniment to these criticisms is another comment by Grant Duff that another naval officer with whom he worked with had ‘more brains in his little finger than Troubridge has in his great woolly head.’³⁵ His proposals of operating a picket line patrol of ships in the North Sea, a so-called ‘intermediate blockade’, have also been criticized.³⁶ However, a memorandum produced by Troubridge on the possibilities of naval aviation in early 1912 shows that he possessed a clearer and more imaginative mind than is often allowed.³⁷

The War Staff’s structure owed much to the influence of amongst others, George Ballard, Prince Louis of Battenberg, and Herbert Richmond.³⁸ It was organized ‘from existing elements’³⁹ into three divisions: Intelligence, Operations, and Mobilisation. In Churchill’s official pronouncement, these groups ‘may be shortly described as dealing with War Information, War Plans, and War Arrangements respectively.’⁴⁰ As originally constituted, the War Staff existed ‘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.’⁴¹ Central to this work was the maintenance of the Admiralty’s ‘War Room plot’, and assisting the First Sea Lord in developing war plans and fleet manoeuvres.

Hull Press, 1996). Admiralty documents on the whole affair can be found in E.W.R. Lumby (ed.), *Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean 1912-1914* (London: Navy Records Society, 1970), pp. 131-462.

³⁴ Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 262.

³⁵ Grant Duff diary, 25 April 1912, AGDF 2/2, Grant Duff MSS. In fairness, it should be noted that the other officer was the brilliant and industrious George Ballard, so it may have been true! True or not, however, the comparison is unfair to Troubridge.

³⁶ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 263-264; Grimes, pp. 176-177.

³⁷ Troubridge, ‘The Development of Naval Aeroplanes and Airships’, 23 January 1912, in Captain S.W. Roskill (ed.), *Documents Relating to the Naval Air Service: Volume I 1908-1918* (London: Navy Records Society, 1969), pp. 29-32.

³⁸ Battenberg to Churchill, 22 November 1911, in Kerr, Battenberg, pp. 235-238; Ballard memorandum, October 1911, f. 2-15 CAB 17/8; Richmond, ‘Considerations Affecting a Staff’, n.d. [late 1911], RIC/12/4, Richmond MSS.

³⁹ That is, the Naval Intelligence Department and the moribund Navy War Council.

⁴⁰ Enclosure in Churchill to Haldane, 1 January 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1488.

⁴¹ Black, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

As with any new organization, there were inevitable teething troubles. The Chief of the War Staff had no executive authority of his own and his relationship to the Board of Admiralty was murky, especially when Churchill began using him as a cutout to circumvent Bridgeman when their relationship deteriorated.⁴² Troubridge was chosen without the First Sea Lord's consultation, and Churchill described him as 'my man' to Battenberg.⁴³

Nevertheless, as Nicholas Black has recently shown, much of opprobrium levelled at the earliest incarnation of the War Staff is undeserved.⁴⁴ The Admiralty, with Churchill's direction, had made a good start, but it would take time. 'And', as Churchill lamented, 'we were only to have thirty months!'⁴⁵

The 1912 Estimates

Aside from the formation of a Naval Staff, the most important brief given Churchill upon his appointment as First Lord was the now time-honoured quest to rein in the Naval Estimates. His later claims to the contrary were short of the truth to say the least.⁴⁶ As already described, Churchill had a strong reputation as one of the Cabinet's 'economists'. His initial behaviour would have reassured any doubters. At the Guildhall Banquet on November 9th—little more than a fortnight after his arrival at the Admiralty—he told the assembled guests that 'the estimates for the forthcoming year should show some reduction from the abnormal level at which they now stand ... the high-water mark, at any rate, has been reached.'⁴⁷ A month or so later Sir Francis Bridgeman wrote to Lord Fisher that 'Churchill is strongly on the economy line. I trust he will

⁴² Black, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61; Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman', in Murfett (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57; Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁴³ Churchill to Battenberg, 19 November 1911, MB1/T9/43, Battenberg MSS.

⁴⁴ Black, *op. cit.*, pp. xiii-xiv, 57-74, 238-246.

⁴⁵ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 70.

⁴⁶ See, for example, *ibid.*, ch. 5.

⁴⁷ 'The Guildhall Banquet. The Prime Minister on Public Affairs. Mr. Churchill on Naval Expenditure', *The Times*, 10 November 1911, p. 10.

not go too far'.⁴⁸ Many of Churchill's proposals regarding economy were, to Bridgeman's mind, 'almost too bold to be believed.'⁴⁹ As Lambert points out, Bridgeman was probably unaware that many of these ideas were the result of several profoundly secret conversations between Churchill and Fisher!⁵⁰ Surviving correspondence between Churchill and Fisher from late 1911 suggests these schemes were an extension of the traditional Fisher strategy of saturating the southern end of the North Sea with flotilla craft to counter the German Navy's own flotillas and the closure of the North Sea's exits:

'If you hold the Straits of Dover & Scapa Flow with an abundance of Submarines & Destroyers such as we possess and have a good Admiral in perpetual charge of the East Coast with his own ear-marked flotillas of Submarines & Destroyers and attendant Cruisers then you can sleep quiet in your bed as regards any raid of the German Fleet. Any bolt out of the blue I mean! And our Battle Squadrons never ought to be within Destroyer range of the German Coast. What is Destroyer range? (The German Submarines can be ignored[,]) those they have are only coastal vessels) Well! A German destroyer can only be mischievous at such a distance as enables her to get back to her Port before daylight for the English "Swifts" (we want more of that type) waiting off the rabbit holes upon their return. On the wide ocean one Indomitable owing to her immense superiority of speed in a sea-way... would overtake and lick up one after another any number of destroyers!'⁵¹

Furthermore, Fisher described secret proposals he had prepared for Baltic operations by British submarines in defence of Denmark and even the Russian capital ('defenceless against German Fleet'), combined with an eventual landing by Russian forces '90 miles from Berlin.'⁵² Apart from Fisher's plans for Russian amphibious operations along the Pomeranian coast, nothing in these proposals differ from 1907's Plan (A) when the improvement in the capabilities of Germany's torpedo craft since 1907 are considered.⁵³ The lack of emphasis regarding the British heavy units (battlecruisers excluded) is not necessarily evidence Fisher had no use for them, only

⁴⁸ Bridgeman to Fisher, 4 December 1911, F.P. 547, f. 7-8, FISR 1/11, Fisher MSS.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, pp. 244-245.

⁵¹ Fisher to Churchill, 6 November 1911, f. 16-18, CHAR 13/2, Chartwell MSS.

⁵² Fisher to Churchill, n.d. [c. December 1911], f. 5-8, CHAR 13/43, *ibid.* See also Fisher to Churchill, n.d. [c. January 1912], f. 1-5, CHAR 13/14. Dating taken from Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 378n100.

⁵³ See Gray (ed.), *Conway's 1906-1921*, pp. 164-168.

that he envisioned the great majority of operations being conducted by light forces. Nowhere was an eventual general engagement between fleets ruled out, nor was it mutually exclusive to Fisher's proposals.

Armed with Fisher's advice and his own hopes for economy, Churchill set to work on the Estimates for the 1912-13 financial year. The McKenna-Wilson administration had already worked out a proposed construction programme of four dreadnoughts, five light cruisers, twenty destroyers and six submarines. The resultant increase in financial liabilities would be £11.3 million from which £8.4 million resulted from the four planned dreadnoughts.⁵⁴ In terms of reductions, an obvious place to start was the disposal of whatever old warships were deemed expendable by the Board. As Churchill explained to the prospective Second Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, 'The very first thing that we must tackle is the number of old ships to be kept in commission. Upon that manning, stores, and repairs mainly depend.'⁵⁵ Doing so would 'reduce expense on the upkeep of an obsolescent fleet', thereby ensuring a concomitantly greater amount 'for the development of new teeth and claws.'⁵⁶ There were qualifications, however: 'I deprecate the sale of any of the battleships at the present time. The old destroyers too should be considered in connection with coast defence.'⁵⁷

Insofar as the new construction programme was concerned, 'my present view is that the marked feature should be a multiplication of torpedo craft.'⁵⁸ Another change would be the replacement of the four planned battleships by a super-*Lion* type battlecruiser of Fisher's own design costing an estimated £1,995,000, of which more will be said later.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

⁵⁵ Churchill to Battenberg, 18 November 1911, MB1/T9/46, Battenberg MSS.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Churchill to Bridgeman, 30 November 1911, f. 7, CHAR 13/3, Chartwell MSS.

⁵⁸ Churchill to Battenberg, 18 November 1911, MB1/T9/46, Battenberg MSS.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; also Fisher to Churchill, 22 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, pp. 1341-1342.

Battenberg warned the First Lord some of his schemes were overambitious: ‘The difficulty that I foresee’, he warned:

‘is a cry being raised of your ‘cutting down’ the moment Sir A. Wilson’s back is turned. Forgive my mentioning this. I feel sure that you are fully aware of this, and that you feel yourself able to refute it in the House—or rather, to prove that it is a case of ‘*reculer pour mieux sauter*.’⁶⁰

Battenberg’s own suggestions were for a reduction in the Navy’s Mediterranean commitments, the details of which will be discussed later. Fisher, as usual, had a much more decisive proposal: ‘I think in view of the immense *increase of gun power* in your new ships that you might only have 3 & take the money of the 4th for submarines *chiefly* & a few more destroyers.’⁶¹ Nicholas Lambert views this substitution as a radical departure from previous practice.⁶² However this is not necessarily an accurate descriptor, since as shown in Chapter 4, many previous construction programmes had seen ships of one kind substituted for another as part of the usual budgetary horse-trading that the yearly estimates went through. The major difference now, of course, lay in the particular classes of ships under consideration for substitution.

Churchill’s solution was the abandonment of plans to station the *Indomitable* in the Pacific as per the 1909 naval agreement with the Dominions to build up a new force of capital ships in the Pacific. Responding to a memorandum from Bridgeman on the requirements needed to maintain 60% superiority over the High Seas Fleet in Home Waters, Churchill noted a requirement to order four dreadnoughts ‘is on the assumption that the *Indomitable* should be sent to China in January 1912, and that the *New Zealand* should follow when completed.’ If *Indomitable* remained in Britain only three new dreadnoughts were needed. Furthermore, this proposal ‘would open two very important ... possibilities, first a largely increased construction

⁶⁰ Battenberg to Churchill, 20 November 1911, in Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 233-234.

⁶¹ Fisher to Churchill, 20 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1338.

⁶² Lambert, *op cit.*, p. 247.

of torpedo craft... and secondly, if the Germans increase their Navy Law by laying down an extra Cruiser, we could immediately reply by adding 2 battle-cruisers to our programme which would then be 5.' Churchill therefore proposed 'as an alternative to the programme submitted that we should build 3 new capital ships and retain the *Indomitable*', saving £2,100,000.⁶³ The money thus saved would go to ten submarines and ten destroyers, thus providing a total of forty-six new flotilla craft when added to the twenty-six already planned. British strength in torpedo craft would be thus almost doubled. Total new construction expenditure would be £11,350,000.⁶⁴

Churchill quickly found that his proposal was unfavourable to the rest of the Board. The principal objection was to replacing the new battleships with battlecruisers, especially since the decision was made to develop a new 25-knot battleship carrying 15-inch guns, a design which Bridgeman and Battenberg were very much in favour.⁶⁵

The Novelle

In Britain one isotope to be detected in the fallout from the Agadir Crisis was the firming up of the rift in the Asquith Cabinet regarding relations with Germany. Esher observed in November 1911 that, notably, 'Morley believes in capturing German sentiment. Winston thinks Germany *L'ennemi*, and uncapturable.'⁶⁶ In Germany, the reaction was much the same. As Professor Marder wrote, '[t]he effect of the Agadir Crisis in Germany had been to exasperate feeling against England and convince the press that Germany must have more ships.'⁶⁷ Admiral Tirpitz, a seasoned political animal, saw this as an opportunity for further expansion of his own bureaucratic preserve. Thus in the autumn of 1911 he proposed a modification of Germany's

⁶³ Churchill, 'Naval Programme 1912-13', n.d. [c. December 1911], f. 70-71, CAB 1/32.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bridgeman to Churchill, 21 May 1912, f. 50-51, CHAR 13/9, Chartwell MSS.

⁶⁶ Diary entry, 24 November 1911, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS.

⁶⁷ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 272.

naval aims. Instead of merely building to complete the fleet required by the extant Navy Laws, the new objective would be a 2:3 ratio of capital ships versus Britain. Such a ratio was easily understandable ‘from the King down to the beggar.’⁶⁸

In his first public speech as First Lord, at Guildhall on November 9th, Winston Churchill attempted to dissuade the Germans. In a piece of rhetoric aimed at both Germany and the economists in his own party, Churchill suggested there was hope for substantial reductions in future Naval Estimates, foreign situation permitting. This was not mere talk; Churchill had already been in correspondence with McKenna on the matter and hoped that a rumoured reduction of £1,700,000 could be achieved.⁶⁹ Churchill retrospectively justified himself by claiming that he ‘felt I should be all the stronger in asking the Cabinet and the House of Commons for the necessary monies, if I could go hand in hand with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and testify that we had tried out best to secure a mitigation of the naval rivalry and failed.’⁷⁰

Failure was fast in coming. A draft of the new German *Novelle* caused great alarm when shown to the Cabinet. In a hurried letter to Sir Edward Grey, Churchill wrote that Germany’s naval increases ‘are serious & will require new & vigorous measures on our part.’⁷¹ Especially troubling was the effect on future naval construction:

‘I had been thinking that if the old German programme had been adhered to we shd have built 4,3,4,3,4,3 against their 6 years programme of 2,2,2,2,2,2. If their new programme stands, as I fear it must, & they build 3,2,3,2,3,2, we cannot build less than 5,4,5,4,5. This maintains 60% superiority over Germany only in Dreadnoughts & Dreadnt Cruisers. It will also be 2 keels to 1 on their additional 3 ships.’

⁶⁸ Kaiser Wilhelm II to Bethmann Hollweg, 30 September 1911, quoted in Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 273.

⁶⁹ Churchill to McKenna, 7 November 1911, f. 2, MCKN 4/3, McKenna MSS.

⁷⁰ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 95.

⁷¹ Churchill to Grey, 31 January 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1504.

This was not the only problem. The new *Novelle* would also create a third permanently-manned German battleship squadron of the *Hochseeflotte*, leaving the Admiralty forced to make their North Sea force calculations against a German force of twenty-five battleships⁷² instead of the previous seventeen.

This increase in German strength in the North Sea meant a further reorganization of the Home Fleet was inevitable. In fact, a new reorganization of the fleet was already in the works, but the *Novelle* announcement gave it new urgency. At the same time as the Naval Staff was being drawn up, Churchill had sought out advice on a rearrangement of the fleet with an eye towards both greater economy and increased effectiveness. On December 7th, Prince Louis had submitted a minute enumerating ‘the broad lines on which floating material of the Navy (excluding foreign Stations) could be best divided up’ during peacetime. Battenberg suggested three categories:

- ‘1. The bulk of all classes of ships and vessels of the latest types in full commission. (Present 1st and 2nd Divisions, Home Fleet).
2. A certain proportion (earlier types) of ships in commission with Nucleus Crews- the balance of Active Service personnel actually available at their manning ports. (Present 3rd Division, Home Fleet).
3. The remainder of the Fleet fit to fight – the oldest types – in Reserve, ready to be mobilized as soon as their proportion of Reserve Crews have arrived, on being called out. (Present 4th Division, Home Fleet).’⁷³

Churchill took these suggestions to heart, writing back on Boxing Day that ‘I have spent a lot of time on the organisation of the Fleet in 1912-13.’⁷⁴ Amongst the options was the withdrawal of the Navy’s Mediterranean battleships, which on arrival in Britain would go into ‘the new A.1. reserve’, meaning the current 3rd Division of the Home Fleet.⁷⁵ Amongst other changes would be a complete redesignation of the Home Fleet’s component parts, for in Churchill’s opinion the

⁷² Three eight-ship squadrons plus an independent fleet flagship.

⁷³ Battenberg to Churchill, 7 Dec 1911, MB1/T9/49, Battenberg MSS.

⁷⁴ Churchill to Battenberg, 26 December 1911, MB1/T10/58, Battenberg MSS.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

extant nomenclature 'was misleading and confused.' Especially vexing to the First Lord was that '[t]he word 'Division' was used in three different senses, sometimes tactical and sometimes administrative.'⁷⁶ In part-place, the system of numbered Squadrons used for cruisers would be extended to capital ships. Early on, Churchill seemed to hope they could be more than this, as he wrote to Battenberg that, 'The 4th Battle Squadron must be a complete fleet: 9 battleships[,] 5 armoured cruisers, 3 protected cruisers and the et ceteras.'⁷⁷ The Fourth Battle Squadron, however, was meant to be the Gibraltar-based replacement for the Mediterranean battle fleet, so it may have been a special case.

The matter of fleet reorganization was further discussed between Admiral Bridgeman and Churchill in January. Among the points discussed was the nature of the C.-in-C. Home Fleet's command responsibilities. Battenberg wrote that 'I rejoice to hear you have been discussing with the First Sea Lord the question of putting an end to the present unsound organization in Home Fleet, whereby the C. in C. is charged, over and above his legitimate work, with the direct command of one of the Divisions of the Fleet.'⁷⁸ The Second Sea Lord, recalling Churchill's military background, likened it to the commanding general of an army division being also in simultaneous permanent command of one of his division's brigades.

The heavy units of the Home Fleet were not the only ones to be reformed. Churchill intended any new organization to extend all the way down. 'I do', he informed Battenberg, 'now feel able to carry it further than large armoured ships.'⁷⁹ In this connection, the Home Fleet's destroyer flotillas came under scrutiny. Admiral Bridgeman, doubtless drawing on his extensive experience as C.-in-C., Home Fleet, led the way. On January 27th the First Sea Lord minuted to

⁷⁶ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 90.

⁷⁷ Churchill to Battenberg, 27 December 1911, MB1/T10/59, Battenberg MSS.

⁷⁸ Battenberg to Churchill, 25 January 1912, f. 36, CHAR 13/8, Chartwell MSS.

⁷⁹ Churchill to Battenberg, 26 December 1911, MB1/T10/58, Battenberg MSS.

Chief of Staff Troubridge that in his opinion ‘[t]he size of Destroyer Flotillas appears to require modifications.’⁸⁰ The current twenty-four ship flotillas left both the Commodore (T) and the Captains (D) an ‘unreasonably heavy’ load of clerical work, and Bridgeman felt a reduction to twenty per flotilla would be a great improvement. Troubridge dutifully passed the matter on to Captain George Ballard, now the director of the War Staff’s Operations Department. Ballard’s response proposed creating a fourth fully-manned flotilla from ships drawn from the other three. Each flotilla would be given two cruisers, one as flagship and the second as a supporting scout.

	Flagship	Scout	Depot Ship	Destroyers	Base
First Flotilla	<i>Blonde</i>	<i>Pathfinder</i>	<i>Venus</i>	20 <i>Acherons</i>	Rosyth
Second Flotilla	<i>Bellona</i>	<i>Attentive</i>	<i>Blake</i>	16 <i>Acorns</i>	Rosyth
Seventh Flotilla	<i>Boadicea</i>	<i>Patrol</i>	<i>Blenheim</i>	16 <i>Beagles</i>	Harwich
New (Fifth) Flotilla	<i>Blanche</i>	<i>Adventure</i>	<i>Hecla</i>	4 <i>Acorns</i> & 12 <i>Tribals</i>	Portland

Other changes planned included a total reorganization of the existing Sixth Flotilla, which as then organized was in Ballard’s opinion ‘not a flotilla in any proper sense.’⁸¹ The destroyers of that flotilla would be broken up amongst the local Torpedo Boat Flotillas at Devonport, Chatham, and Portsmouth. Both Battenberg and Controller Charles Briggs⁸² were amenable to the proposal, though the Second Sea Lord regretted it would not ‘give me any relief in men’.⁸³ Battenberg’s solution was to distribute twenty-four ‘Coastals’ eight apiece amongst three nucleus crew flotillas. Briggs also noted that the second-class cruiser *Venus* could be replaced by a new depot ship provided for in the latest Estimates. Troubridge added little to Ballard’s proposal, but noted

⁸⁰ Bridgeman minute to Troubridge, 27 January 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸¹ Ballard, ‘Fully Manned Flotillas’, 3 February 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸² Rear-Admiral Charles Briggs minute, 21 February 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸³ Battenberg minute, 7 February 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

that a further division of the destroyers into five flotillas instead of four would needlessly overcomplicate arrangements.⁸⁴

Subsequent discussions changed little of the original Ballard proposal, although when questioned on the need for economy in personnel arrangements by Bridgeman, which were considered ‘evidently undesirable from the “War Plans” point of view’ Battenberg insisted they were essential, but suggested sending several old second class cruisers into 4th Division reserve instead of any change to the flotillas.⁸⁵ Troubridge found this acceptable.⁸⁶ Also accepted was a reduction of twenty-three ‘30-knotters’ to care and maintenance crews only.

The First Lord announced the new Admiralty policies to the Commons on March 18th. In Churchill’s words he proposed ‘to lay bare to them this afternoon, with perfect openness, the naval situation.’⁸⁷ The new organization was based largely on Battenberg’s original December 7th proposal. The details were issued to the fleets in an Admiralty minute on March 29th and were set to take effect on May 1st.⁸⁸ In place of the old divisional structure, the Home Fleet would be comprised of three separate fleets: the First, Second, and Third. Each of these was manned to a different scale based on mobilization considerations, or as the official language ran, ‘These Fleets are therefore administrative and not tactical classifications.’ The First Fleet contained all ships in full commission, the Second Fleet comprised the ships in commission but manned by nucleus crews, and the Third Fleet ships were those in reserve either with nucleus crews or simply care and maintenance parties.

⁸⁴ Troubridge to Bridgeman, 6 February 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸⁵ Bridgeman to Battenberg, 4 March 1912 and Battenberg to Bridgeman, 5 March 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸⁶ Troubridge to Bridgeman, 6 March 1912, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

⁸⁷ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debate*, 18 March 1912, Fifth Series, v. 35, col. 1552.

⁸⁸ Admiralty minute, 29 March 1912, M. 11735/12, in Admiralty, ‘Destroyer Flotillas.’, 27 January 1912, ADM 1/8271.

Thus constituted, the Home Fleet would be arranged into eight Squadrons, each comprised of a Battle Squadron and a Cruiser Squadron plus supporting vessels. The 1st and 2nd Divisions of the Home Fleet became the 1st and 2nd Squadrons while the Atlantic Fleet became the 3rd Squadron, and it was planned to constitute a 4th Squadron subsequently. The old 3rd and 4th Divisions of the Home Fleet would be split into the 5th and 6th Squadrons and 7th and 8th Squadrons respectively. The C.-in-C., Home Fleet would now ‘have place under his direct command such fleets and squadrons as Their Lordships consider proper.’ What this meant in the normal course of events was that his command included ‘the whole of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Fleets.’ The overall arrangement would be:

First Fleet	Second Fleet	Third Fleet
1 st Squadron	5 th Squadron	7 th Squadron
2 nd Squadron	6 th Squadron	8 th Squadron
3 rd Squadron		9 th Cruiser Squadron
4 th Squadron		10 th Cruiser Squadron
		11 th Cruiser Squadron

In the event, the combined cruiser-battleship squadrons never became official and are seldom if ever referred to after this announcement.

Aside from hurrying on the reorganization of the Home Fleet, ‘Germany’s intransigence helped solve Churchill’s domestic political problem of rallying Liberals to the Admiralty’s shipbuilding program.’ However, ‘Berlin’s blunt refusal to consider the holiday plan still left Britain with the strategic problem of facing simultaneous naval build-ups by great powers other than Germany.’⁸⁹ Though the Estimates issue had been somewhat eased by the *Novelle*, no First

⁸⁹ John H. Maurer, ‘Churchill’s Naval Holiday: Arms Control and the Anglo-German Naval Race, 1912-1914’, *JSS* 15, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 124.

Lord and especially not Churchill could expect to count on the German government to put forward a major naval reform every time the Admiralty's financial situation was threatened.⁹⁰

The Queen Elizabeths

For the 1912-13 Estimates, Churchill had from almost from the beginning been considering another leap forward in battleship design. He was not alone in this desire, as witnessed by the broad support given to it by most of the naval members of the Board. His claimed inspiration was Fisher and McKenna's decision in 1909 to replace the 12-inch gun with the 13.5-incher.⁹¹ Churchill claimed that he 'immediately sought to go one size better', giving the new battleships an armament of 15-inch guns.⁹² Such a gun was already in train, preliminary considerations having begun in February 1911 when D.N.O. Moore asked the Ordnance Board to consider both a 15-inch and a 14.5-inch design.⁹³

In addition to this upgrade in firepower, an increase in speed to 25 knots was planned. Fisher approved of the new gun, but practically nothing else, referring to the new design as a 'd—d hybrid'.⁹⁴ This might at first seem unusual, since Churchill's proposed specifications were not far distant from Fisher's 1906 fusion design. However by 1911, with the *Lion*-class battlecruisers—from which trial speeds of 30 knots were hoped for—under construction,

⁹⁰ It is of interest to note there were some who thought that the Germans were labouring under the same condition since the Russians were by now rebuilding their navy in earnest. 'The rise of Russia's seapower in the Baltic is viewed with considerable apprehension in the Berlin Admiralty and I cannot help feeling that the new 3rd Squadron created by Germany is partly intended to contain the Russian ships if need be,' were Prince Louis' words in private to the Prime Minister. As for the reviving Tsarist Navy's value, Battenberg wrote that '[f]rom a naval point of view: Russians have so far shown little aptitude or understanding for warfare at sea, but the few men in higher command who came creditably out of their last war, are now at the Admiralty and, when built, these new ships would constitute a force no one could neglect.' Battenberg to Asquith, 28 June 1912, MB1/T20/129, Battenberg MSS.

⁹¹ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 94.

⁹² Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹³ Friedman, *Naval Weapons*, p. 44.

⁹⁴ Fisher to Churchill, 9 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 1325.

anything slower than that in Fisher's mind was a retrograde step. Just as unwanted in the old Admiral's opinion was the 6-inch anti-torpedo boat battery.

Secrecy was considered essential, as the following note in the Ships Cover indicates:

'This design is to be regarded as secret, and neither the design as a whole nor any features of it should be mentioned, either inside or outside of this office, to anyone whatever except people actually engaged on the design.'⁹⁵

This secrecy extended to descriptions of the armament in the D. N. C.'s paperwork—the new gun was referred to as the '14 inch experimental gun.'⁹⁶

While the earliest design documents in the *Queen Elizabeth* class's Ships Cover are from May and June of 1912, preliminary specifications for armament and speed were clearly ready by October of 1911, when Churchill discussed the proposed design with Fisher at Reigate Priory.⁹⁷ These facts, combined with the commencement of work on a 15-inch gun by the Ordnance Board in early 1911, suggest that the Wilson-McKenna regime may have been considering the possibility of such a vessel before their ouster. If so—and the evidence either for or against this is scanty—then the inception of the *Queen Elizabeth* class, which are ton for ton probably the finest capital ships ever built by the Royal Navy, is another example of Churchill being able to achieve something great thanks to the unrecognized preparations of his predecessors.

Over the next seven months occurred the 'vast process of juggling and haggling' needed to produce a satisfactory design.⁹⁸ One proposal, which must have been amongst the very first and may date from the last months of McKenna's First Lordship, was for a slightly enlarged *Iron Duke* with ten 15-inchers. This design would have the usual 21-knot speed and 'carry armour

⁹⁵ Constructor E.N. Mooney, 'Battleship design. 1912-13 Programme. Secrecy.', 4 May 1912, f. 2, Ships Cover 294 (*Queen Elizabeth* Class), D.N.C. MSS.

⁹⁶ Moore minute, 20 June 1912, f. 27, Ships Cover 294, D.N.C. MSS.

⁹⁷ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

which on the armoured belt, the turrets and the conning tower would reach the thickness unprecedented in the British Service of 13 inches.⁹⁹ Very quickly this design gave way to a more radical design, sacrificing one turret to gain a higher speed of 25 knots, thus granting the ability of the ships to work as a semi-autonomous ‘fast division’ of the battlefleet. In *The World Crisis*, Churchill suggests this speed was worked out ‘on the tactical board’ by the War College on the basis of the ‘speed required in a Fast Division in order to ensure this Division being able to manœuvre around the German Fleet as it would be in the years 1914 and 1915.’¹⁰⁰ While such a request was doubtless made to the War College, it seems likely that 25 knots speed was already in the specifications by October 1911, if Lord Fisher’s ‘d—d hybrid’ of November 9th comment is any indication.

Attaining 25 knots without a massive increase in size became the key consideration. The battlecruiser *Lion* and her successors were all much larger than their battleship counterparts owing to their massive engineering spaces.¹⁰¹ The solution was the total replacement of coal by oil fuel, which had a much higher caloric efficiency. The Navy had by 1911 accepted oil fuel for destroyers, despite an initial reversion to coal after the endurance of Fisher’s *Tribals* proved disappointingly low. Utilizing it in battleships, though, would bring about new logistical issues, and by all accounts, the decision for oil-only fuel for the *Queen Elizabeths* was not decisively made until after the final design was selected in June 1912.¹⁰² This design was known internally as ‘R’_{III}, and was selected in preference to two other designs: ‘R’_{III} and ‘R’_{IV}. Considering dreadnought design names for this period ran more or less sequentially, and that the finalized

⁹⁹ Ibid. Churchill was referring to thirteen inches of Krupp Cemented steel armour, not thirteen inches of armour of any sort.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰¹ *Queen Mary* was 660 feet long overall, while the *King George V* class of the same programme were just 555 feet.

¹⁰² Archibald Gordon Moore minute, 20 June 1912, on D.N.C., ‘1912-13 Programme. Battleship Designs.’, C.N. 01089/12., f. 3, Ships Cover 294, D.N.C. MSS.

design for the *Iron Duke* class was 'M_{IV}',¹⁰³ it seems likely that designs 'N' to 'R_{II}', if they ever existed, were either preliminary proposals for the *Queen Elizabeths* or alternative designs. Whatever the case, 'R_{III}' was preferred because she included additional torpedo protection lacking in the original 'R_{III}' design, and had a better turret arrangement than 'R_{IV}', which used the same layout as the *Lions* and the *Queen Mary*, thus sacrificing the ability of 'Q' turret to fire astern.¹⁰⁴ The belt armour was still the same thirteen inches as the original proposal for the enlarged *Iron Duke*, but for the conning tower and turrets it was reduced to twelve inches in the interests of higher speed.

Churchill defended himself from Fisher's deprecations of the use of armour in general by pointing out that armour 'forces the use of armour-punching as against high-explosive shells with consequent tremendous diminution in destructive power: with high explosive shells even, the bulk of the explosion remains outside.'¹⁰⁵ Fisher, however, did not consider this a strong argument.¹⁰⁶

The resulting five ships (originally four until the Federated States of Malaya gifted the funds for a fifth vessel to the Admiralty¹⁰⁷) can safely be said to have satisfied, and indeed exceeded, the Admiralty's hopes for them.¹⁰⁸ Sir Francis Bridgeman, who as First Sea Lord had signed off on the design along with Churchill, was especially proud of them. During the war he wrote to Jack Sandars of the *Queen Elizabeth* herself that 'I regard her & her sister ships as my special children.'¹⁰⁹ Despite this enthusiasm, the *Queen Elizabeths* had some important

¹⁰³ See Ships Cover 268 (*Iron Duke* Class), D.N.C. MSS; Admiralty, 'Board Minutes. Tuesday, 19th September 1911', f. 13, in Board Minutes. 1911., ADM 167/45.

¹⁰⁴ Watts minute to Moore, 15 June 1912, on D.N.C., '1912-13 Programme. Battleship Designs.', C.N. 01089/12., f. 3, Ships Cover 294, D.N.C. MSS.

¹⁰⁵ Churchill to Fisher, 10 January 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1495.

¹⁰⁶ Fisher to Churchill, 22 April 1912, in *ibid.*, pp. 1345-1346.

¹⁰⁷ Parkes, *op. cit.*, p. 570.

¹⁰⁸ Oscar Parkes described them as 'the most perfect example of the naval constructor's art'. *Ibid.*, p. 562.

¹⁰⁹ Bridgeman to Sandars, 8 March 1915, f. 52, MS.Eng.hist.c.768, Sandars MSS.

detractors from the very start. Lord Fisher, as has been noted, felt them to be a ‘d—d hybrid’ type. Sir George King-Hall recorded that Sir Henry Jackson felt ‘that Battleships were getting too big and he had set his face against the 15” guns most determinedly.’¹¹⁰ Civil Lord George Lambert was another dissenter—when the final design for the *Queen Elizabeths* was approved by the Board of Admiralty at their July 17th meeting, Lambert insisted that a note be added enumerating his objections. Lambert felt there was no need to make the leap to 15-inch guns in the 1912-13 Programme and that in any case, all British battleships should carry at minimum ten guns instead of the eight planned for the *Queen Elizabeths*.¹¹¹

Having established the new design and committed to its construction, the matter of securing a sufficient supply of fuel oil became paramount. Churchill knew just the man for the job: Lord Fisher, and the remainder of the ex-First Sea Lord’s principle activities were related to matters arising for his work as Chairman of the Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines, which ultimately led to the Anglo-Persian Oil agreement.

Groping For a Strategy

As Churchill and the Admiralty were occupied with the Mediterranean and the Pacific, the new War Staff was given the job of revising the Navy’s strategic plans for war with Germany. The traditional close observational blockade and amphibious operations against the German coast had been one of the major reasons for the dismissal of McKenna and Wilson. Furthermore the new Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Sir George Callaghan, was distinctly unhappy with those same plans. On January 9th, 1912 Callaghan submitted a lengthy complaint to the Admiralty which had obviously been a long time in coming.¹¹² There was little about the plans

¹¹⁰ King-Hall diary, 13 January 1914.

¹¹¹ George Lambert minute, 17 July 1912, ‘Board Minutes. 1912.’, f. 24a, ADM 167/46.

¹¹² Callaghan to Admiralty, 9 January 1912, No.1.S., ADM 116/3096.

from their schedule of officers to be supplied with copies to peace distribution to actual wartime objectives that Callaghan found appealing. Nicholas Lambert goes so far as to describe Callaghan finding the plans incomprehensible, ‘confused in detail and riddled with inconsistencies.’¹¹³

Of specific complaints, Callaghan observed that one of the destroyer flotillas destined for observation duties in the Heligoland Bight was expected to take up patrol duties in the Thames during the period of strained relations in lieu of preparation for its wartime duties. ‘Since the watching operations on the Enemy’s Coast are to be under the control of the Commodore T,’ Callaghan pointedly observed, ‘it is considered essential that the whole of his Flotilla should be fresh and ready to accompany him at a moment[’]s notice to the Enemy’s Coast.’¹¹⁴ The plans listed the old *Cressy*-class armoured cruisers as being part of the support force for the initial observation line, to which Callaghan replied that as those ships were being passed into care and maintenance reserve they were ‘unlikely to be available on the outbreak of hostilities’. Callaghan was no less sanguine when it came to the observational blockade strategy as a whole:

‘It is submitted that the whole question of the Heligoland Bight Blockade, which depends largely on the policy with regard to Heligoland, be reviewed and also the duties of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 7th Flotillas.’

By way of explanation, Callaghan observed that ‘our present margin of superiority in destroyers seems insufficient to establish a watch in the mouths of the Rivers in the manner suggested.’

As for the matter of conducting a campaign of coastal assaults using the heavy ships of Home Fleet, Callaghan was something more than incredulous. ‘The employment of a portion of the Main Fleet in operation against land defences, as recommended in these notes, appears to me

¹¹³ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 262.

¹¹⁴ Callaghan, ‘War Plans – Pages 1 to 24. Remarks by C. in C. H.F.’, 9 January 1912, enclosure in Callaghan to Admiralty, 9 January 1912, No.1.S. , in Admiralty, ‘War Plans. Remarks on certain points in.’, 9 January 1912, M.001/12, ADM 116/3096.

to be open to grave objection’, he wrote.¹¹⁵ Not helping were ‘other points in the Notes which I do not understand, e.g. the duties proposed for the “Hearty”, the use of our minelayers at the mouths of the German Rivers and the value of Cruisers of the “Edgar” class in bombarding land defences.’

Callaghan was not the only senior Home Fleet officer to be troubled by the state of the existing plans. Another was Sir Robert Arbuthnot, the Commodore (T). The eccentric Arbuthnot, now historically infamous for his suicidal handling of the First Cruiser Squadron at Jutland, is, to quote Andrew Gordon’s description of the similarly-inclined Sir Algernon ‘Pompo’ Heneage, ‘a historical tourist attraction’ of the Prewar Era.¹¹⁶ Though not a formal member of the ‘Fishpond’, Fisher was nonetheless fond of him, memorializing him after Jutland as ‘a favourite Midshipman of mine.’¹¹⁷

In late December 1911, Arbuthnot complained to Callaghan that the planned stationing of the First Destroyer Flotilla in Yarmouth Roads was not at all suitable. ‘A year’s experience with the Flotilla, and a year’s consideration of these questions, have convinced me that a Flotilla, returning from 4 days’ work on an enemy’s coast, requires a properly protected Base, in which it can coal, oil, repair and rest, in any weather, under the protection of the Base’s Military defences.’ These requirements, Arbuthnot wrote, ‘cannot be in any way met by Yarmouth Roads.’¹¹⁸ For a man so famous for driving his men and himself as hard as possible to make this claim gives it substantial weight.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, p. 175. Like Heneage, Arbuthnot earned an entire chapter for himself in Commander Geoffrey Lewis, *Fabulous Admirals and Some Naval Fragments*, reprint ed. (London: Putnam, 1959).

¹¹⁷ Fisher to Jellicoe, 9 June 1916, f. 108, Add MS 71556, Jellicoe MSS.

¹¹⁸ Arbuthnot to Callaghan, 18 December 1911, enclosure in Callaghan to Admiralty, 9 January 1912, No.1.S., in Admiralty, ‘War Plans. Remarks on certain points in.’, 9 January 1912, M.001/12, ADM 116/3096.

These complaints by prominent seagoing officers were taken seriously at the Admiralty. Churchill had quickly grown to admire the Home Fleet C.-in-C., writing in March after a visit to the fleet at Portland that ‘They are vy simple these sailors; but this one — Callaghan — is sensible.’¹¹⁹ In the meantime, Chief of the War Staff Troubridge had assured Sir Francis Bridgeman that most of Callaghan’s complaints were to be ‘dealt with in the new War Plans which will very shortly be ready to issue.’¹²⁰ Accordingly the Admiralty informed Callaghan in early April that ‘the Blockade by the British Fleet of the whole German Coast on the North Sea is to be considered as cancelled.’¹²¹ In the meantime, Callaghan had informed the Admiralty he had no intention of drawing up fresh war orders for his fleet until his complaints had been considered.¹²²

The results of the War Staff’s efforts in early 1912 have been almost universally condemned, with Grimes calling them ‘as flawed as the strategy it was meant to supersede.’¹²³ Only Nicholas Black has anything approaching a kind word for the scheme.¹²⁴ Usually referred to as ‘Intermediate Blockade’, the plan was a break, albeit a somewhat half-hearted one, from the previous observational blockade paradigm. Nevertheless, it shared much with earlier plans, although considering the limited number of realistic strategic choices available for operations in the North Sea this was probably inevitable. Nevertheless it does not seem entirely fair to imply Troubridge and his assistants culled most of the plan straight from the 1908 ‘W’ series.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 24 March 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1529.

¹²⁰ Troubridge minute to Bridgeman, 8 March 1912, in Admiralty, ‘War Plans. Remarks on certain points in.’, 9 January 1912, M.001/12, ADM 116/3096.

¹²¹ Admiralty to Callaghan, n.d. [after 8 April 1912], in Admiralty, ‘War Plans. Remarks on certain points in.’, 9 January 1912, M.001/12, ADM 116/3096.

¹²² Callaghan to Admiralty, 9 January 1912, No. 2.S., in Admiralty, ‘Revision of Orders connected with War Plans.’, 9 January 1912, M.002/1912, ADM 116/3096.

¹²³ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹²⁴ Black, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹²⁵ Grimes, *loc. cit.*

The outbreak of war with Germany would see the First Fleet's four Battle Squadrons 'together with such cruisers and flotillas as their Lordships may determine' into the North Sea 'northabout' to proceed 'to Scapa Flow, to Cromarty, or to Rosyth, or to remain at sea, according to circumstances.'¹²⁶ These units would become the Northern Fleet, and their main wartime base was to be Rosyth. Meanwhile the major share of the Second and Third Fleets would remain in the south, forming the Southern Fleet; the Fifth and Sixth Battle Squadrons assembling at either Spithead or Portland, and the Seventh and Eighth Battle Squadrons at Portland. This at least was the plan if an Anglo-German war broke out after a period of strained relations. If war came suddenly, the 'first essential' would be to maintain a unified battle fleet 'of sufficient strength to enable it to seek a battle with the whole German Navy; and until this condition has been established no division of the fleets into a North and Southern Fleet can take place.' Subsidiary operations included the distant commercial blockade, enforced by the Ninth and Tenth Cruiser Squadrons on patrol between the Shetlands and the Stadlandet Peninsula.

Provided there was time for the fleet to assemble before war commenced, it was intended to string a cruiser-flotilla line across the North Sea:

'Five Cruiser Squadrons and four Flotillas will be stationed from Stavanger to the Hook of Holland, to each of which squadron and flotilla an area will be assigned over which they will patrol. This patrolling movement will be uniform both as to course and speed throughout the area to be patrolled. Forty miles to the westward there will be stationed a line of "look-outs." This line will consist of steam trawlers or other small vessels fitted with wireless telegraphy.

'Each Cruiser Admiral will have a group of these craft under his orders, and their positions relative to the patrolling cruisers will be fixed.

'The 1st Cruiser Squadron will be stationed at a distance of about 90 miles to the westward of the patrolling cruisers in readiness to support them if required or to fall back on the Battle Fleets if necessary.

'All the flotillas that are under the orders of the Admiral of the Patrols will also be available to reinforce any of these outlying forces if considered desirable.

¹²⁶ Troubridge, 'Orders to Flag Officers, with an Explanatory Memorandum', 15 April 1912, M.0010/12, ADM 116/3096.

‘Thus the watch will be maintained by a triple line working throughout in concert, of which the first will be patrolling squadrons and flotillas strong enough to deal with any but the most serious movements of the enemy; the second, of fixed lines of observation only; and the third, of a fast and powerful supporting squadron certainly capable of reaching and engaging or keeping in touch with anything which passes the others.’¹²⁷

These deployments were to be made ‘[a]s soon as possible after the warning telegram or the outbreak of hostilities.’ Once they were in place, the battle fleets could await a German sortie. No efforts would be taken to obstruct such a sortie, until the *Hochseeflotte* reached a point ‘that will render his return to his own ports without fighting a battle an impossibility’, hopefully a location ‘in proximity to our own coasts and harbours and as far distant as possible from his own.’¹²⁸ Most desirable would be a general engagement where the Germans would be caught between the Northern and Southern Fleets with one cutting across their line of retreat.

The ‘Intermediate Blockade’ scheme can be seen as an attempt to combine two competing strategies: observational blockade and distant patrols. Unfortunately, the results obtained during trials showed the concept had the flaws of both and the merits of neither. The line selected was too great for the available forces to cover, leaving the patrolling cruisers too far apart and the blockade as a whole open to evasion or piecemeal destruction by enemy forces. Other aspects of the concept were problematic too. The Navy possessed too few cruisers and destroyers for such an undertaking, and the establishment and maintenance of the nearly 350 mile cordon has been quite fairly described by Grimes as a ‘logistical and communications nightmare’.¹²⁹ In fairness to Troubridge and the planners, however, they had been given a major task to accomplish and little time with which to accomplish it. Furthermore, apart from the long patrol line, many features of this proposal survived into later War Plans.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

Churchill seems to have been sceptical (at the very least) about the prospects of intermediate blockade from the beginning. To his wife he wrote in March that ‘the war plans put forward by the staff have several stupid features about them wh have caused me some worry. I am gradually purging them of foolishness ... it is extraordinary how little some of these officers have really thought upon war on the largest scale.’¹³⁰ Before the plan could be officially approved, Churchill sent what in Bridgeman’s words was a ‘truly Winstonian telegram’ setting aside the adoption of any new war orders before Troubridge’s proposed cordon could be tested in the annual manoeuvres.¹³¹ More evidence of Churchill’s displeasure with these initial plans was recorded by Grant Duff, who claimed in his diary ‘upon good authority’ that when the plans were submitted to Churchill, after having been initialled by Bridgeman and Battenberg, the First Lord ‘read them & tore them in half – saying that he would lay down the plans for war!’¹³² There matters ground to a halt until the cruiser cordons could be tested.

The 1912 Manoeuvres

As in previous years, the 1912 Summer Manoeuvres provided the Royal Navy an opportunity to carry out trials of new tactics and strategies on the largest scale practicable in peacetime. In a briefing written for Prime Minister Asquith in October, Churchill described the ‘special purpose’ of the 1912 Summer Manoeuvres as being ‘to test certain situations and dispositions possible in the initial phase of a potential war between Great Britain and Germany.’¹³³ As already indicated, one such disposition was Troubridge’s proposal for an ‘intermediate blockade’ of cruisers and light craft strung across the North Sea. There was also the

¹³⁰ Churchill to Clementine Churchill, 25 March 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1529.

¹³¹ Bridgeman to Troubridge, 25 May 1912, B.6, TRO/300/5, Troubridge MSS.

¹³² Diary entry, 2 May 1912, AGDF 2/2, Grant Duff MSS.

¹³³ Churchill, ‘Notes on the Manœuvres: Prepared for the Prime Minister by the First Lord’, 17 October 1912, ADM 116/3381.

matter of the defence of the British coast against raiding expeditions in the absence of the British Army's expeditionary forces.¹³⁴ An economic blockade was implicit in the Manoeuvres' scheme: one condition of the manoeuvres was a prohibition against the movement either side's forces across longitude 61° north. When Callaghan expressed his incredulity and warned such a restriction 'might lead to fallacious conclusions',¹³⁵ it was explained to Callaghan privately (for reasons of secrecy) as representing a cruiser line that the forces available for the manoeuvres could not provide.¹³⁶

With these factors in mind the General Scheme for the manoeuvres makes interesting reading. The majority of the action was naturally expected to occur in the North Sea. The Blue Fleet represented the British with coastal territory being the entirety of the British Isles except a sector from Flamborough Head to Dungeness. The opposing Red territory extended from Yarmouth and its associated Roads to Dungeness.¹³⁷ Red's objectives were 'any and all of the following': Covering a landing on the Blue coast, and the disruption of Atlantic mercantile trade either by a show of strength requiring the intervention of the Blue Fleet's main force or through cruiser activity while the Blue Fleet was occupied. Blue's objective was to prevent Red fulfilling any of these conditions.¹³⁸ In lieu of actual troop transports it was decided that Red battleships could be declared as transports carrying 3,000 men each. Blue would be commanded by the Second Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg; Red by Admiral Callaghan. Admiral Sir William

¹³⁴ This was given a very thin veneer of deniability by the assumption of a 'native war' being in progress in Africa removing all but 20,000 of the Army's regular soldiers. Admiralty, 'Naval Manœuvres, 1912. General Scheme, Rules, &c. Errata and Addenda.', June 1912, ADM 116/1176B.

¹³⁵ Callaghan to Admiralty, 30 June 1912, No. 1437/H.F.757, in Callaghan, 'General Scheme for Naval Manœuvres.', 30 June 1912, M.01156/1912, ADM 116/1176B.

¹³⁶ Admiralty to Callaghan, 8 July 1912, in Callaghan, 'General Scheme for Naval Manœuvres.', 30 June 1912, M.01156/1912, ADM 116/1176B.

¹³⁷ Admiralty, 'Naval Manœuvres, 1912.', p. 1, ADM 116/1176B.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

May was chosen to be Umpire-in-Chief with his flag aboard the armoured cruiser *Euryalus*. The order of battle for both sides was as follows:

Blue Fleet	Red Fleet
2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th Battle Squadrons	1 st , 7 th Battle Squadrons
<i>Lion, Indefatigable</i>	<i>Inflexible, Invincible</i>
2 nd , 3 rd , 5 th , 6 th Cruiser Squadrons	4 th and Mediterranean Cruiser Squadrons
Minelaying Cruisers	
1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 5 th , 8 th Destroyer Flotillas	4 th , 6 th , 7 th Destroyer Flotillas
III, IV, VI, VII Submarine Flotillas	VIII Submarine Flotilla
Minesweepers	2 Aircraft

Of interest are the maximum ranges allowed for effective fire. These were 9,000 yards by day, 3,000 yards after dark. The Manoeuvres would commence on the night of July 11th.

Once the Manoeuvres commenced, Callaghan planned to send his faster battle squadron plus cruisers and a destroyer flotilla into the Atlantic via Fair Island. Meanwhile his older battleships plus two cruisers and the balance of his destroyers would sail to land troops at Filey.¹³⁹ Red's first approach to Filey was spoilt by dense fog, which was fortunate as Blue's ships were not in position for a timely intervention. After a brief withdrawal, Callaghan turned around and succeeded in getting his two battlecruisers into the Atlantic accompanied by the armoured cruisers *Hampshire* and *Suffolk*. Then, after regrouping his forces, Callaghan made another attempt to land at Filey. This time he was successful, claiming to have landed more than 28,000 troops before Blue arrived to intervene. Callaghan pulled out from Filey, sacrificing the *Majestics* of his Seventh Battle Squadron to escape. Soon afterwards the Admiralty pulled the plug on the Manoeuvres.

¹³⁹ May, 'Naval Manoeuvres, 1912. Narrative of Events by Umpire-in-Chief.', p. 3, ADM 116/1176B.

Troubridge's patrol lines had failed to provide an adequate observation force, and although George Ballard, now Director of the Operations Division of the War Staff, still considered the principle sound, Churchill felt 'vindicated' and ordered a new start be made.¹⁴⁰

Six via Four

Alongside all the other milestones and crises, 1912 saw the start of construction of the four *Iron Duke*-class super-dreadnoughts, and indeed the launching of the *Iron Duke* herself.¹⁴¹ As mentioned previously, the *Iron Dukes* reintroduced the 6-inch gun to the British battleship, though for a completely different purpose than the 6-inch batteries mounted aboard the pre-dreadnoughts. This fact is reflected in a memorandum from the D.N.O. to the Controller from August 1911: 'It is assumed that these guns are to be considered as anti-torpedo boat guns both for day and night and not as part of the main armament.'¹⁴² So it seems certain the reversion to 6-inch guns was entirely motivated by concerns over defence against torpedo attacks by enemy flotillas. This decision was not without controversy, even within the Admiralty. Aside from Fisher's venomous objections, both Bridgeman and Jellicoe had previously objected to an armament of guns larger than 4-inchers, although there is little evidence either of them opposed the change when it came with the *Iron Dukes*.¹⁴³

Even Churchill seems to have developed certain doubts. In October 1912, the Third Sea Lord asked the D.N.C. if 12-pounder guns could be fitted to the *Queen Elizabeths*—and presumably the *Iron Dukes* as well. Constructor H.R. Champness duly produced tracings

¹⁴⁰ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 177; Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 264.

¹⁴¹ Laid down on January 12th, she was launched exactly ten months later on October 12th, an impressive feat. Her sister *Marlborough* was laid down and launched in almost the same period. Both were built in the Naval Dockyards.

¹⁴² Moore to Briggs, 'Control of 6 inch guns for 1911-12 ships.', 9 August 1911, G.0576/11, f. 24, Ships Cover 268 (*Iron Duke* Class).

¹⁴³ Bridgeman minute, 25 November 1912, on Moore, '(1) "Iron Duke" class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.', 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27; Jellicoe minute, 4 July 1910, in Admiralty, 'Employment of Destroyers in Fleet Actions', X.1751/1910, ADM 1/8120.

showing that twelve could be mounted with accommodation for 200 rounds per gun.¹⁴⁴ D.N.O. Tudor pointed out that several of the proposed positions were totally unsuitable owing to blast effects from the main armament, graphically noting that in one case ‘the gun and mounting would be blown to pieces by the blast from ‘B’ turret guns if they are not actually fouled by the guns themselves.’¹⁴⁵ The First Sea Lord was very much against the entire idea of adding more guns to the new ships:

‘I am averse to three types of guns being mounted in one ship- it is apt to create confusion, & there is nothing a 12 P^r. can do that a 6” cant [sic] do - also all our experiments in “Skate” show that nothing less than a 4” gun will effectively stop a Destroyer! A 6” gun can be brought into action just as quickly as a 12 P^r.’¹⁴⁶

The Third Sea Lord was no more supportive:

‘I am not in favour of adding the 12 prs. The 6 inch guns being loaded can be discharged as quickly as the 12 prs, and at night the attacking destroyers will certainly get so close before being discovered that unless put out of action by the first discharge, their torpedoes will certainly be launched effectively, and it is hardly likely that a 12 pr. salvo will prevent this, whereas a 6 inch salvo very possibly might.’¹⁴⁷

Churchill, characteristically, was not inclined to give up the idea, even faced with this unambiguous opposition from the responsible experts. In response to Moore and Bridgeman he wrote that ‘Before we come to a final decision upon this, it wd be well to have the subject investigated by a cte. There is much to be said on both sides.’¹⁴⁸

Bridgeman’s response can be interpreted in several ways. By this time his relationship with Churchill had more or less collapsed completely, and this means that the First Sea Lord may

¹⁴⁴ Unsigned, ‘1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pr. Guns.’, 8 October 1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁴⁵ Moore minute, 13 November 1912, on Moore, ‘(1) “Iron Duke” class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.’, 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁴⁶ Bridgeman minute, 12 November 1912, Moore, ‘(1) “Iron Duke” class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.’, 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁴⁷ Moore minute, 13 November 1912, on Moore, ‘(1) “Iron Duke” class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.’, 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁴⁸ Churchill minute, 15 November 1912, on Moore, ‘(1) “Iron Duke” class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.’, 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

have been intending to be as defiant as possible in his answer. This does not, however, seem very likely considering Bridgeman's capacity for stone-faced professionalism demonstrated during Beresford's assault on the Home Fleet. Sadly for historians looking for vicious interdepartmental quarrels, Bridgeman seems to have opposed Churchill's proposal on purely professional grounds.

Whatever emotions Bridgeman felt while drawing up his reply, the result was typical of the man. His memorandum was a clear and lucid statement of facts. In reference to Churchill's committee proposal, Bridgeman suggested going even farther: 'I suggest that the whole subject of anti-torpedo boat defence requires investigation.' Reminding the First Lord of the 'enormous amount of money' devoted to 'providing men and materiel as a defence against torpedo craft', it was nonetheless 'open to question whether we are likely to get an adequate return for it and it may even be that our efforts are futile and that we are dealing with the problem in an altogether out-of-date manner which has not been sufficiently criticised.'

Bridgeman began from first principles, describing the manners in which ships could be attacked by torpedoes (either by other capital ships, by submarines, or by flotilla craft), and noting that the modern torpedo had a range and accuracy 'which I think is insufficiently realised', a situation which was only increased by the newly-invented 'Angle Gyroscope'. Torpedo attack by enemy heavy ships could only be defended against than remaining outside the enemy's torpedo range, a difficult proposition even with the efforts devoted to long range fire control. Against enemy submarines, the battleship's armament was 'quite impotent unless the submarine is above water or in the unlikely event of the periscope being hit.' Bridgeman was under no illusion, however, as to the unlikelihood of these circumstances. In both cases the most important defence for the targeted ship was the strength and internal subdivision of her hull and anti-torpedo boat armament was of little relevance to the problem.

Turning to the question of defending against enemy torpedo craft, Bridgeman noted that by day the anti-torpedo boat battery ‘depend for their usefulness on the present elaborate control being intact.’ Beyond that, much would depend on how the enemy flotillas behaved:

‘If the torpedo boat destroyers come close they will probably be hit, but why should they come close by day when there is such a huge target to hit and when they can possibly manoeuvre for position...

‘It is probable that the torpedo boat destroyers will go on closing until they are being hit in which case they will fire their torpedoes and a definite percentage will hit, and some of the torpedo boat destroyers will be sunk, but after firing their torpedoes.’

In a night attack, British capital ships would be unable to open fire on attacking torpedo craft outside the effective range of their searchlights (3000 yards), and Bridgeman believed the emphasis placed on strict searchlight discipline (to avoid accidentally showing a light) plus the time needed to target the attacking craft meant that in practice the range would be considerably less by the time the anti-torpedo boat guns opened fire. Once again, the enemy flotilla would probably be able to fire their torpedoes before they suffered losses. There was also the question of whether searchlights should even be used, as a squadron proceeding in total darkness would be a more difficult target than one using searchlights. It should be noted that in neither of these cases did Bridgeman consider counterattacks by British destroyers, since in that case he felt that the battleships’ anti-torpedo armament would be irrelevant.

In summary, Bridgeman asked the following questions: whether searchlights were of use or a hazard; whether the present anti-torpedo armament and control systems were worth maintaining in future designs; and whether they might be abolished altogether and the weight saved used to improve internal protection.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Bridgeman memorandum, 25 November 1912, on Moore, ‘(1) “Iron Duke” class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.’, 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

Churchill's response to Bridgeman's memorandum was enthusiastic. Forwarding the document to Battenberg, the First Lord noted he agreed with Bridgeman's opinions and 'the conclusions carry us a long way.'¹⁵⁰ This would have been of little comfort to Bridgeman however, as by this time he was being forced out of the Admiralty. In the ruckus that followed, Churchill dropped the issue completely, but the matter did not stay dead.

Nine months later Churchill minuted Moore and Tudor that 'I must revert to the point I raised last year about the anti-torpedo armament of the latest battleships.'¹⁵¹ When asked for comment, the new D.N.C., Sir Eustace Tennyson d'Eyncourt, replied they could be added, but in locations where 'they do not apparently meet the conditions for defence against T.B. attack.'¹⁵² When the question was submitted to the fleet flag officers for their views (possibly a stalling tactic by Battenberg), Callaghan replied that additional light guns would be useless except in night or thick weather.¹⁵³

As for the 6-inch battery's utility in a fleet action, Callaghan had already shown himself a disbeliever. In his report on the gunnery exercise carried out against the old battleship *Empress of India*, part of which included the light cruiser *Liverpool* pounding away with her 6-inch armament, Callaghan remarked:

'The six-inch gun in battleships can be considered of very little use at ranges over 8,000 yards, or probably 7,000 yards may be nearer the mark, when engaged with the main armament at the same target.

'In this connection the question may arise as to whether the 6-inch guns of "IRON DUKE" class should fire at battle practice at the same target as the main (13.5") armament; I would take this opportunity of recommending they should not do so.'

¹⁵⁰ Churchill minute, 30 November 1912, on Moore, '(1) "Iron Duke" class (2) 1912-13 Battleships. Fitting 12 pdr. Guns.', 5 November 1912, G.01512/1912, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁵¹ Churchill minute, 31 August 1913, on Churchill, 'Anti Torpedo Boat Armament of the latest Battleships', 31 August 1913, G.0937/1913, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁵² Sir Eustace Tennyson d'Eyncourt minute, 12 September 1913, on Churchill, 'Anti Torpedo Boat Armament of the latest Battleships', 31 August 1913, G.0937/1913, ADM 1/8367/27.

¹⁵³ Callaghan to Admiralty, 2 April 1914, No. 418/H.F.0111, in Admiralty, 'Armament for Defence against Torpedo Craft.', 2 April 1914, G.0243/1914, ADM 1/8367/27.

Once again, a senior officer had declared against using a battleship's 6-inch guns against the enemy's battleships. However, the 6-inch guns were not to be considered worthless:

‘One other hand, the firing of “LIVERPOOL” clearly showed the importance of armoured ships carrying an armament of hand-worked rapid-fire guns, which can be *kept* ready, and can develop a high rate of fire at the shortest notice, for use at night, in weather of limited visibility by day, or in action against light-cruisers or torpedo craft.’¹⁵⁴

This result should not be considered surprising. That the 6-inch gun could do great damage had never been in doubt. While captaining *Dreadnought*, the arch-pessimist Herbert Richmond had fretted that in thick weather ‘a *Bulwark* class could have lain half a mile of us & pounded us at practically point-blank range...& put 60 6”-shot a minute into us.’¹⁵⁵ It was clear that apart from a few circumstances the advantage would always lie with the heavy gun in a fleet engagement, and the increasing emphasis on increasing battle ranges left the 6-inch gun being suitable only to use against flotilla craft. A decision in 1911 that armoured ships with 6-inch batteries should carry a loadout of 75% lyddite explosive shells and 25% capped common pointed armour-piercing shells should be seen in this context. This was a contingency loadout—a recognition that circumstances where capital ships would fight each other using their 6-inch guns would be unusual, although not impossible.¹⁵⁶

Finally, it might be asked why, considering the extent of the debate over the question of 4-inch quick-firers versus 6-inch, was there apparently a lack of consideration towards splitting the difference and adopting a 5-inch piece, or even a reversion to the old 4.7-inch calibre. In fact there is scattered evidence that such a weapon was considered, in the form of a 5-inch 60-

¹⁵⁴ Callaghan to Admiralty, 8 December 1913, No. 1947/H.F. 0305, in D.N.O., ‘Gunnery Practice at Sea: Sinking of “HMS Empress of India”’, 8 December 1914, G.01303/13, ADM 1/8346.

¹⁵⁵ He then immediately backtracked: ‘At any rate, the matter is not one to dogmatise on, and it has to be remembered that in that same minute we should be putting something like 48 shot from 12” into her, which is not much [of] a joke & would rapidly reduce the number of 6” that could fire.’ Richmond journal, 8 April 1909, quoted in Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ D.N.O., ‘6-inch Shell.’, G.0517/1911, in ‘Important Questions Dealt with by D.N.O. Copies, precis &c. Volume I. 1912’, f. 11-14.

pounder gun. During the early work on the *Iron Duke* class one design, Design LIII, was proposed which carried sixteen '5" B.L.'. ¹⁵⁷ There being no such weapon immediately available the proposal was quickly abandoned. Subsequently in July 1914 the D.N.O. wrote that the question 'of a 5-inch 60-pdr gun is being dealt with ... in connection with the possibility of arming cruisers with guns of this calibre.' The process got as far as requesting designs from heavy gun builders but nothing further was done, almost certainly due to the outbreak of war. ¹⁵⁸ Fisher's insistence to go back to the 4-inch, albeit on a triple mounting, and the simultaneous introduction of the 5.5-inch gun only confused matters more. ¹⁵⁹

The Bridgeman Affair

Despite being First Sea Lord at a crucial time, Sir Francis Bridgeman is not an oft-recalled figure of the Prewar Era. In fact if Bridgeman is remembered at all, it is either as a peripheral character in the Fisher-Beresford 'feud', or for his enforced departure from the Admiralty, which with some justification is referred to, again by his biographer, as the only time he 'hit the headlines'. ¹⁶⁰ While the basic facts of Bridgeman's *exeunt* from the First Sea Lordship are known, like so many events in the Prewar Era it is quite possible that new approaches can be taken to them.

Professor Marder's observation that Bridgeman and his First Lord, Winston Churchill, 'simply did not get along' remains valid. ¹⁶¹ By November 1912, relations between the two men had deteriorated to such an extent that 'neither man was making much of an effort to get on with

¹⁵⁷ Watts, 'Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c.', 10 May 1911, Ship's Cover 268 (*Iron Duke* Class).

¹⁵⁸ Tudor, 'Armament for Defence against Torpedo Craft', 22 July 1914, G.0243/1914, f. 575, 'Important Questions Dealt with by D.N.O. Copies, precis &c. Volume III. 1914.', NHB.

¹⁵⁹ John Roberts, *Battlecruisers*, pp. 96-98. The problem would not disappear with the Armistice, and right through the Second World War the Royal Navy lacked a standardized medium-calibre gun, which caused no end of production problems. See D.K. Brown, *Nelson to Vanguard: Warship Design and Development 1923-1945* (London: Caxton Editions, 2000), pp. 96-97, 107, 188, 198-199.

¹⁶⁰ Ross, *op cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 258.

the other and the tension at the Admiralty was embarrassing.’¹⁶² When the Treasury opposed a £470,000 *per annum* increase to sailors’ pay, Bridgeman put his foot down and threatened resignation when Churchill tried to compromise. In this case, Bridgeman had the support of the other Sea Lords, who declared that ‘they cannot be held to accept it as a final settlement’.¹⁶³ It should be noted that Churchill was as desirous as the rest of the Board to see a pay rise for the lower deck approved, and a compromise was eventually reached.¹⁶⁴

This cannot be said of two more incidents, both squabbles over senior appointments (Churchill’s offering command of the First Cruiser Squadron to Troubridge instead of the already-promised Rosslyn Wemyss, and Admiral Arthur Farquhar’s retention on full pay as Admiral Commanding the Reserves and Coast Guard) during which Bridgeman threatened resignation in order to cow the First Lord.¹⁶⁵ Little wonder that on November 14th, Churchill confidentially informed Prince Louis of Battenberg that he would succeed Bridgeman when the latter departed.¹⁶⁶

Churchill was not the only one manoeuvring for position, however. At the end of October Bridgeman had written to Sir Henry Jackson offering him the post of Chief of the War Staff in place of the outgoing Troubridge. Before offering Jackson the job, Bridgeman wrote that ‘I should value your opinion ... as I naturally am much interested in the appointment, the C.O.S. working immediately under me.’¹⁶⁷ He continued that ‘The work is very close & indeed trying, for the First Lord also takes up much of the time with him, and at present the office is understaffed!’ This may have been friendly advice, or it may have been an effort to ensure the

¹⁶² Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁶³ Sea Lords minute, November 1912, MB1/T49/20, Battenberg MSS.

¹⁶⁴ Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 601-603.

¹⁶⁵ Nicholas Lambert, ‘Bridgeman’, in Murfett (ed.), *op cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Bridgeman to Jackson, 31 October 1912, JAC/87, Jackson MSS.

new Chief of the War Staff would be less of a tool of the First Lord than Troubridge had sometimes been. This being said, Bridgeman seems not to have held any lasting personal grudge against Troubridge. In the wake of the latter's court-martial over the escape of the *Goeben*, Bridgeman wrote to Jack Sandars that he was glad Troubridge had been acquitted.¹⁶⁸

Bridgeman was also being encouraged from afar by Lord Fisher. In mid-November Bridgeman apparently wrote to his former superior suggesting that he was considering a departure from the Admiralty at Churchill's request, or was at least feeling considerably burdened by both the job and his sparring with the First Lord.¹⁶⁹ Having already sent several letters over the spring and summer urging him 'on my bended knees to stick to your post to the bitter end!',¹⁷⁰ and to 'stick like a limpet to your very last hour... as First Sea Lord regardless of every personal consideration',¹⁷¹ Fisher now again attempted to rally the spirits of 'My beloved Bridgeman'.

'I am astounded! Not even a faint hint was given me by W.C. when talking to him only a few days ago. The only thing he said was ... it might be a good thing for Jellicoe to be Second Sea Lord & I of course assumed that meant Battenberg succeeding Callaghan [as C-in-C Home Fleet] because long ago that had been mentioned but I never thought of it as Jellicoe told me[.] Callaghan has no idea now of leaving & was very fit and as I once told you W.C. had said to me in confidence that he looked on you as his sheet anchor & if necessary would arrange for you to be an Admiral of the Fleet &ct.'¹⁷²

Perhaps Bridgeman's spirits were not the problem, since Battenberg's wife wrote to a friend around the same time that the First Sea Lord 'has again been ill' and that his resignation was 'more than likely ... before long'.¹⁷³ Bridgeman himself wrote to Battenberg that 'two attacks of

¹⁶⁸ Bridgeman to Sandars, 22 November 1914, f. 154-159, MS.Eng.hist.c.767, Sandars MSS.

¹⁶⁹ Bridgeman's letter has not survived, but Fisher's reply is suggestive of its contents. Fisher to Bridgeman, 17 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷⁰ Fisher to Bridgeman, 1 June 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷¹ Fisher to Bridgeman, 20 May 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷² Fisher to Bridgeman, 17 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷³ Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine to Nora Kerr, 14 November 1912, quoted in Richard Hough, *First Sea Lord: An Authorised Biography of Admiral Lord Fisher* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 257.

bronchitis within a few months, and coming on top of appendicitis, seems to have weakened my constitution, and I sometimes feel inclined to give up my post.’¹⁷⁴ Battenberg replied that:

‘You told me before that the Doctor had wished you to have a spell abroad soon. Let me beg you not to neglect his advice. ... I had no intention whatsoever of leaving London this winter & with the assistance of your excellent staff I can perfectly attend to your papers whilst you are abroad.’¹⁷⁵

Whatever the ill feelings between Bridgeman and Battenberg, it is difficult to view this letter as anything but one colleague telling another to take a needed rest.

During this exchange Bridgeman was at Copgrove Hall on a short leave from the Admiralty. Bridgeman’s biographer suggests that the First Sea Lord missed some nefarious subtext in this letter, something that ‘would have aroused immediate suspicion in the wary mind of a Fisher or a Churchill – or even the most humble backbencher.’¹⁷⁶ Whether this is the case seems to be a matter of the historian’s personal preference, and an orchestrated conspiracy may be an overdramatic reading of events. Whatever the case, another letter from Battenberg informed Bridgeman that ‘[s]hould a change become inevitable I thought you might like to know that I have, provisionally and whenever it should become necessary, accepted the First Lord’s offer to fill, to the best of my ability, your place.’¹⁷⁷ Churchill, meanwhile, wrote on 28 November that he was ‘very glad to hear from various sources that you have somewhat recovered from the chill which so unkindly spoiled your holiday’.¹⁷⁸ Then Churchill, with uncharacteristic delicateness, suggested resignation might be on the table:

‘I have been meaning for some time to write to you about your health which causes me concern both as a colleague & a friend. During the year ... I have seen how heavily the strain of your great office has told upon you & I know that only your high sense of duty & your consideration for me have enabled you

¹⁷⁴ Bridgeman to Battenberg, 25 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷⁵ Battenberg to Bridgeman, 26 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷⁶ Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁷ Battenberg to Bridgeman, 30 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁷⁸ Churchill to Bridgeman, 28 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

successfully to overcome your strong inclination to retire. That strain will not I fear diminish in the future; & if ... we were to be involved in war, I feel that the burden might be more than you could sustain.

‘If therefore you should feel disposed ... to retire, I could not whatever my personal regrets oppose your wish...’¹⁷⁹

Bridgeman was likely startled by this suggestion, and wrote to both Battenberg and Churchill that he was, in fact, well and truly on the mend. On December 2nd, he informed Battenberg that he intended to return to the Admiralty ‘for a week or two days’, and after the holidays would ‘return to Admiralty [sic] for good.’¹⁸⁰ Furthermore:

‘Today the Dr. gave his considered opinion, that as there was nothing organically wrong, & that as he had now diagnosed the malady there was nothing to prevent my getting quite well under treatment. He said I had been run down & that if I had taken more leave I sh^d not have been so bad.’

Bridgeman’s December 2nd letter to Battenberg suggests that his previous letters contemplating resignation was meant merely as a dutiful warning that, until given a firm diagnosis by his doctor, it would be well if the First Lord had a ready contingency plan in case his health was seriously threatened. Unfortunately for all concerned, Churchill was now it seems resolved once and for all to rid himself of this turbulent Admiral, and leapt at the pretext Bridgeman had unintentionally provided. He had already written to the King on November 29th expressing ‘anxiety about the state of Sir Francis Bridgeman’s health’ and proposed to promote Battenberg to First Sea Lord and bring in Jellicoe as Second Sea Lord.¹⁸¹

Thus Churchill must have been startled when a letter from Bridgeman arrived shortly afterwards in which the Admiral said that he was both feeling better and was ‘in receipt of your kindly-meant letter,’ which he planned to give ‘careful consideration.’¹⁸² Churchill, flummoxed, wrote back from aboard the Admiralty yacht *Enchantress* that having consulted the Prime

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Bridgeman to Battenberg, 2 December 1912, MB1/T22/169, Battenberg MSS.

¹⁸¹ Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁸² Bridgeman to Churchill, 29 November 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

Minister and reported to the King, Churchill's conclusion 'must necessarily be final; and I am confident that it will command your assent.' Bridgeman was to be replaced as First Sea Lord. Bridgeman was hardly pleased at this, and his reply accepting his ouster was measured, concluding 'I now understand that you expect me to resign, and I am happy to be able to meet your wishes.'¹⁸³ Several days later however, Bridgeman, doubtless encouraged by officers unhappy over another abrupt dismissal of a First Sea Lord, wrote to Churchill asking if their disagreements 'may have had something to do' with the resignation request.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile Jack Sandars told Bridgeman that he could 'hardly refrain from proclaiming the iniquity of Churchill from the house tops'.¹⁸⁵

Others however were perfectly happy to shout from amongst the chimneysweeps, especially Lord Charles Beresford, who grilled the First Lord in the Commons on the matter.¹⁸⁶ Bridgeman's initial reaction to Beresford's unasked-for offensive on his behalf was bemusement: 'I wonder what C.B has heard. He is not supposed to be a friend of mine.'¹⁸⁷

Worse followed soon; *The Standard* reported that a Special Correspondent had 'just seen the healthiest invalid in England – Sir Francis Bridgeman. Whatever may have been the mysterious cause of the First Sea Lord's resignation, certainly it was not ill-health.'¹⁸⁸ *The Times* picked up the story subsequently.¹⁸⁹ An angry exchange of letters and telegrams between Bridgeman and Churchill only aggravated matters, and the Commons was still raging over the issue when it adjourned on December 20th. By this time Bridgeman was fully aware he had become a tool for the Opposition, as well as for members of the Syndicate of Discontent looking

¹⁸³ Bridgeman to Churchill, 4 December 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁸⁴ Bridgeman to Churchill, 9 December 1912, cited in Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁸⁵ Sandars to Bridgeman, 8 December 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁸⁶ Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-218.

¹⁸⁷ Bridgeman to Sandars, 11 December 1912, f. 42, MS.Eng.hist.c.765, Sandars MSS. Clearly Bridgeman had not forgotten Lord Charles's imprecations against the Home Fleet.

¹⁸⁸ *The Standard*, 13 December 1912, quoted in Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹⁸⁹ 'Sir Francis Bridgeman's Retirement. Impending Statement.', *The Times*, 16 December 1912, p. 6.

to attack Fisher by proxy through Churchill.¹⁹⁰ Despite being Tory in his politics, Bridgeman had no desire to be used as a hammer to strike at the Admiralty no matter his own feelings towards Churchill. On December 23rd the Admiral wrote the the Leader of the Opposition, Andrew Bonar Law:

‘As you know, I was very anxious that there sh^d have been no debate, but unfortunately the matter had gone too far to be stopped!
‘I now desire to say I am that I am still more anxious that the case sh^d not be re-opened: no good from my point of view could result and these unhappy differences do much harm to the great Service I have the honour to belong.’¹⁹¹

Bridgeman’s straightforward character means there is no need to search for a hidden meaning in this letter, but even so any doubts about his sincerity are quashed by the following extract of a letter written on Christmas Day by Lord Stamfordham:

‘His Majesty wishes me to say that he is very glad you have abandoned the idea of a further publication of correspondence and that he thinks your letter to Churchill was a very dignified one.
‘If I may be allowed to say so, your decision to let the matter drop is the best thing you could have done for the sake of the service; and you have subordinated your own feelings in the interests of the Navy. I only hope that Churchill will realize this and appreciate your action.’¹⁹²

Whether Churchill appreciated Bridgeman’s disengagement is unknown. Soon, however, the issue had become immaterial. Bridgeman accepted his forced retirement and his successor, Battenberg, was already entrenched at the Admiralty. Overall, Bridgeman was correct in his observation to Sir Francis Hopwood that ‘I was fired out WITHOUT warning, but it was not because I was too weak, but because I was too strong!’¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ See letters from Beresford and Admiral Arthur Moore, both in Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁹¹ Bridgeman to Bonar Law, 23 December 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁹² Stamfordham to Bridgeman, 25 December 1912, Bridgeman MSS.

¹⁹³ Bridgeman to Hopwood, 8 December 1912, quoted in Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 258.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Serene Sea Lord and the Outbreak of War 1912-1914

Marder writes that Battenberg was 'by 1914 generally considered to be the outstanding flag officer on the active list' and that it was said that 'he was born a Serene Highness, but had lived it down.'¹ Ottley wrote that 'There are literally hundreds of naval officers who would be quite ready to believe black was white if he issued a memo. to that effect.'² Standing over six feet tall, Battenberg cut a memorable figure. Sir Henry Oliver recalled that

'Prince Louis was a big man and had a big appetite. At breakfast he began on porridge, then fish, then eggs and bacon or a meat dish, then a large plate of cold ham, then hot muffins or crumpets; and then a lot of toast and butter and jam, and finished on fruit. His meal would have fed an officers' mess.'³

Churchill found him a gracious and ideal First Sea Lord. Their harmonious record together is such, especially when compared to the other men who occupied the position while Churchill was First Lord, that Battenberg is accused of being either a pawn of Churchill's with few opinions of his own or being unwilling to stand up against him even when the best interests of the Navy were on the line.⁴ This impression is, unsurprisingly, not the whole and entire truth. It seems likely that Battenberg, far from regularly knuckling under to his young colleague, tended to be very much in agreement with the First Lord on many issues. When disagreements arose, Battenberg was able to smooth Churchill's ruffled feathers in a way Bridgeman and Fisher never could. One suspects from reading correspondence between the two on matters where they disagreed that Battenberg knew how to manoeuvre the First Lord until he either forgot the issue or relented sufficiently to meet Battenberg's desires. This political ability would not, of course,

¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 406.

² Ottley to Esher, 25 October 1911, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 407.

³ Quoted in Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 407n6.

⁴ Fisher told Jellicoe that 'Battenberg was a cypher and Winston's facile dupe!' Fisher to Jellicoe, 20 December 1914, Marder, *FGDN*, iii, p. 100. See also Idem, *FDSF*, ii, p. 87.

be obvious to the First Sea Lord's frustrated subordinates, and who would thus have felt aggravated by what they saw as Churchill's interference, but were at the same time were left unaware of the Admiralty's remedy.⁵ Even if it had, there were likely many in the service of Admiral Drax's 'old sea-dog type' who would have found such methods distasteful.

Upon learning of Battenberg's appointment as Second Sea Lord, Lord Selborne, who had worked closely with Battenberg a decade prior, told Churchill that '[h]e is the ablest officer the Navy possesses and, if his name had been Smith, he would 'ere now have filled various high offices to the great advantage of the country, from which he has been excluded owing to what I must characterize as a stupid timidity.'⁶ An anecdote from Churchill himself seems appropriate to relate here:

'It was recounted of him that on one occasion, when he visited Kiel with King Edward, a German Admiral in high command had reproached him with serving in the British Fleet, whereat Prince Louis, stiffening, had replied, "Sir, when I joined the Royal Navy in the year 1868, the German Empire did not exist."⁷

Such were the times that Prince Louis lived in, however, that no amount of ostentatious displays of patriotism would dissuade the suspicious, the envious, or the malicious.

One of the timid had been David Lloyd George. Esher recalls that upon Wilson's ouster, Asquith had suggested Battenberg as his replacement, but when he 'tried it on' with the Chancellor, Lloyd George 'was horrified at the idea of a German holding the supreme place.' Asquith appreciated the point but was evidentially unimpressed by Lloyd George's reasoning, wryly noting to Esher that 'L.G. is an excellent foolometer and that the public would take the same view.'⁸

⁵ No Balm of Gilead for them, as Fisher might have put the matter!

⁶ Selborne to Churchill, 29 November 1911, in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 552.

⁷ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 67.

⁸ Esher journal, 4 October 1911, ESHR 2/12, Esher MSS.

Perhaps one of the most important attributes possessed by Battenberg was the ability to dissuade, or at least distract, his eager-beaver First Lord from some of his more problematic schemes. This was due in part to the fact that Churchill and Battenberg possessed many similar opinions. This has been viewed by both Battenberg's contemporaries (including, notably, Sir Francis Bridgeman) and historians as a sign of Battenberg lacking a certain amount of steel in his personality. Overall, however, Battenberg seems to have genuinely trusted his subordinates and commanders such as Jellicoe, Moore, and Callaghan, as well as the still-embryonic War Staff, to provide new ideas and proposals where such were required. This was not out of idleness or spinelessness. It was a signal of his trust in the other flag officers in the Admiralty and the Home Fleet.

Strategy I: Deploying the Fleet

Just before Bridgeman was dismissed, Callaghan was sent new war plans, albeit ones described as being temporary measures.⁹ The Admiralty's disclaimer was extensive, declaring the plans 'provisional in the sense that they are subject to revision, that they have been issued to you only and that they and the War Orders based upon them have not yet been issued to other officers concerned.' However the Sea Lords thought it 'of importance' that Callaghan be placed 'in possession of their latest intentions without delay'.¹⁰ The distant commercial blockade strategy was now accepted, with the general intent being 'to use our geographical advantage of position to cut off all German shipping from oceanic trade and to secure the British coasts from any serious

⁹ Admiralty, 'Proposed War Plans', 25 November 1912, M.0020/1912, f. 6-25, ADM 116/3412.

¹⁰ Admiralty to Callaghan, 25 November 1912, No. 1075, in Admiralty, 'Proposed War Plans', 25 November 1912, M.0020/1912, f. 7, ADM 116/3412.

military enterprise and incidentally but effectually to cover the transport across the Channel of an Expeditionary Force to France should the government decide upon such an operation.’¹¹

To carry out this goal the Grand Fleet would be based in Scottish waters while the Channel Fleet would operate in the Channel. Callaghan was to use his cruiser squadrons not involved in the northern cordon operations 'as an observation force to sweep and patrol the North Sea', however they were to keep their distance from the German coast, with 4°E 'marking the more dangerous radius of German activity.'¹² The four First Fleet destroyer flotillas would be divided up, one remaining with the battle fleet, two with the cruiser patrols, with the remaining flotilla operating from Harwich in conjunction with the 5th Cruiser Squadron 'for operations south of the 55th parallel.'¹³ The details of the cruiser and destroyer patrols were left for Callaghan and his staff to draw up. With very slight amendments, this plan was adopted as on a permanent basis in December,¹⁴ and was substantially the one the Home Fleet went to war with.¹⁵

Churchill was unhappy with these plans; the newly adopted distant blockade scheme was too passive for the First Lord's temperament. 'It is impossible', he wrote to the First Sea Lord, 'to guard against all the dangers wh may be threatened by an enterprising enemy. When one menace has been provided against another appears.'¹⁶ Churchill fretted the entire length of the British coast from Dover to the Shetlands would be left vulnerable to German attack. The First Lord's solution was characteristic:

¹¹ Admiralty, 'Proposed War Plans', 25 November 1912, M.0020/1912, f. 10, ADM 116/3412.

¹² Ibid., f. 11.

¹³ Ibid., f. 12.

¹⁴ Admiralty, 'War Plans', 16 December 1912, M.0020/12, f. 26-45, ADM 116/3412.

¹⁵ For later revisions, see Admiralty, 'War Plans and War Orders. Home Fleets and Detached Squadrons. October 1913 to July 1914.', H.S. 818, ADM 137/818.

¹⁶ Churchill to Battenberg, 17 February 1913, in 'War Plans. Note by 1st Lord.', 17 February 1913, f. 192, ADM 116/3412.

‘Whatever may be said in favour of distant blockade as the guiding policy of a long war, & I agree with what is said, such a policy can only be effectively maintained on a basis of morale superiority. Unless & until our enemy has felt & learned to fear our teeth it is impracticable. We must conduct ourselves that the sea is full of nameless terrors for him—instead of for us.’¹⁷

This meant a short, sharp offensive at the start of an Anglo-German war to teach the Germans to fear the Royal Navy’s teeth before settling in to the dull business of economic warfare. ‘Nothing can give us the security we require during the first 10 days of the war except a strong offensive.’¹⁸ Churchill also felt it might be better to cover the passage of British troops to France by blocking the Elbe instead of patrolling the North Sea, an idea of long pedigree indeed.¹⁹

Aside from the work of the War Staff, Battenberg asked his erstwhile Flag Captain, Mark Kerr, to draw up his own proposal. As Kerr recalled in his later biography of Prince Louis, the First Sea Lord told him ‘that the War Plan against Germany I had made when under his orders some years before, and which had been accepted by the then First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, Sir John Fisher, had been superseded by one that was plain suicide.’²⁰ This plan, which was probably Wilson’s now-lost plan of 1910-11, though this cannot be confirmed with certainty, ‘paraded our battle fleets in two separate squadrons up and down the North Sea of the German ports and exits, regardless of the fact that submarines, destroyers, mines, and aircraft had come into being as offensive weapons.’ As for the reason for Kerr’s selection as a planner, he later wrote that Battenberg was faced with a backlog of work owing to Bridgeman’s illness, and thus ‘had no time for the formation of a new plan’.²¹ Kerr was in sympathy with Battenberg’s general conception of naval strategy, and ‘knew his ideas on the subject.’²²

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Chapter 3.

²⁰ Kerr, *Battenberg*, p. 239.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The resulting plan, which will be referred to as the Kerr Plan for lack of any other name, is one of the most intriguing of the Prewar Era. It has also generally been neglected by historians. Eschewing almost completely the use of heavy ships in the North Sea, defensive and offensive operations were to be left to the flotillas, and in fact it is a purer example of Nicholas Lambert's 'flotilla defence' strategy than any of Fisher's war plans or proposals.²³ The general thrust of the plan was 'to make the North Sea into a British flotillas' lake.' The Navy's capital ships were to be removed 'as far as possible from the German submarine bases.' Rosyth, Cromarty, and Scapa Flow were not distant enough. Instead, the battlecruisers would be kept in the Minch²⁴ while the main fleet would rust upon its anchors in Bantry Bay. The heaviest ships available on the east coast would be the six old *Cressys* operating from Scapa, possibly supplemented by other armoured cruisers (the wording is somewhat vague), as well as eight destroyers, two submarines and the tender *Aquarius*. Eight more submarines, plus eight destroyers and some additional auxiliaries would be at Lerwick with a detachment at Battu Sound at the extreme north of the Shetlands. Twenty light cruisers were to operate from Cromarty. Nineteen light cruisers, twenty-seven destroyers, and three submarines would be at Rosyth and the Firth along with their parent vessels. Small groups of submarines, torpedo boats, and destroyers were to protect Newcastle, Sunderland, Grimsby, and Yarmouth. Harwich would be home to a force of forty destroyers, thirteen submarines, six torpedo boats, and 'twelve light cruisers and parent ships'.²⁵ The Thames was to be covered by six light cruisers, twenty torpedo boats, and three submarines. At Dover would be twelve torpedo boats and six submarines. Long-range submarines would be deployed to watch the Skagerrak exit alongside a seaplane carrier and would be 'based where

²³ Ibid., pp. 239-241.

²⁴ The exact anchorage is left unspecified.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 240.

most convenient.’ An identical force would work off the Elbe backed by three cruisers ‘with a varying base as necessary.’²⁶

The various cruiser-destroyer-submarine forces based along the east coast were each to patrol a set area. The cruisers at Cromarty would ‘patrol at speed on a N.E.—S.W. line as far as the coast of Norway.’ The Aberdeen force would deploy between the Cromarty patrol line and the south of Norway. The Firth destroyers would operate ‘in groups, at speed’ between their base and the north of Denmark ‘but not to go farther east than the fifth degree of longitude without special orders’. The Harwich ships would ‘be disposed between there and the mouth of the Elbe.’ While on station the destroyers were to work in flotillas, spending ‘four days and nights at sea and two days and nights in harbour’. However, they would be relieved ‘in singles, each one doing a curve of search when going to and from the base.’

Aside from turning the North Sea into a pond for British flotilla craft Kerr expected these deployments would be ideal against Germany’s small but growing submarine force:

‘It is known that the Germans have only small under-sea boats, as they consider that they are only useful for coast defences. If the above plan is carried out, we should destroy about twenty under-sea boats in the first two months of the war, and they will not have a target worth shooting at. The submarine warfare will cease, large under-sea boats will not be built, and the greatest menace to our communications will be stopped before it starts.’²⁷

Exactly how Kerr worked out that the British flotillas would destroy ‘about twenty submarines in the first two months’ is never specified. Ironically, he may have unwittingly followed Wilson’s line of reasoning that the best place to fight German submarines would be the Waddenzee coast.

Apart from the description left by its author in his biography of Battenberg, little remains to show the Kerr Plan ever existed. In any case, Kerr’s bitterness aside, the rejection of this plan should not come as a shock. The extensive patrols by flotilla craft and cruisers recommended call

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 240-241.

to mind Troubridge's intermediate blockade proposal, which had been proven ineffective during the 1912 Manoeuvres. When presented with a more extreme version of the same idea that also involved the main fleet being stationed as far as possible from the North Sea, the resultant of the examining Admirals for the Kerr Plan was logical and justified.

Even had Troubridge's patrol lines functioned properly in the 1912 Manoeuvres there was a major flaw in the Kerr Plan that calls to mind the rambling criticisms of Beresford in 1907-8. Much like the proposals Beresford had made, the Kerr Plan needed far more ships of various types than the Royal Navy possessed. Overall the Kerr Plan was a bridge too far for the prewar Admiralty, and a very rickety bridge at that.

Fleet Tactics and 'The Great Gunnery Scandal'

In addition to the Bridgeman affair, the fall of 1912 saw the end of anything resembling cordial relations between the Royal Navy and Arthur Hungerford Pollen, a career businessman who had spent the previous twelve years working on the problem of naval fire control. The story of this relationship and its fractious ending is an excellent framing device for discussion of British prewar naval tactics, and especially the ways in which the Home Fleet would fight a general engagement. The deeply rooted notion encapsulated in Professor Marder's statement that the prewar Royal Navy was without 'a generally accepted, comprehensive, authoritative tactical doctrine in 1914' is, while possibly technically correct, nonetheless incomplete.²⁸ Furthermore, accusations that the later Grand Fleet Battle Orders were a straitjacket are based on something of a misunderstanding of their true purpose.

Returning to Pollen, he became interested in the problem of naval fire control after his cousin—William Goodenough, later to win fame at Jutland leading the Second Light Cruiser

²⁸ Marder, *FDSF*, iii, p. 4.

Squadron—invited him to view gunnery practice aboard the cruiser *Dido* in February 1900. Having asked why shooting practice was conducted at a distance that was considerably less than naval gun crews were achieving in action on land in the on-going Boer War, Pollen was told the major limitation was ‘the lack of an efficient range-finder.’²⁹ This matter had been under consideration since at least 1880.³⁰ By 1906 the Admiralty had finally found a suitable instrument, the 9-foot Barr & Stroud FA2.³¹

After some early unsuccessful proposals, Pollen finally succeeded in obtaining a trial of a rangefinding system and plotter—the only parts of a proposed full system ready for testing—aboard the battleship *Jupiter* in the fall of 1905, which proved quite unsuccessful.³² Undeterred after this failure and in part prompted by the introduction of the 9-foot rangefinders into naval service, Pollen and his engineer Harold Isherwood redesigned their ‘A.C. System’, resubmitting the proposal to the Admiralty in early 1906.³³

Fisher was at first enthusiastic; declaring in September 1906 that ‘*Pollen’s invention is simply priceless*, and I do hope we may hesitate at nothing to get ITS SOLE USE. We shall NEVER be forgiven hereafter if we do not!’³⁴ However by 1909 Fisher had performed a *volte-face* and wrote to Arnold White that ‘I have consistently refused to have anything to do with him or see him.’³⁵ The proximate cause of this reversal was a combination of Pollen’s Roman

²⁹ Sumida, *IDNS*, pp. 76-77.

³⁰ Commander J. Eliot Pringle to Admiralty, 27 November 1880, ADM 116/240. This case file also contains other submissions along the same lines from other officers or concerned parties from later in the decade.

³¹ Brooks, *DGBJ*, pp. 40-41.

³² Brooks, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84; Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-88.

³³ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³⁴ Fisher to Tweedmouth, 10 September 1906, MSS 254/45, Tweedmouth MSS. Reprinted in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 87-88.

³⁵ Fisher to White, 4 April 1909, in *ibid.*, p. 241n2.

Catholicism—Fisher was a staunch anti-Catholic³⁶—and his cordial connections to leading anti-Fisher partisans such as Lord Charles Beresford and Sir Reginald Custance.³⁷ Fisher also seems to have believed Pollen to be behind certain newspaper attacks on him.³⁸ Nevertheless negotiations between Argo and the Admiralty continued throughout, leading Brooks to conclude that ‘Fisher’s personal hostility to Pollen does not seem to have influenced subsequent events’ in any significant way while Captain Bacon was D.N.O.³⁹

Indeed in late 1906 was given £6,500 for a set of revised instruments with the promise of a £100,000 payment for monopoly rights should two months’ trials at sea prove them satisfactory.⁴⁰ This was despite Pollen’s aggressive manner during negotiations which won him no favour amongst the responsible Admiralty officials.

These trials took place aboard the protected cruiser *Ariadne* under the supervision of Sir Arthur Wilson with the assistance of Ordinance Department officer Lieutenant Frederic Dreyer. They have been a source of contention ever since.⁴¹

Dreyer was already working on his own fire control instruments by this time, and had also informed Pollen that he intended to test Pollen’s gear for all it was worth, claiming in a letter he intended to ‘crab’ it. At the time Pollen was understanding, and he replied that, ‘I am strongly convinced that, unless the system is crab proof ... the Service ought not to any exceptional expense to acquire it.’⁴² Wilson was also anxious conduct as thorough a trial as possible, and Sir

³⁶ See for example his description of Lord Walter Kerr as ‘a pervert’ who ‘has all the antagonism of the pervert to the faith he has left! ... In the Navy [the Roman Catholics] one mainstay is Walter Kerr and they will make him die at his post!’ Fisher to White, 16 July 1901, in Marder, *FGDN*, i, p. 199. Quoted in Hough, *First Sea Lord*, p. 132.

³⁷ Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169. A sizable collection of Custance’s own papers, including technical correspondence regarding capital ships, ended up in Pollen’s hands. One example is the collection of letters now catalogued at the Churchill Archives as PLLN 6/14, Arthur Pollen MSS, CCAC.

³⁸ Fisher to White, 4 April 1909, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 241n2.

³⁹ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴¹ See generally Brooks, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-88, 108-114, 139-142; Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-138, 149-158.

⁴² Arthur Pollen to Lieutenant Frederic Dreyer, 4 January 1908, DRYR 2/1, Admiral Sir Frederic C. Dreyer MSS.

Henry Jackson apparently wrote to warn Pollen that ‘If your gear can be broken down, Wilson will break it’.⁴³ Matters were not helped by the fact that the A.C. apparatus installed aboard *Ariadne* was incomplete. Although the Admiralty apparently had accepted this as a necessary part of their contract with Pollen, Wilson was unhappy, and wrote to demand ‘a written statement showing exactly what are the advantages you claim for your system as fitted in the *Ariadne* and for which the Admiralty are asked to pay £100,000.’⁴⁴

Wilson ultimately rubbished the A.C. system in his report of the *Ariadne* trials in favour of his own manual virtual-course plotting system, and the Admiralty saw fit to reject Pollen under the terms of their contract in the spring of 1908. This was despite the fact that the A.C. system had passed the requirements set out in the trial; the Admiralty had scrupulously maintained their right of refusal no matter the outcome of the *Ariadne* trials. Until the end, Pollen had reason to think the Admiralty might still decide in his favour, so the rejection was doubtless a shock.⁴⁵ The Admiralty’s motives likely had more to do with the roaring fight over every farthing of the 1908-9 Estimates in Cabinet than any bias against Pollen. Nevertheless, Pollen could rightly accuse the Admiralty of less-than-fair dealing.⁴⁶ Further progress stalled after Tweedmouth’s sacking in April 1908, but even so the Admiralty gave Pollen £11,500 to cover his expenses in June.⁴⁷

One of the problems was Pollen’s conduct towards the Admiralty. ‘I may say’, wrote Captain Henry Barry in May 1904, ‘I know the Pollen family personally and they are all pushing and persistent.’⁴⁸ Barry was the D.N.O., and had been in contact with Pollen regarding an early

⁴³ Pollen to Lieutenant George Gipps, 26 August 1911. Quoted in Sumida (ed.), *Pollen Papers*, p. 129.

⁴⁴ Wilson to Pollen, 8 December 1907. Quoted in Sumida, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴⁵ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴⁸ Captain Henry Barry minute, 31 May 1904. Quoted in Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

proposal for a fire-control system consisting of a ‘rangefinder, calculating machine and plotter’.⁴⁹ Barry had also told Pollen the proposal was ‘not the instrument that the Admiralty wanted.’ Pollen’s response was that ‘he wanted – “the Admiralty to take what they didn’t want”’.⁵⁰ Pollen undeniably had a habit of courting controversy—much later he earned the ire of naval aviation pioneer *cum* Member of Parliament Murray Sueter by providing an introduction for a book that to Sueter’s mind deprecated the aircraft as a weapon of war.⁵¹ He also had something of a deliberately loose tongue; in July 1908—at the height of Beresford’s feud with the Admiralty—Pollen complained to Custance that ‘I do not think [D.N.O.] Bacon had a vestige of an idea what it [the A.C. equipment] was for, and consequently could not instruct Sir Arthur in this sense.’⁵² Worse followed in the coming months, and culminated in ‘a piece of blatant political arm-twisting’ by Pollen in March 1909 at the height of the naval panic.⁵³ Sans any subtlety whatsoever, he wrote to McKenna regarding his ‘Battle System’:

‘for the last three days, I have been doing my utmost to prevent this matter being brought up in the Unionist Press and in the House of Commons. There is a wish to bring it up because (I hear the Front Bench Unionists, who were formerly members of the Board, are perfectly familiar with the tremendous importance that was attached to my inventions when they were brought forward under the late Government. The gentlemen who have approached me are in touch with a great many men in the Service; and in the Service the view taken of the way in which the thing has been treated, is of such a forcible character, that it is believed a very strong polemical value would attach to brining the matter out in the forthcoming vote of censure.’

Pollen’s following paragraph did little if anything to reassure McKenna to his good intentions:

‘To supply powder and shot for a Unionist attack on the Liberal Government can never be part of my programme; and in this matter the efficiency of the Fleet and national safety are more important than anything else. I have accordingly told

⁴⁹ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵⁰ Barry minute, *loc. cit.*

⁵¹ Rear-Admiral Murray F. Sueter, “*Airmen or Noahs?*”: *Fair Play for Our Airmen: The Great “Neon” Air Myth Exposed* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1928), pp. xvii-xix.

⁵² Pollen to Custance, 10 July 1908, PLLN 6/1, Pollen MSS.

⁵³ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

these gentlemen, who, I hope, are as good patriots as they are partisans, that if their object is the efficiency of the Fleet, they will be defeating their object by drawing the attention of foreign powers to a secret system of enormous fighting value, nor would their doing so accelerate the introduction of this system into the English Navy. I hope, therefore, that I have prevented this matter being publically discussed.⁵⁴

This was apparently not enough for Pollen, as soon after these letters to McKenna he produced a splenetic account of the *Ariadne* trials ‘accusing Bacon, Wilson, and Dreyer or ignorance, stupidity and dishonesty.’⁵⁵ The major accomplishment of this print seems to have been alienating a crucial ally of Pollen’s, Rear-Admiral Jellicoe. The now-Third Sea Lord’s blistering response to the attacks on his gunnery advisors left Pollen grovelling.⁵⁶

Despite this difficult and frequently abusive relationship, the Admiralty continued their support of Pollen. Bacon had refused to rise to Pollen’s bait, and subsequently Captain Robert Falcon Scott—then a member of the Ordnance Department—wrote that Bacon ‘went arm and arm with Pollen to Manchester and came back much impressed.’⁵⁷ The Admiralty’s secrecy arrangements with Pollen were continued and a new round of equipment trials took place aboard the armoured cruiser *Natal* in October 1909. Although the Admiralty felt the results of the trials were not sufficient to consider adoption of Pollen’s entire fire control system (which was still incomplete at the time of installation aboard *Natal*) he was rewarded with funding, a continuation of secrecy, and a large order for Pollen’s rangefinder mounting.⁵⁸

By 1912, Pollen and his Argo Company were ready to try selling a full fire control system to the Admiralty again. 1912 was a busy year for the Navy’s already-overworked

⁵⁴ Pollen to McKenna, 22 March 1909, f. 16(1), MCKN 3/14, McKenna MSS.

⁵⁵ Sumida, *IDNS*, p. 169.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁷ Robert Scott to Captain Constantine Hughes-Onslow, 17 July 1909. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁸ Brooks, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-118; Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.

ordnance experts,⁵⁹ for not only but Pollen but Percy Scott as well had new developments ready for trial.⁶⁰ This time the Admiralty was far less enthusiastic, as by now Frederic Dreyer had designed a competitive—and far less expensive—plotting instrument. Perhaps inevitably, Dreyer was accused of plagiarising from Pollen’s machine,⁶¹ which Dreyer just as inevitably denied forcefully.⁶²

Once again Pollen made sure the Admiralty heard his case loudly. Inspector of Target Practice and long-time Pollen supporter Admiral Sir Richard Peirse wrote to Bridgeman and Battenberg in September full of concern over ‘a rumour that the Admiralty were about to abandon the testing of Mr. Pollen’s Fire Control System’.⁶³ Doubtless having heard only Pollen’s side of the story, Peirse opined that ‘[t]o throw over Mr. Pollen and allow him to give the fruits of his ten years [sic] experience (all gained at our expense) to some Foreign Power would in my

⁵⁹ In addition to his management of the whole of the Royal Navy’s gunnery matters, the D.N.O. was a member of the joint service Ordnance Council, necessitating his presence at meetings about matters that had nothing at all to do with the Navy. One such meeting in 1912 called D.N.O. Moore away from the Admiralty to consider the question of payment to an Army Major for his patent of a new adjustable riding saddle. This particular matter also required the presence of D.N.C. Sir Philip Watts! Ordnance Council, ‘No. 233.—Proceedings of the Ordnance Council held at the War Office on Tuesday, 20th February, 1912.’, in ‘Index to the Proceedings of the Ordnance Council. Nos. 203 to 241. 1907 to 1913.’, SUPP 6/752, Ministry of Supply MSS, TNA.

⁶⁰ In Admiral Scott’s case it was the perfection of an effective and efficient method of centralised fire control direction, something that, like Pollen, he had spent the previous years working on with far more limited success than was later claimed. John Brooks, ‘Percy Scott and the Director’, in David McLean and Antony Preston (eds.), *Warship 1996* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1996), pp. 150-170.

⁶¹ Pollen himself heavily implied it. See Sumida, *op. cit.*, p. 223. For a discussion of the plagiarism accusation, see Brooks, *DGBJ*, pp. 187-200.

⁶² One of the major problems in disentangling the Pollen-Dreyer controversy is that both men often seem, at this far remove, deeply unpleasant characters. Pollen was ambitious and aggressive in a way that reflected his lawyerly training, and given to taking the darkest possible view of opposition or criticism. Dreyer was much the same, as the recollections of a Midshipman aboard the *Hercules* (where Dreyer served as Flag Commander to Jellicoe in 1911-12) make clear (though the same source admits that ultimately mellowed with age):

‘[Dreyer] was intolerant of lesser men. He would “fly off the handle” not just over a mistake, which might be understandable, but over the slightest hesitation in carrying out an often complicated instruction. He seemed to expect nothing but idiocy from his junior staff and while we admired his ability and devotion to his task we kept out of his way as much as we could. I remember being used as a “living” blast gauge before such things were invented.’

Rear-Admiral Stewart Pears, ‘Jellicoe and Beatty As Commanders-in-Chief, Grand Fleet’, in Lt. Colonel William Geffen (ed.), *Command and Commanders in Modern Warfare: The Proceedings of the Second Military History Symposium U.S. Air Force Academy 2-3 May 1968*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 104.

⁶³ Rear-Admiral Richard Peirse to Battenberg, 7 September 1912, MB1/T20/142, Battenberg MSS.

opinion be nothing short of a National disaster.’⁶⁴

Peirse’s letter included a memorandum on Pollen’s equipment with closed with Sir Percy Scott’s declaration that ‘I agree with every word of this[.]’.⁶⁵

Moore fired back later that month. Offended at Pollen’s accusations that Moore was maliciously obstructing the adoption of Argo fire control equipment, Moore stated flatly that if Pollen ‘can produce [a fire control table] there would be no objection to trying it in conjunction with the Clock & Rangefinder and Mr. Pollen is quite mistaken in thinking I oppose this.’⁶⁶ This being established, Moore noted that Pollen knew that ‘I do not think he has yet, or is even likely to produce equal results with True Course & Speed plotting, to those obtained by Rate plotting under seagoing fleet conditions.’⁶⁷

On a more fundamental level, Moore had fiscal objections to Pollen’s special treatment, especially now Dreyer had produced what was apparently a tangible alternative that would ‘produce about equal results’ to Pollen’s. As far as a comparison of the two went, Moore felt that ‘Dreyer’s is the more developed at present, but Pollen’s workmanship is probably better & less liable to get out of order.’ This being the case, it was a question of economics. ‘If Pollen’s table proves better at rate plotting,’ Moore stated bluntly, ‘then it is a question of how much better compared to price[.]’ Pollen’s hardball business methods, meanwhile, left Moore cold. Everything to do with Pollen ‘hangs up, because of the demand for Monopoly money (it might almost be called Hush money).’⁶⁸

Equally as troubling was Pollen’s insistence on large orders. When on April 10th the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Peirse, ‘Some Remarks on Mr Pollen’s System’, enclosure in Peirse to Battenberg, 7 September 1912, MB1/T20/142, Battenberg MSS.

⁶⁶ Moore to Battenberg, 19 September 1912, MB1/T20/147, Battenberg MSS.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Admiralty through Moore offered an order for five clocks to equip the new *King George V* class battleships, Pollen was hesitant. His official explanation was that it would be ‘impossible to make so small a number at commercial prices, and I would not like to have the first impression of price be one that would not be defensible in clocks were supplied in quantities.’⁶⁹ This was a fair enough reservation on Pollen’s part, but his follow-up was an all-or-nothing recommendation for the Admiralty to either ‘acquire the monopoly of our system’, place an order for a large number of range clocks, or to abandon secrecy and allow the Argo Company to try its luck on the open market.⁷⁰ Pollen stuck to this line throughout the summer, and in at least one instance Pollen’s comments had the tone of a protection racket:

‘Assuming the Dreyer gear is to be identical to mine, it is admitted that both are infinitely superior to anything hitherto seen. The question before you... can only be whether economy justifies putting (possibly) enemy navies on an equality with ours in a vital point of efficient preparation for war.’⁷¹

For all his proclamations of being motivated by patriotism, Pollen was here admitting to a senior Admiralty officer that he had no compunctions about selling his apparatus to a hostile power. As Moore had bitterly noted this in his September 19th letter to Battenberg:

‘Mr. Pollen made a great parade of his patriotic feelings preventing him from seeking out other markets, but if we propose to accept that kind offer of patriotism without paying him for it, he threatens to go aboard and trade upon the Confidential knowledge he has acquired by reason of his specially favoured treatment.’⁷²

Pollen further did himself no favours by his venomous denunciations of Moore. In one letter to Peirse, Pollen went so far to accuse the erstwhile D.N.O. of incompetence and dirty tricks:

‘I gather that opposition both to adopting my system and to monopolising it begins and ends with Admiral Moore. It is no disrespect to him to say that he has never been practically engaged in Fire Control, has never seen any of my system

⁶⁹ Pollen to Moore, 11 April 1912, quoted in Sumida, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-222.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Pollen to Battenberg, 19 December 1912, MB1/T22/174, Battenberg MSS.

⁷² Moore to Battenberg, 19 September 1912, MB1/T20/147, Battenberg MSS.

at work, knows nothing first hand of the first experiments, is ignorant of why we first embarked upon this quest, or why from the first we have been so strongly supported by the Admiralty, the same weight does not attach in the region of pure expertise to his opinion as to that of many others. It is inevitable too, that his opposition began when he was D.N.O., for the Admiralty to support me now would be ... a reflection on his previous policy and recommendations.’⁷³

This, combined with the veiled accusations of plagiarism he levelled against Dreyer, sank Pollen’s relationship with the Admiralty. Moore, for his part, was surprisingly diplomatic: ‘Mr. Pollen’s being a “personal” letter to Peirse I do not comment on it, although it contains a strong attack upon me.’⁷⁴ Furthermore

‘After the Natal trials all that was successful of the Pollen gear was accepted i.e. The gyro-controlled Range Finder, & a very handsome monopoly price paid for 45 sets. The Clock was not then completed. The plotting table aiming at finding direct “Time Course & Speed of Enemy” failed, & until recently Mr. Pollen has not produced a better table.

‘If [Pollen] can produce one there would be no objection to trying it in conjunction with the Clock & Rangefinder and Mr. Pollen is quite mistaken in thinking I oppose this. He knows I do not think he has yet, or is ever likely to produce equal results with True Course & Speed plotting, to those obtained by Rate plotting under seagoing fleet conditions. What I am opposed to is paying him monopoly prices when we have practically the same principles at work in Dreyer’s system. I am so far from being opposed to Pollen’s Clock that I have begged him for his own sake to push on with it, & perfect it, as I know Dreyer was going ahead, & I believed Argo Company’s work would be more accurately carried out.’⁷⁵

These were hardly the words of a man out to cause unscrupulous delays. Thus it is hardly surprising that eventually even Pollen’s supporter Peirse wrote that he was ‘sorry that Pollen proved himself impossible but I was always afraid he might prove himself to be his own enemy. It is a great pity as it is my firm conviction that he alone has solved the problem in a scientific & at the same time practical manner.’⁷⁶

The Admiralty let the secrecy agreement expire with the New Year, but even afterwards

⁷³ Pollen to Peirse, 10 September 1912, MB1/T20/147, Battenberg MSS.

⁷⁴ Moore to Battenberg, 19 September 1912, MB1/T20/147, Battenberg MSS.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Peirse to Battenberg, 14 April 1913, MB1/T24/201, Battenberg MSS. This paragraph is crossed out in the original.

they were unable to shed themselves of Pollen entirely. As had been the case throughout their association with Pollen, the Admiralty found themselves forced to remind serving officers of the need for secrecy, and specifically forbade them from corresponding with Pollen.⁷⁷

As far as the Pollen-Dreyer controversy goes, the possibly unanswerable question of which system was technically superior may not matter, since materiel superiority alone cannot win battles.⁷⁸ This being the case, it seems best to leave the last words on the subject to Pollen's cousin, William Goodenough: 'As regards the statistics of hits the human element enters so enormously that one wonders whether they show any conclusion as to materiel.'⁷⁹

But what of the tactics that the fleet would employ in wartime, especially in the fleet-to-fleet encounter(s) with the *Hochseeflotte* that were increasingly the central object what the Home Fleet was organised on an operational level?⁸⁰ To discuss this matter it is necessary to return to the nineteenth century, when the introduction of steam had necessitated some major changes in how fleets operated at sea. With steam power came the possibility of mathematically precise station-keeping.⁸¹ From this the manoeuvring of fleets seemed to become a matter of precise manoeuvring⁸² in a manner quickly stereotyped as mindless quadrilles executed via signal flag.⁸³ In fact, the most astute flag officers realized that the true purpose of practicing such 'equal speed manoeuvres' was to prepare their ships for the chaos of battle so that the integrity of the line of battle could be maintained—the vogue for melee and ramming engagements that resulted in

⁷⁷ Admiralty to Fleet, 29 July 1913, G.0721/1913, in D.N.O., 'Important Questions dealt with by D.N.O. Copies, precis, etc. Vol. II 1913', f. 135, NHB.

⁷⁸ Professor Rodger makes this point with his usual elegance using the Hazemeyer anti-aircraft mounting as an example. See Rodger, 'Royal Navy in the Era of the World Wars', p. 275.

⁷⁹ William Goodenough to Custance, 13 September 1909, PLLN 6/14, Pollen MSS.

⁸⁰ For as one interested party declared postwar: 'The tactical encounter is the culminating act in war, and is therefore of supreme importance... for, as Clausewitz has said, "In war nothing is gained except by fighting."' Captain Henry Thursfield, 'History of Tactics I.', 12 December 1921, THU /107, Captain Henry Thursfield MSS, NMM.

⁸¹ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, p. 183.

⁸² One such effort was Foxhall A. Parker, *Squadron Tactics Under Steam* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864).

⁸³ Marder, *FGDN*, i, p. 148.

much spirited argument through the 1860s and 1870s notwithstanding. Still, in the hands of less attentive commanders there could be justice in the following complaint:

‘Tactical exercises consisted merely of changing the columns of Divisions or Subdivisions by equal speed, from lines ahead to abeam or quarterly and vice versa. It taught captains to turn their ships accurately in the wake of their guide and at all times to keep exact station. Admiral Hornby's rules still governed the whole procedure, but these were not “war exercises”.’⁸⁴

The tactical situation recrystallized in the years after the Naval Defence Act when the Royal Navy once again possessed homogenous squadrons of warships of similar design and capability, and the venerable line of battle once again asserted its supremacy. Unfortunately most of this ‘tactical revolution’—if indeed it is worthy of the name—escaped formal description, and in some cases it seems never to have been written down in the first place. Of Fisher’s tactical reforms in the Mediterranean, Prince Louis of Battenberg (now Marquess of Milford Haven) could only recall that ‘Lord Fisher never told us captains how he proposed to fight his fleet; in his lectures he merely pointed out the tactical advantage of superior speed as enabling you to choose the range.’⁸⁵

Despite this (now-familiar) paucity of direct evidence, there are still indications of how the Royal Navy might have fought a *fin de siècle* fleet engagement. One of the more obscure is a 1905 novel of the genre that is now called ‘alternate history’ depicting Lord Nelson’s Trafalgar campaign and the eponymous battle as it might be fought with modern ships—*Victory* becoming a *King Edward VII* and so forth.⁸⁶ Though clearly intended as a boy’s adventure story, the two listed authors—naval writers Alan Burgoyne and Sir William Laird Clowes—make it of serious interest. The climactic battle sees Nelson’s battle fleet—a mixed force of battleships and armoured cruisers operating together—operating as three separate divisions, comprehensively

⁸⁴ Battenberg to Lord Cecil Fisher, 25 August 1921, MB1/T39/387, Battenberg MSS.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Sir W. Laird Clowes and Alan H. Burgoyne, *Trafalgar Refought* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1905).

outmanoeuvring the Franco-Spanish fleet in a series of semi-isolated actions. On the issue of weaponry, the torpedo proves a disappointment and the author (writing as Nelson's Flag Lieutenant) comments 'it remains more than ever evident that it is upon the gun, and the man behind it, that depends the result of a naval battle to-day—given, of course, a leader who has the respect, admiration, and whole-hearted confidence of his subordinates.'⁸⁷

Of course the finest tactical mind is worthless without the ability to communicate, and this was a critical matter in the years preceding the First World War. Quite simply, the size of the fleet that a wartime British C.-in-C. would command had grown massively, even without the development of the 'grand fleet of battle' concept. In 1907 Admiral Beresford expected to fight with fourteen battleships of generally homogenous capabilities under his direct command. By 1914, Admiral Callaghan possessed twenty-nine battleships, eight of which were three knots' slower than the rest and carried less than half the main armament.⁸⁸ Many officers were of the opinion that fleet commanders simply could not command this many vessels.⁸⁹ The one certainly was the ultimate object of tactics: 'All guns possible pointing at the enemy.'⁹⁰

It was into this situation that Admiral May stepped when he took command of the Home Fleet in 1909. The 'Notes of Tactical Exercises' produced at the end of Admiral May's term in 1911 have been mentioned already in the context of destroyers, but they also provide important information on the tactical thought going on in the Home Fleet. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the 'Notes' were never intended to be used as a tactical manual.⁹¹

The 'Notes' emphasized that much depended on how the commander would choose to fight with his fleet. The available choices were the classic single line ahead that had dominated

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 328.

⁸⁸ *Navy List*, July 1914, p. 269.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 212.

⁹⁰ Lieutenant A. C. Dewar, 'Battle Tactics of the Single Line', *JRUSI* 53, no. 371 (January 1909), pp. 11-38.

⁹¹ May, 'Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.', 19 September 1911, p. 1, Eb 012, NHB.

tactics since the age of sail, or the division of the fleet into squadrons that would fight semi-autonomously.⁹² The latter concept was essentially that described in *Trafalgar Refought* and had been recently under test in the Home Fleet, despite some initial reticence on the part of Admiral May.⁹³ All else being equal, the fleet commander's major decision would be how to deploy his ships to 'mass the heaviest fire possible on the van of the enemy'.⁹⁴ Since the fleet's battle line would be composed of both dreadnoughts and earlier ships, it was important to put the most powerful ships where they could attack the enemy van. If the fleet cruised in line ahead it was simply a matter of putting the largest ships at the head of the line, but because the fleet would likely cruise in columns abreast, the matter was more complicated and also related to the commander's decision to deploy either to port or starboard of the fleet's course.⁹⁵ The most flexible option was keeping the heaviest ships in the wing divisions, meaning whichever way the fleet deployed, their leading ships would have the best chance of gunfire supremacy.

The other option, decentralized attack by divisions, in theory offered advantages in terms of response time, and being amore offensively-oriented formation: 'The single line is a defensive formation; success in war may depend on a strong offensive. Detachment of command lends itself directly to offense.'⁹⁶ In addition, the introduction of the long-range 'heater' torpedo made long lines of ships vulnerable to the point where one estimate predicted 35% hits on a line of battle by torpedoes fired indiscriminately.⁹⁷

⁹² Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁹³ Richmond journal, 25 January 1911, in Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral*, p. 74.

⁹⁴ May, 'Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.', 19 September 1911, p. 10, Eb 012, NHB.

⁹⁵ For a historical example of this dilemma, see Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 421, 433-441, 619-621.

⁹⁶ May, 'Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.', 19 September 1911, p. 237, Eb 012, NHB.

⁹⁷ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 466. For an operational analysis, see D.K. Brown, 'Torpedoes at Jutland.', *Warship World* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 24-26.

Nevertheless divisional attack had several disadvantages as well.⁹⁸ Though it encouraged initiative I subordinate commanders and reduced the danger from torpedoes, it also demanded more skill and practice, and carried with it the danger of the divisions being isolated and destroyed piecemeal. Such an incident happened in the 1909 Manoeuvres when Captain Hugh Evan-Thomas, in command of the dreadnought *Bellerophon* had been acting as a single-ship 'fast division'. Although in one engagement *Bellerophon* bagged four 'enemy' cruisers, the next day *Bellerophon* ran into an enemy battleship squadron and was overwhelmed.⁹⁹ This danger was especially acute if the individual divisions were of differing composition and speed. In any case the lack of a universal tactical doctrine made it worrying difficult, if not practically impossible, for a fleet commander to predict with any reliability how their subordinates would behave on their own. Furthermore, it was quickly discovered that the fleet's communications infrastructure 'was simply not up to the task.'¹⁰⁰ This last problem, the 'Notes' observed, would be exacerbated as the number of ships in a division increased.¹⁰¹ It is significant that the first appendix in the 'Notes' begins

'The necessity for having some simple signals for forming the Order of Battle on any bearing when the Fleet is cruising in columns has been frequently shown throughout the series of tactical exercises carried out between 1909 and 1911, and more especially ... in misty weather.'¹⁰²

All in all, the 'Notes on Tactical Exercises' provided a base for future tactical development, though Richmond inevitably thought much of it as poor quality, possibly because much of his own contribution had been trimmed from the finished product.¹⁰³ Certainly the remark on the need to have a simple signal to deploy the fleet from cruising formation can be

⁹⁸ May, 'Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.', 19 September 1911, p. 238, Eb 012, NHB.

⁹⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ May, 'Notes on Tactical Exercises. Home Fleet. 1909-1911.', 19 September 1911, p. 238, Eb 012, NHB.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 452.

¹⁰³ Richmond diary, 25 January 1911, RIC/1/8, Richmond MSS.

taken as one root of Jellicoe's famous 'Equal Speed Charlie London' signal at Jutland. What Admiral May's successor, Bridgeman made of them, is uncertain, as is his contribution to tactical development during his brief second tenure as C.-in-C. of the Home Fleet. It is entirely possible that between Agadir and his sudden appointment as First Sea Lord Bridgeman found little time for such considerations.

Bridgeman's successor was the practical and open-minded Sir George Callaghan,¹⁰⁴ who was active in efforts to develop fleet operational tactics.¹⁰⁵ In 1913 this drive resulted in a campaign to update the Navy's venerable Fighting Instructions, which 'had by that time dwindled down to a few pages in the Signal Book'. Comprising thirteen articles, most were 'almost unchanged' from their seventeenth century forebears.¹⁰⁶ As efforts to revise the Signal Book were underway at the same time, Callaghan and his staff submitted their own proposed revision, said to be a very complete revision. When the results were submitted to the Admiralty it was 'severely criticised by the Admiralty Naval Staff, principally on the ground that it was much too detailed to be issued as general instructions from the Admiralty, and a large part of it was cut out.'¹⁰⁷

What was eventually released by the Admiralty was entitled 'Instructions for the Conduct of a Fleet in Action', and consisted of ten headings on subjects such as manoeuvring in action

¹⁰⁴ Sir Sydney Fremantle wrote that Callaghan 'was no brilliant innovator, he had not graduated in the scientific branches of the service, and would not have pretended to judge the merits of the details of continuous advances in material of all descriptions except by the results which they achieved in practice.' Sir Sydney R. Fremantle, *My Naval Career: 1880-1928* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1949), p. 163.

¹⁰⁵ Although as previous noted, Callaghan's own personal papers have not survived, enough material from various subordinates and members of his staff have survived to give reasonable insight into his views. These collections include, principally, those of (as they then were) Sir David Beatty, Reginald Plunkett (as he then was), and Roger Backhouse.

¹⁰⁶ Thursfield, 'Development of Tactics in the Grand Fleet. Lecture No. I.', 2 February 1922, THU/107, Thursfield MSS.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

and fire discipline.¹⁰⁸ Callaghan subsequently issued a supplemental memorandum that according to one source was largely comprised of material the Admiralty had vetoed.¹⁰⁹ This memorandum is one of the main sources for the contention that Callaghan intended to employ a more decentralized command style in action than Jellicoe, entrusting greater responsibility and initiative to his subordinate commanders.¹¹⁰

Callaghan acknowledged that '*[s]ize of the fleet must influence tactics*'.¹¹¹ Although he recognized the need to decentralize authority in a large fleet,¹¹² Callaghan still intended (visibility permitting) to 'exercise control over the whole fleet during the approach, disposing it as may be best for subsequent deployment, and ordering the deployment when the time arrives.' After battle was joined, Callaghan intended to maintain control of the battle line, but detached squadrons and 'other portions' were to be 'delegated to their commanders, subject to the general instructions given below or to others which I issue.'¹¹³

Of course, intent and thruppence would get Callaghan a loaf of bread if he was unable to pass his orders to the rest of the fleet, and that was where the greatest problem lay. Of the three chief methods of transmitting signals, only two could really be relied upon—signal pennants and Aldis lamps. Despite the importance attached to wireless telegraphy, Callaghan was under no illusions about its capabilities in action: 'The chief W/T difficulty to be faced in war will be the

¹⁰⁸ Admiralty, 'Instructions for the Conduct of a Fleet in Action.', October 1913, M.0426/13/A, THU/107, Thursfield MSS. Marder, *FDSF*, iii, pp. 19-20, mistakenly attributes authorship of these instructions to Callaghan alone.

¹⁰⁹ Thursfield, 'Development of Tactics in the Grand Fleet. Lecture No. I.', 2 February 1922, THU/107, Thursfield MSS.

¹¹⁰ See principally Marder, *loc. cit.*; Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

¹¹¹ Callaghan, 'Conduct of a Fleet in Action. Commander-in-Chief's Instructions.', 14 March 1914, T94621, Backhouse MSS. A typescript copy also exists as a supplement to Captain Thursfield's 'Development of Tactics in the Grand Fleet' lecture notes in THU/107, Thursfield MSS. Backhouse's copy, however, is the original as issued to the fleet.

¹¹² This can be emphasized by the fact that at least 199 copies of Callaghan's 'Instructions' were printed. Backhouse was issued No. 199, while Thursfield used a copy of No. 190.

¹¹³ Callaghan's 'Instructions' are vague of what sort of form these detached squadrons would take.

congestion of the various lines of communication.’¹¹⁴ Wireless signals were to be brief, clearly written, and only sent if no ‘other method of communication’ was possible. At least the increased speed of the latest destroyers meant the *Boadiceas* could be repurposed as repeating ships, increasing the speed that visual signals could be transmitted throughout the battle fleet.

An additional handicap to Callaghan’s communications was that neither flags nor Aldis nor telegraphy functioned in what is now termed ‘real time’. There was considerable delay between a squadron commander issuing an order, the actual transmission of that order by his flagship’s signalmen,¹¹⁵ the order’s reception by the rest of the squadron’s ships, and their subsequent execution of those orders. This delay between issuance and execution was at the best of times measured in minutes.

The brevity of Callaghan’s instruction¹¹⁶ and his comment that his delegation of authority would be subject to other instructions issued later (which never were), both suggest that the Admiral may have been more of a ‘centralizer’ than hitherto claimed. Perhaps Callaghan was setting up some fleet-wide general principles for his successor, Sir John Jellicoe,¹¹⁷ to build upon. If this was indeed what Callaghan was attempting, it would largely explain the great difference between his ‘Instructions’ and Jellicoe’s wartime Grand Fleet Battle Orders, which were of much greater detail and complexity. But if Callaghan never intended to fight a fleet engagement using the ‘Instructions’, and instead meant them to be a tool for developing a standard fleet doctrine, where does that leave the infamous Grand Fleet Battle Orders? Those Orders that have been

¹¹⁴ Callaghan, ‘W/T Orders in Time of War or Emergency’, 15 September 1913, T94635, Backhouse MSS.

¹¹⁵ Or, as was increasingly the case in 1914, by telegraphists.

¹¹⁶ They fill two pages of close-spaced type in their original form.

¹¹⁷ Jellicoe had been tapped to succeed Callaghan several months before the outbreak of hostilities.

accused of proclaiming ‘the message that any proactive exercise of initiative would be tantamount to disloyalty’¹¹⁸ and thus being responsible for the indecisive outcome at Jutland?

Recall Marder’s comment about ‘the lack of a generally accepted, comprehensive, authoritative tactical doctrine in 1914.’¹¹⁹ If Callaghan meant his ‘Instructions’ as a foundation to build from, that construction was overtaken by events. From the earliest moments, Jellicoe had to create a fleet doctrine to answer ‘[t]he supremely important question of how best to handle in action the large and increasing Fleet in his charge.’¹²⁰ Callaghan had the luxury of writing his Instructions in peace and possessed time to experiment. What form his wartime Fleet Orders would have taken is unknown. It is known, however, that prior to the war no ‘instructions respecting cruising formations or deployments existed.’¹²¹ These had to be created essentially *ex novo* by Jellicoe.

After war’s end, Jellicoe wrote ‘The tactics to be pursued by the different units of the Fleet in action under all conceivable conditions were provided for as far as possible.’ He also declared his initial Grand Fleet Battle Orders were based on a ‘Battle Memorandum’ he had written while in command of the Atlantic Fleet.¹²² These orders were looser than the Grand Fleet Battle Orders, but they were written for a much smaller force. In all cases the emphasis was on forcing a favourable position to win the resulting gunnery duel.¹²³ Due to the disappointing

¹¹⁸ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

¹¹⁹ Marder, *FDSF*, iii, p. 4.

¹²⁰ Jellicoe, *Grand Fleet*, p. 42.

¹²¹ Thursfield, ‘Development of Tactics in the Grand Fleet. Lecture No. I.’, 2 February 1922, THU/107, Thursfield MSS.

¹²² Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, p. 43. The ‘Battle Memorandum’ is idem, ‘My War Orders & Dispositions Pre-war – Prepared when in 2nd Division Home Fleet’, n.d. [1911-1912], f. 1-16, Add MS 49012, Jellicoe MSS. Excerpts are reproduced in A. Temple Patterson (ed.), *The Jellicoe Papers: Selections from the private and official correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe of Scapa*, i (London: Navy Records Society, 1966), pp. 23-25.

¹²³ It would be well to note here that in 1914 it was assumed that despite the growing menace of the torpedo, it would still be the heavy gun that would settle everything. And at least as far as major surface actions of the First World War are concerned, this forecast proved accurate. Disagreement on his point does exist, however, although examples are rarely convincing and are often incoherent. For a typical specimen of such arguments, see Rodrigo

results obtained in experiments with divisional attack, the single line ahead remained the best tactical formation. Jellicoe was certainly aware of its faults, especially with a force as large as the Grand Fleet, writing to the commander of the Third Battle Squadron, which was comprised of a mixture of pre-*Dreadnought* battleships:

‘Undoubtedly the line of 31 ships is very unwieldy, but if the Germans do it we must do the same. They may detach divisions in which case ours will naturally be taken to meet them under the VA's. But above all don't get drawn away by a fast division which might then leave you isolated by their superior speed. ‘The German TBD's ... are the more difficult problem. If they deploy in the opposite to us, we must bite their tails as if they bite ours & we don't bite theirs we are all in a very bad position.’¹²⁴

The line ahead, then, seemed the best of a number of less-than-ideal options.

A tradition has grown up that regards the Grand Fleet Battle Orders as a straitjacket, and that Jellicoe's over-centralization killed off the initiative of his subordinates.¹²⁵ There is, however, another way to look at the prescriptiveness of these Battle Orders. Setting out a large number of potential scenarios in advance decreased the reaction time and signals traffic needed during battle, a very important matter in an organization without real-time communications. By providing his officers with specified procedures ahead of time, the chance of a serious collapse of fleet command and control was greatly reduced. Jellicoe emphasized this:

‘Stress was laid from the beginning on the fact that the Commander-in-Chief of a large fleet could not after deployment control the movements of all the squadrons comprising that fleet under the conditions of modern action when funnel and cordite smoke, and the great length of the line, would hamper his knowledge of events, and increase the difficulty of communication. The necessity for wide decentralisation of command, *after the deployment* of the fleet for action, was emphasised.’¹²⁶

Garcia y Robertson, ‘Failure of the Heavy Gun at Sea, 1898-1922’, *Technology and Culture* 28, no. 3 (July 1987), pp. 539-557.

¹²⁴ Jellicoe to Bradford, 13 August 1914, MSS/73/095, Uncatalogued MSS, NMM.

¹²⁵ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹²⁶ Jellicoe, *Grand Fleet*, p. 43.

The first addendum to Jellicoe's initial set of Orders demonstrates that Jellicoe did not always have 'little faith in his followers' and prefer 'to do everything himself.'¹²⁷ Regarding the reportage of sightings of the enemy fleet:

'It is of the greatest importance to the Commander-in-Chief that he should receive the earliest information from any cruiser or other vessel sighting the enemy's main body as to the composition and disposition of their battlefleet.'¹²⁸

Although perhaps phrased awkwardly, this instruction demonstrates that Jellicoe did in fact put much trust in his subordinates. It can be argued that if the Grand Fleet lacked initiative with Jellicoe as its C.-in-C., then it was not Jellicoe or his orders that were the cause.

Aside from questions of manoeuvre or initiative, a crucial part of tactics involved the range at which to engage the enemy. While there has been a recent tendency to discount British commitment to long-range gunnery in the years immediately previous to the war,¹²⁹ Callaghan certainly left no doubt of his preference, informing his subordinates that 'deliberate fire may well be opened at about 15,000 yards', although effective fire was expected to be at ranges between 8,000 and 10,000 yards. Closer ranges would, Callaghan hoped, be avoided until the end of an engagement when the enemy's firepower was beaten.¹³⁰ This seems to have been in accordance with previous intentions—Jellicoe's prewar 'Orders & Dispositions' proposed opening fire at 15,000 yards (weather permitting), and establishing the maximum rate of fire between 13,000 and 12,000 yards, while ranges closer than 7,000 yards were to be avoided in 'ordinary

¹²⁷ Andrew Lambert, *Admirals*, p. 359.

¹²⁸ Jellicoe, 'Grand Fleet Battle Orders. Addendum No. 1 to H.F. 0034 of 18 August 1914.', 26 August 1914, f. 6, ADM 116/1341.

¹²⁹ See for instance Sumida, 'A Matter of Timing'; and Friedman, *Naval Firepower*. There is also speculation that the *Iron Dukes* and subsequent classes were given their 6-inch guns owing to a resurgence in short-range 'hail of fire' tactics, for which see Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219.

¹³⁰ Callaghan, 'Conduct of a Fleet in Action. Commander-in-Chief's Instructions.', 14 March 1914, T94621, Backhouse MSS. Brooks, *DGBJ*, p. 69, erroneously gives the extreme range as 16,000 yards.

circumstances' due to 'the Torpedo menace'.¹³¹ Callaghan was also convinced that his views were echoed by at least the majority of the First Fleet's responsible officers. The principal problem was lack of practice in long-range firings, 'although everyone is agreed as to the great desirability of hitting first we have little to guide us as to the range at which we can open fire with good prospect of hitting.'¹³² There was a general failure to carry out long-range firings in the last few years of peace.¹³³ One intriguing exception, however, was a firing done by the *Colossus* in 1912 at between 14,000 and 15,000 yards,¹³⁴ and with the start of the war gunnery practice switched to longer ranges very quickly—within weeks a ship of the Second Battle Squadron 'put 3 of her first salvo into a small towed target at 13000 yds.'¹³⁵ Although perhaps verging on caricature, Captain Henry Thursfield was reasonably accurate when he claimed that the firm prewar conviction that the *Hochseeflotte* wished a close-range slugging match with their heavy secondary and torpedo armament 'that our whole tactics were based upon it', and the British decided, in effect:

““Since the Germans want to fight a close action, to do so must be advantageous to them; therefore we should endeavour to avoid it: we must develop and practise the game of long bowls”.”¹³⁶

In fact, this 'Quest for Reach' as Jon Sumida termed it, had been going on since the fleets of the Dual Alliance were still the Navy's main concern. The emergence of the German threat gave the Navy no reason to desist—and every reason to continue—working on their 'long bowls'.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Jellicoe, 'My War Orders & Dispositions Pre-war – Prepared when in 2nd Division Home Fleet', n.d. [1911-1912], f. 8, Add MS 49012, Jellicoe MSS.

¹³² Callaghan to Admiralty, 8 December 1913, No. 1947/H.F. 0505, in D.N.O., 'Gunnery Practice at Sea. Sinking of "HMS Empress of India"', 8 December 1913, G.01303/1913, ADM 1/8346.

¹³³ Percy Scott, predictably, had already called into question the Navy's entire system of gunnery practice in a letter to Captain Charles de Bartolomé in late 1912. Scott to Bartolomé, 20 December 1912, MB1/T87, Battenberg MSS.

¹³⁴ Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹³⁵ Commander Rudolf Bentinck to Noel, n.d. [October 1914], NOE/4/B, Noel MSS.

¹³⁶ Thursfield, 'Development of Tactics in the Grand Fleet. Lecture No. I.', 2 February 1922, THU/107, Thursfield MSS.

Strategy II: Bases

As the work on the new war plans continued, a parallel discussion was taking place regarding the basing of the war fleet. By the end of 1912 it had been more or less decided that Scottish waters were preferable. It was expected that any fleet actions would occur in that vicinity owing to the expected impregnability of the Dover Straits thanks to advances in mines and torpedo craft.¹³⁸ This cut both ways, however, and the Admiralty recognized that a sheltering fleet would be vulnerable to attack. Thus the northern realignment brought back into the limelight one of many issues left over from the early 1900s: the question of a northern Home Port for the Royal Navy. Though this matter had never quite died away, the adoption of a distant blockade strategy gave it renewed importance.

The Admiralty had been greatly concerned of overcrowding in the three existing Home Ports, and a Berthing Committee reported at the beginning of 1902 that the Firth of Forth was a strategically desirable location for a fourth Home Port:

‘Its position, 300 miles nearer than is Chatham to the Pentland Firth and the other routes to the north of Scotland, renders it a valuable strategic position in case of war with the Northern Powers.’¹³⁹

Land was subsequently purchased from Lord Linlithgow in 1903 and schemes were drawn up for the construction of a modern naval base at Rosyth. Then came Fisher, who implored Lord Selborne ‘*Don’t spend another penny on Rosyth!*’¹⁴⁰ Battenberg’s view in 1904 had been similar to Fisher’s. Building a new base to ease overcrowding was nonsensical when

¹³⁷ Interestingly, it seems the Royal Navy was aware by 1914 that the Germans too were planning to engage at a long range. Mathew S. Seligmann, ‘A German Preference for a Medium-Range Battle? British Assumptions about German Naval Gunnery, 1914-1915’, *War in History* 19, no. 1 (January 2012), pp. 33-48.

¹³⁸ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 424.

¹³⁹ Admiralty, ‘Report of Berthing Committee’, 31 January 1902, quoted in Admiralty, ‘Rosyth. Acquisition and Proposals for Development.’, February 1906, F.P. 4714, p. 3, FISR 8/7, Fisher MSS.

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, ‘The Scheme’, in Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 23.

the existing facilities could be relieved by scrapping old ships.¹⁴¹ Selborne, however, noted that this argument overlooked other considerations, including Germany.¹⁴² Despite Selborne's admonition, work on Rosyth proceeded at a snail's pace throughout the remainder of the Fisher administration, and in 1910 Fisher bragged of getting Rosyth delayed four years.¹⁴³ This despite the entreaties of Jellicoe, who as Controller felt the matter of East Coast docking facilities was of 'the utmost gravity and open to much criticism.'¹⁴⁴

Fisher's motives for blocking Rosyth were not all based on securing economies, however. He wrote in 1912 that 'I have always been "dead-on" for Cromarty and hated Rosyth, which is an unsafe anchorage...and there's that beastly bridge which, if blown up, makes the egress risky without examination'.¹⁴⁵

Work proceeded on Rosyth nonetheless, albeit slowly. Progress was such that when the first harbourmaster was appointed in July 1911, his first 'very hasty' visit convinced him 'that for war purposes the Firth of Forth was a hopeless position.'¹⁴⁶ Work was carried on at such a pace that Churchill offhandedly admitted in the Commons in March 1912 that Rosyth would not be ready until 1916.¹⁴⁷ By August 1914, Rosyth could manage a few minor repair duties, but nothing more.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, other locations had begun to attract attention.

¹⁴¹ Prince Louis likened the idea to a man adding a new floor to his house to accommodate spare furniture. Battenberg, 'Rosyth. (a fable)', enclosure in Battenberg to Fisher, 19 November 1904, F.P. 139, f. 33-35, FISR 1/4, Fisher MSS.

¹⁴² Selborne note on Fisher, 'The Scheme', in Kemp (ed.), *FP*, i, p. 23.

¹⁴³ Fisher to Esher, 23 January 1910. Quoted in Fisher, *Memories and Records*, i, pp. 103-104. Fisher claimed he had hoped a Forth-Clyde ship canal would be built, obviating the need for a major Scottish base. See also Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Campbell, 'The Strategical Position in the North Sea as Strengthened by the "Forth and Clyde Battle-Ship Canal" and the "Dover and Sangatte Tube Railway"', *JRUSI* 52, no. 359 (January 1908), pp. 3-27.

¹⁴⁴ Jellicoe to Fisher, 8 April 1909. Quoted in Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 421.

¹⁴⁵ Fisher to Unknown, 2 August 1912, quoted in Bacon, *Lord Fisher*, ii, p. 155.

¹⁴⁶ D.J. Munro, quoted in Brian Lavery, *Shield of Empire: The Royal Navy and Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2007), p. 191.

¹⁴⁷ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 18 March 1912, Fifth Series, v. 35, col. 1559-1560.

¹⁴⁸ Lavery, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

Cromarty Firth, noted earlier as Fisher's preference, came into the spotlight during 1912. Churchill sided with Fisher, and at the same time as he told the Commons of the delays at Rosyth he announced a 'floating second-class naval base and war anchorage' would be established at Cromarty.¹⁴⁹ The matter went on to the C.I.D. and subsequently the War Staff agreed that the creation of 'a temporary secondary base' there was an important matter, 'especially before Rosyth is completed.'¹⁵⁰ In December 1912, during discussions of the 1913-14 Estimates, Churchill felt that work on Cromarty (including fortification) required 'the immediate provision of another floating dock, and also a floating factory.'¹⁵¹ The emphasis given to floating infrastructure was probably inspired in part by the work of the aforementioned Rosyth harbourmaster, Commander D.J. Munro. Munro was a great advocate of floating dry docks, and had discussed them with Jellicoe and Churchill. He had also drawn up plans for an entirely mobile naval base at Cromarty.¹⁵² Oil tankage was also authorized for construction in the area, leading Churchill to worry that they could become a target for a tip-and-run landing operation.¹⁵³

There was also the remote roadstead of Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, which had been noted by naval surveyor Graeme Spence in 1812 and was featured as a wartime anchorage in numerous Admiralty War Plans from 1907 onward.¹⁵⁴ Already a regular destination of Home Fleet cruises, Scapa found a great advocate in Commander Arthur Vyvyan, the Assistant to the Chief of War Staff. In Vyvyan's words to the Cabinet, Scapa was 'ample for all requirements' and its

¹⁴⁹ Hansard, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵⁰ Churchill memorandum, 5 October 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1652.

¹⁵¹ Churchill, 'New Programme, 1913-14', 8 December 1912, in *ibid.*, p. 1697.

¹⁵² Lavery, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197.

¹⁵³ Churchill, 'Further Notes by the First Lord of the Admiralty', 18 April 1913, p. 5, CAB 37/115/24.

¹⁵⁴ Lavery, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205. See also Chapter 3.

remoteness would make maintaining operational security much easier.¹⁵⁵ A major disadvantage, however, was the prohibitive cost of maintaining defences in the Orkneys.¹⁵⁶

Faced with these three choices, opinion amongst the responsible parties was divided. In October 1913, Admiral Callaghan admitted Scapa's advantages, declaring it 'the best natural harbour', but its remoteness meant that in the immediate future Cromarty and the Firth were preferred as fleet bases.¹⁵⁷ For its part, the Board of Admiralty 'wavered between Scapa Flow and Cromarty'.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, having considered all the various facts, the War Staff came to prefer Scapa.¹⁵⁹ Having seen statements to the same effect in a paper on providing Scapa with temporary defences in wartime, Churchill implored Battenberg to have the War Staff recast their argument 'without reflecting upon the Admiralty policy in regard to Cromarty.'¹⁶⁰

The debate over the basing of the fleet would continue throughout the war, and Scapa Flow's ultimate wartime role as the Grand Fleet's primary base was nowhere as clear-cut as Jellicoe would later claim.¹⁶¹ Despite this absence of certitude, the northward reorientation of the fleets still had effects on matters besides the purely strategic. In October 1912 Commodore (T) Lambert received a complaint from the owner of the island of Hoy regarding 'the injurious effects on the sporting rights' caused by regular visits by men of the Home Fleet, leading Admiral Callaghan to severely restrict the activities of libertymen visiting Hoy.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Commander Arthur Vyvyan, 'War anchorages in the North Sea', 1913, CAB 45/266. Quoted in Lavery, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ Even a 'modest' scheme of defensive emplacements at Scapa would cost £379,000 up front and £55,000 annually for running costs. Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 425-426.

¹⁵⁷ Callaghan, 'Review of the W. P. After Manoeuvres, 1913.', 2 October 1913, enclosure in Callaghan to Beatty, 2 October 1913, No. H.F. 7.S., BTY/2/4/5, Beatty MSS. Reproduced in Ranft (ed.), *The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty*, vol. 1 (London: Navy Records Society, 1989), i, pp. 82-90.

¹⁵⁸ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 425.

¹⁵⁹ For a summary of their reasoning, see War Staff, 'Admiralty Memorandum on the Necessity of Defending Scapa Flow Against Attack by Torpedo Craft', 24 November 1913, ADM 116/1923.

¹⁶⁰ Churchill to Battenberg, 21 November 1913, ADM 116/1923.

¹⁶¹ Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁶² Admiralty, 'Landing of Officers and Men in Hoy Island, Orkneys.', 12 November 1912, X.29/1913, ADM 1/8326.

Another Cruiser Revolution

In 1912 Churchill instructed the Admiralty to simplify the designation system for cruisers, and the result was the consolidation of the myriad types under three headings: battlecruiser, cruiser, and light cruiser.¹⁶³ This sweeping redesignation did not alter the Navy's lack of a cruiser capable of equalling the speed of the latest destroyers. This requirement resulted in a choice between two designs, a 'Super-Active'¹⁶⁴ carrying a belt of side armour, and a 'Super-Swift'.¹⁶⁵ Fisher inevitably favoured the Super-Swift because the Super-Active lacked speed and thus 'cannot possibly escape from an Armoured Cruiser ... Armour is vision. D—d rot to put armour into small vessels! Sheer waste of speed!'¹⁶⁶ The Admiralty, however, tended towards the Super-Active, and this design, which had originated as a 'New Fearless',¹⁶⁷ was chosen. After a hectic design process, the eight ships of the *Arethusa* class emerged.¹⁶⁸ They were the first of a series of light cruiser classes optimized for North Sea fleet operations that can be collectively termed 'North Sea Scouts'.¹⁶⁹

The 'North Sea Scouts' were intended 'to protect the Battle Fleet from torpedo attack, to screen it and within certain limits to scout for it', or so Churchill later claimed.¹⁷⁰ In fact, there was a difference of opinion over exactly which of those duties would be most prominent. Churchill favoured their use in scouting, writing in April 1913 Churchill that 'tactical

¹⁶³ The term battlecruiser is so well known that it has obscured the fact the *Invincibles*, *Indefatigables*, and *Lions* had all been designated as 'armoured cruisers'. 'Cruiser' included the various first-class armoured and protected cruisers. 'Light Cruiser' encompassed everything else, from the old third-class unarmoured cruisers which had escaped the Fisher axe to the *Sentinels* to the *Towns*.

¹⁶⁴ *Active* and her sisters *Amphion* and *Fearless* were the last *Boadicea*-derived 'scout cruisers' ordered by the Admiralty. Friedman, *British Destroyers*, p. 113; Gray (ed.), *Conway's 1906-1921*, p. 53.

¹⁶⁵ For details of both these proposals, see Churchill to Fisher, 12 January 1912, in Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 108.

¹⁶⁶ Fisher, 'Comments by Lord Fisher on paper prepared by Admiral Jellicoe on "Reasons for Preferring Seven or, if possible, Eight Super-Actives."', n.d. [1912], f. 2-8, CHAR 13/7, Chartwell MSS.

¹⁶⁷ Friedman, *British Cruisers: Two World Wars*, p. 38.

¹⁶⁸ The responsible Constructors were so pressed for time they were unable to do proper hull form testing, and the *Arethusas* paid the price in a loss of several knots from their top speed. D.K. Brown, 'The Design of H.M.S. *Arethusa* 1912', *Warship International* 1/1983, pp. 35-42.

¹⁶⁹ The larger, slower *Towns* can be categorized as 'Trade Protection Cruisers'.

¹⁷⁰ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

combinations of battle cruisers and light cruisers require special study and practice.’¹⁷¹ The battlecruisers were ideal for reinforcing the fleet’s scouting cruisers operating ahead of the main body in search of the enemy fleet:

‘It is suggested that the light cruiser squadrons (‘Arethusas’) should work with the battle cruiser squadron, and that in observation or scouting the battle cruiser should be in the front line with the light cruisers of his or perhaps 5 or 6 miles in rear or it.’¹⁷²

The responsible officers afloat had other opinions. Admiral Callaghan and the commander of the 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron, Rear-Admiral David Beatty, though not denying the importance of scouting, felt that the light cruisers would be ‘the *only* proper means of defence against torpedo craft in a Fleet action’.¹⁷³

This also touched on the matter of how to employ the battlecruisers. A month after taking command of the First Battle Cruiser Squadron in March 1913, Beatty and his War Staff Officer Commander Reginald Plunkett produced ‘Functions of a Battle-Cruiser Squadron’.¹⁷⁴ In their view the duties of the battlecruisers were:

- A) Supporting fast light cruiser sweeps of the enemy coast so that the enemy would need battleships to drive them off.
- B) Supporting an armoured cruiser blockade patrol.
- C) Supporting armoured cruiser squadrons during a cruise by the fleet.
- D) Supporting for cruisers shadowing an enemy fleet.
- E) Acting as a fast division in a fleet action.

¹⁷¹ Churchill to Jackson, 3 April 1913, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, pp. 1721-1722.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Beatty to Callaghan, 4 June 1913, DRAX 4/1, Drax MSS.

¹⁷⁴ Beatty, ‘Functions of a Battle-Cruiser Squadron’, 5 April 1913, in Ranft (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 59-64. The authorship of this document is covered in Stephen Roskill, *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty: The Last Naval Hero* (London: Collins, 1980), p. 381n34.

To carry out these duties, Beatty and Plunkett argued that their force must be numerically superior to the enemy's battlecruiser force.¹⁷⁵ That September Beatty reiterated this point, as well as accepting 'that one of the principal functions of the Battle Cruiser Squadron is to provide supports for the Cruiser Squadrons.'¹⁷⁶ Beatty went so far as to declare that the battlecruisers 'should be the keystone of the Cruiser Dispositions'.

In his April 1913 letter to Chief of the War Staff Jackson, Churchill had suggested that *Arethusas* and battlecruisers could operate together in mixed groups of '1 battle cruiser to every 4 light cruisers.' Such a force, with the battlecruiser at the centre, could 'watch with ease in clear weather a front of 90 miles... 30 to 40 miles even in misty weather.'¹⁷⁷ Churchill maintained this notion, which seems as much like a cavalry deployment as a cruiser formation; in mid-1914 he noted that Beatty, in a submission on battlecruisers, had not included 'what is to my mind the most formidable and disconcerting of all' battlecruiser functions: 'rupturing an enemy's cruiser line and attacking his cruisers of all kinds wherever found.'¹⁷⁸

By this time Churchill had gone a step beyond what he had described in 1913. Then he had proposed merely that the battlecruiser and light cruiser squadrons cooperate and train together. Now he had decided that the entire structure of the First Fleet's cruiser force would be altered. Instead of distinct battlecruiser and light cruiser squadrons, there would be six-ship mixed squadrons comprising two battlecruisers and four 'North Sea Scouts'.¹⁷⁹ In this proposal Churchill may have been prompted by the C.-in-C. Home Fleets. A draft précis of a question to be discussed at a planned conference at Spithead in July 1914 mentions Callaghan

¹⁷⁵ It seemed to the battlecruiser officers 'imperative that in circumstances in which our prospective enemy can produce three BCs we should have at *least* four & when four at least five in the supporting force.' Beatty, 'Functions of a Battle-Cruiser Squadron', *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Beatty to Callaghan, 8 September 1913, No. 79, ADM 1/8372/76.

¹⁷⁷ Churchill to Jackson, 3 April 1913, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1721.

¹⁷⁸ Churchill to Beatty, 15 April 1914, in *ibid.*, p. 1974.

¹⁷⁹ See Admiralty, 'Battle and Cruiser Squadrons – Programme', 8 July 1914, ADM 1/8383/179.

recommending 'the association of light cruisers with the battle cruisers', although whether the C.-in-C. proposed breaking up the Battle Cruiser Squadrons is unknown.¹⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, the question was submitted by Admiral Beatty, who had a proprietary interest in the matter.¹⁸¹ There is no mention in any of these papers of the employment of mixed battlecruiser-light cruiser forces outside the Home Fleet.

The 1913 Manoeuvres

The 1913 Manoeuvres were along the same general lines as the previous year's, and deliberately so. Chief of Staff Sir Henry Jackson hoped they would 'possibly afford either a valuable confirmation of the results obtained by the Red Fleet last Summer, or show the apparently successful raid on the East Coast was illusory'.¹⁸² The use of battleships as *ersatz* troopships in the 1912 Manoeuvres had been a point of controversy, so this time Jackson hoped that chartered merchantmen carrying Royal Marines would provide superior verisimilitude.¹⁸³ Subsequently the Admiralty chartered four suitable vessels as transports, supplemented by the repair ships *Cyclops* and *Assistance*.¹⁸⁴

The Red Fleet was once again the attacking force, and represented a German-Austrian combination, a curious feature of which being a successful sortie by a strong detachment of the Austro-Hungarian Navy to seize a coaling anchorage on the western Irish coast.¹⁸⁵ Red was given two objectives, both of which were similar to those from 1912. The first objective was to cover the transports carrying raiding forces, and the second was the interruption of Atlantic trade

¹⁸⁰ Admiralty, Draft of questions B.-1. and B.-2., 6 July 1914, ADM 1/8380/150.

¹⁸¹ Admiralty, 'Agenda for War Conference.', 17 July 1914, ADM 1/8380/150.

¹⁸² Jackson minute, 12 February 1913, on Admiralty War Staff (O.D.), 'Manoeuvres for 1913.', 29 January 1913, O.D. 16/1913, ADM 116/1214.

¹⁸³ Ibid. Though the Director of the Naval Mobilisation Division, Rear-Admiral Alexander Duff, expressed concern about the manning requirements for activating the Second and Third Fleets, he anticipated no difficulty in obtaining enough Marines. Duff minute, 11 February 1913, on *ibid*.

¹⁸⁴ Admiralty, 'Naval Manœuvres, 1913. General Scheme.', July 1913, p. 2, ADM 116/1214.

¹⁸⁵ Unsigned, 'Proposed General Scheme for the 1913 Manœuvres.', n.d., in *ibid*.

‘by operating on the routes in sufficient strength to ensure that only Battleships can successfully engage him and drive him off.’¹⁸⁶ The principal Atlantic raiders would be the ‘Austrian’ force in Hibernian waters. Red’s Commander-in-Chief was Vice-Admiral Jellicoe, now the Second Sea Lord. Not including the six transports, the total Red Fleet was:

Red Fleet
Thunderer (flagship)
 2nd, 4th, 6th Battle Squadrons
Indomitable, Invincible
 1st Cruiser Squadron
Cornwall, Cumberland, Warrior
 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron
 2nd, 3rd, 6th Destroyer Flotillas
 6th and 8th Submarine Flotillas
 Transports

The defending Blue Fleet was left in the charge of Admiral Callaghan. Callaghan maintained command of Blue’s main fleet, leaving the patrol flotillas in the charge of the Admiral of Patrols, John de Robeck.¹⁸⁷ Callaghan and de Robeck’s forces included the following:

Blue Fleet
Neptune (flagship)
 1st, 3rd, 5th Battle Squadrons
Lion, Princess Royal, Indefatigable
 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 10th Cruiser Squadrons
 1st, 3rd Light Cruiser Squadrons
 1st, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, 9th Destroyer Flotillas
 3rd, 4th, 7th Submarine Flotillas
 Minelayers

‘War’ was declared in the afternoon of July 23rd. Callaghan’s forces were, at the outbreak, based around eastern Scotland and Scapa Flow, with de Robeck’s forces farther south backed by several cruiser squadrons in the Humber. Jellicoe’s main force was at the Nore, minus the 4th Battle Squadron, which represented the Austrian force in the Atlantic. Jellicoe’s plan was, initially, to bring his fleet as close to Blue’s territory as possible before hostilities commenced,

¹⁸⁶ Admiralty, ‘Naval Manœuvres, 1913. General Scheme’, July 1913, p. 2, *ibid*.

¹⁸⁷ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 284.

then raid the Humber in force while a detachment simultaneously attacked Cromer. As the Red main fleet approached the Humber *Cyclops* and *Assistance* attempted a landing at Haisborough and drove off a Blue destroyer stationed nearby.¹⁸⁸

Meanwhile Jellicoe's force had arrived off the Humber, and the defending submarines were declared—not without controversy¹⁸⁹—to have been all knocked out of action. Red landed Marines ashore at Immingham before Callaghan's fleet could intervene, though a Blue cruiser-destroyer force managed to engage Red's battlecruisers sporadically in fog off Flamborough. His landing successful, Jellicoe withdrew from the Humber and escaped, while Callaghan detached a strong naval force to retake Grimsby from Red, while otherwise remaining on patrol off the Yorkshire coast.¹⁹⁰

After refuelling, Jellicoe on the 25th planned to land troops at Blyth and Sunderland, again covered by his fleet, with the *Cyclops* and *Assistance* carrying out a separate raid south of the Humber at Mablethorpe. Callaghan, meanwhile, had re-established his patrols and was cruising in the latitude of the Farne Islands while his Third Battle Squadron was off Flamborough Head.

During the evening of the 25th Jellicoe's plans almost came to grief when his transports made contact with Blue's Second Cruiser Squadron, although Red's escorting cruisers were able to drive away Blue before the transports were discovered. Blue submarines attacked both landings but only the Blyth landing was disrupted. Callaghan, meanwhile, gathered his ships and set off to attack the Red forces. This time Jellicoe did not manage to get away unscathed as

¹⁸⁸ The Red transports were assumed to all carry a destroyer-strength gun armament. Of interest is the fact that the Sixth Flotilla had been meant to escort these transports but had been delayed in sailing by 'the non-delivery of a P.O. telegram' at Margate.

¹⁸⁹ Keyes to de Robeck, 10 August 1913, No. A. 0129/6., f. 420-424, ADM 137/1926; de Robeck [Admiral of Patrols] to Callaghan, 20 August 1913, No. 0154, f. 425, ADM 137/1926; Sydney Hall to Fisher, n.d. [August 1913], F.P. 648, f. 105, FISR 1/12, Fisher MSS.

¹⁹⁰ May, 'Report by Umpire-in-Chief', August 1913, pp. 7-12, MAY/10, May MSS.

Callaghan's force overwhelmed the Sixth Battle Squadron which had been operating farther to sea as a diversion. Callaghan's pursuit of Jellicoe was disrupted by attacks by Red submarines.

Again Jellicoe returned to the Nore to regroup, arriving early on July 27th. From there he intended to make another raid on the Humber but subsequently the two Red transports involved were diverted to Blyth. When the transports and their escorts reached Blyth, they were brought under attack by Blue submarines and destroyers led by the cruiser *Juno*. Supported by fire from shore batteries at Tynemouth Castle, the *Juno* and three destroyers forced their way past the Red escorts 'and then had the *Transports* at their mercy.'¹⁹¹ While this was taking place, Jellicoe had once again taken his main fleet to sea to cover the remainder of the Red transports, but the Admiralty signalled for operations to cease in the evening of July 27th. Jellicoe's Flag Captain, Henry Oliver, recalled that Jellicoe's raiding had 'scared the Government and the papers made a great fuss and the Manoeuvres were suspended and Jellicoe sent for to the Admiralty, he flew there in a seaplane.'¹⁹²

Preparations for the second phase of the Manoeuvres began, with the Admiralty altering the rules 'strictly against us [Red] so that it was impossible for us to scare anyone again, or to do anything else.'¹⁹³ When war resumed on July 31st the two opposite sides comprised:

Blue Fleet	Red Fleet
<i>Neptune</i>	<i>Thunderer</i>
1 st , 3 rd , 5 th Battle Squadrons	2 nd and 6 th Battle Squadrons
Three battlecruisers	Two battlecruisers
2 nd , 3 rd , 6 th , 7 th , 10 th Cruiser Squadrons	1 st Cruiser Squadron
3 rd Light Cruiser Squadron	2 nd Light Cruiser Squadron
1 st and 4 th Destroyer Flotillas	2 nd , 3 rd , 6 th Destroyer Flotillas
Minesweepers	Six transports

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹² Oliver, 'Recollections. Volume II.', p. 88, OLV/12, Oliver MSS.

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

Callaghan had been ordered confidentially by the Admiralty to pursue a much more ‘generally offensive policy’ as compared to the previous phase:

‘You should endeavour to bring the Red Fleet to decisive action at the earliest possible moment, or, failing that, drive him into his ports, and blockade him therein, to prevent a continuance of the raids on Blue territory and the egress of Red vessels into the Atlantic.’¹⁹⁴

In addition the First Lord had written to Callaghan in a rather chiding tone on July 29th.¹⁹⁵ In it, Churchill, aware that Callaghan felt his provided resources inadequate, insisted that they were not, and in fact ‘[t]he task now entrusted to you cannot be called disproportionate to the forces at yr disposal’. Furthermore, the First Lord felt that it seemed ‘that very favourable chances are offered to a general offensive’.¹⁹⁶ What Callaghan thought of this can only be imagined.

After the Admiralty declared hostilities open on the morning of the 31st, Jellicoe gathered his fleet together near the Haaks Lightship, with the intent to take his transports to attack one of a choice of objectives that included Newcastle, Glasgow, and the Shetlands. As a cover to these operations, Jellicoe planned to carry out a night destroyer attack on the Humber while two transports attacked Winterton. He further planned to use a minefield to secure a line of retreat.

Callaghan, meanwhile, had disposed his Cruiser Squadrons along a line from Flamborough to Lister, with the First and Third Battle Squadrons plus the First Destroyer Flotilla and half the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla cruising to north about sixty miles from Peterhead. The Fifth Battle Squadron supported by the Fourth Cruiser Squadron and the remainder of the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla were to counter attack Red’s bases.

Despite heavy seas, the diversionary attack on Winterton went off successfully. Blue submarines arrived too late to disrupt operations. The night destroyer attack on the 31st resulted

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in May, ‘Naval Manœuvres, 1913. Report by Umpire-in-Chief.’, August 1913, p. 22, MAY/10, May MSS.

¹⁹⁵ Churchill to Callaghan, 29 July 1913, f. 45-46, CHAR 13/5, Chartwell MSS.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

in a running fight which saw considerable damage done to the Blue ships present. The real action, however, was happening elsewhere. Red's main fleet passed the Dogger Bank during the night and ran headlong into the Blue cruiser line just before 0400 on August 1st. At 0530 Jellicoe detached two transports plus the Sixth Battle Squadron to raid Blyth but fifty minutes later recalled them, judging the Blue forces too strong for a successful landing. Throughout the rest of the morning Jellicoe's ships fought to drive off Blue's shadowing cruisers.

Callaghan had no shortage of intelligence but was still unsure of Jellicoe's objective. At 1240 Jellicoe tried again to send his transports to attack Blyth, but they were subsequently caught by Blue's Third Cruiser Squadron and sunk along with most of their escorts. Callaghan and Jellicoe finally came to blows at 1715, the results of which were heavy losses to Jellicoe's fleet. The detached Fifth Battle Squadron had captured Yarmouth, leaving Jellicoe in a dangerous position. At this point the Manoeuvres ended.

In the reckoning afterwards Jellicoe was generally hailed as the winner, having achieved his objective of carrying out several successful raids on British territory and escaping with minimal casualties. To be sure, there were dissenters, especially regarding the first landing where the Blue submarine forces were ruled out of action. Callaghan, meanwhile, defended himself by pointing to his eventual success in forcing a fleet action during the second phase of the Manoeuvres. While his cruisers had been brushed aside, 'at an early hour on Friday the Blue Batl. Fleet were able after 12 hours chase to bring [Jellicoe] to action.' Callaghan considered this 'preferable to establishing Blue in strength between [Red] & his base & the annihilation of both Fleets left Blue with the 5th Batt. Sqⁿ intact & in command of the sea.'¹⁹⁷ By the end of August, Callaghan had compiled his thoughts into a long memorandum dealing with 'North Sea Strategy' as a whole. The principal question, as the Commander-in-Chief saw it, was whether 'the fleet [is]

¹⁹⁷ Callaghan to Battenberg, 3 August 1913, MB1/T26/234, Battenberg MSS.

to be primarily used for the defence of our coast, and stationed with this main object in view?’ Callaghan objected strenuously to this notion. ‘Such an idea,’ he warned, ‘if allowed to grow, cannot but be most prejudicial to that spirit of initiative which is so essential.’ Callaghan declared ‘the only proper defence of the country against ~~Invasion and~~ Raid is by Military forces, and to make the Navy responsible for this work is a grave strategic error, which hands the initiative wholly to the enemy.’¹⁹⁸ What were needed instead were more coastal batteries. As for cruiser patrols, Callaghan felt strongly that the Manoeuvres showed this was useless.

Jellicoe was equally sanguine about the existing coastal defence flotillas, writing that ‘I do not think these vessels will be a sufficient deterrent to an enterprising foe although they are of great value.’¹⁹⁹ The enemy cruiser-destroyer forces expected to be escorting raiding troopships could sweep aside the destroyers and harass the defending submarines, ‘especially if the moment selected for the appearance of the hostile force is propitious.’ Clearly, thought Jellicoe, ‘some other means of protection’ was needed against enemy raids.

Destroyers and the Fleet: Integration

Callaghan’s post-Manoeuvres commentary on the uselessness of chaining destroyers and cruisers to coastal defence work was a symptom of a greater doctrinal argument within the Navy on the role of the destroyer. By 1913 the arguments over whether or not destroyer flotillas would be a permanent element of the Royal Navy’s main fleet in wartime had ended. The ‘grand fleet’ school favouring such an attachment had triumphed, aided in no small part by the abandonment of both the observational blockade strategic paradigm and the poor results obtained in the 1912

¹⁹⁸ Callaghan, ‘Naval Manoeuvres, 1913. Remarks on North Sea Strategy’, 28 August 1913, enclosure in Callaghan to Admiralty, ‘Naval Manoeuvres, 1913. North Sea Strategy.’, 28 August 1913, No. 1266/H.F.7.S., ADM 116/3130. The stricken-through words are from the original.

¹⁹⁹ Jellicoe, ‘Naval Manoeuvres, 1913. Report by Vice-Admiral Sir J. R. Jellicoe, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., Commander-in-Chief, Red Fleet.’, 6 August 1913, p. 1, ADM 116/3381.

and 1913 Manoeuvres when search patrols were put into practice. In his appraisal of the 1913 Manoeuvres, Red Fleet C.-in-C. Jellicoe noted that '[t]he presence of even a few torpedo-boat destroyers ... makes it possible to drive off watching cruisers of any nature most effectively at night and gives a great sense of security.'²⁰⁰ All that remained was to actually integrate the flotillas into the battle fleet, thus converting the 'grand fleet of battle' from theory to practice.

One of the most immediate necessities for the union of flotilla and battle fleet was the need for adequate communications between the battlefleet C.-in-C. and his flotillas. Jellicoe had discovered to his frustration that the existing destroyer flotillas lacked this capability, and to bridge the gap he had been forced to attach his own signalling cruisers to the flotillas as an extemporised substitute.

'Without the flotilla cruiser the senior officer of the flotilla cannot signal with any facility or rapidity to his vessels. Their movements are therefore much hampered, they have no rallying point, navigation becomes very difficult; but perhaps the most important point of all is that communication between the flotilla and the Commander-in-Chief is very quickly lost.'²⁰¹

If this total collapse in communications was not prevented, attaching flotillas to the battle fleet would be worse than useless. Jellicoe therefore looked upon 'the immediate reintroduction of the flotilla cruiser as an entire necessity.'²⁰²

Jellicoe submitted this report on August 6th, and even before the month's end the Admiralty was hard at work on a response. Instead of reintroducing a *Boadicea* or *Sentinel*-type cruiser, the Admiralty had a less drastic step in mind. Initial efforts were led by Commodore Cecil Lambert and focused on converting one or more of the *Tribal* class ships and the *Swift* to a 'Flotilla Leader' configuration, in which guise they would embark the Captain (D) of the flotilla, a wireless installation capable of 150 miles' range, and the necessary signalmen and

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 5.

telegraphists.²⁰³ Trials of such an arrangement had already been carried out during the summer of 1913.²⁰⁴ Within a fortnight, likely due to the *Tribals*' wretched endurance, it was decided to forego such conversions and in their place an entirely new design emerged. The new 'Destroyer Flotilla Leader' was to be not larger than 1800 tons with a 33 or 34 knot top speed, a 'Light Cruiser [wireless] installation' and signalling arrangements '[i]f possible equal to the latest Light Cruisers', and superior endurance at 15 knots to the latest ordinary Royal Navy destroyers.²⁰⁵ This was the basis for the *Lightfoot* class flotilla leaders, and the urgency with which their development proceeded can be seen by the decision to order three before the official design was finalised, although this was later changed to just two with the *Swift* being converted in lieu of a third. The two new leaders, *Lightfoot* and *Marksman*, replaced three 'M' class destroyers already on order under the 1913-14 Estimates, with another two (*Kempfenfelt* and *Nimrod*) being added to the forthcoming 1914-15 Estimates.²⁰⁶

Besides the matter of improving the flotillas' signalling and wireless capabilities, there was the issue of how the flotillas would be used in a fleet-to-fleet engagement. What was ultimately decided upon by Callaghan and his staff is embodied in a memorandum he issued to the Home Fleet in March 1914.²⁰⁷ The C.-in-C. decisively cut through the issue of whether his flotillas would concentrate on attacking the enemy heavy ships with torpedoes or defending their own battle line against hostile torpedo craft: they would do both. The large size and gun battery possessed by the First Fleet's newest destroyers allowed them to operate suitably in either role,

²⁰³ Captain Cecil Lambert, 'Report on Conference on Conversion of Tribals Torpedo Boat Destroyers for Duty as Flotilla Leaders', 26 August 1913, S.18581/13, f. 1, Ships Cover 321 (*Lightfoot* Class & Flotilla Class), D.N.C. MSS.

²⁰⁴ Friedman, *British Destroyers*, p. 136; March, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-158.

²⁰⁵ d'Eyncourt, 'Destroyer Flotilla Leader', 4 September 1913, f. 2, Ships Cover 321.

²⁰⁶ Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 137; March, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-156.

²⁰⁷ Callaghan, 'Employment of Destroyers in a Fleet Action.', 18 March 1914, H.F. 0184, DRAX 1/56, Drax MSS. An undated draft copy also survives as item T94616, Backhouse MSS.

no matter how much this dual-purpose irritated some at the Admiralty.²⁰⁸ The British flotillas would immediately at the onset of an engagement close to launch their torpedoes, preferably with browning shots against the enemy battle line(s) at favourable angles of attack.²⁰⁹ Once their torpedoes were launched, the flotillas would turn their attention to disrupting their enemy counterparts. Callaghan refused to give one mission priority, noting that there would likely be occasions where both these objectives would be undertaken simultaneously. Responsibility for ordering the destroyers into action would initially rest with the fleet or squadron commander, but Callaghan cautioned that in the latter stages of an engagement the ‘decision must rest with the flotilla commanders’ owing to anticipated signalling difficulties in the chaotic atmosphere of battle. Flotilla commanders were to work out their method of attack beforehand to avoid long, easily misinterpreted signals during an action.

The Last Year of Peace

On November 4th, 1913 the old *Royal Sovereign*-class battleship *Empress of India* was sunk by gunfire from Callaghan’s Home Fleet off Portland. Despite the *Empress*’s allocation as a target for a not-inconsiderable portion of the Navy’s battle line firepower, her loss was not greeted with favour by the Admiralty. Their reaction to the sinking should be considered as significant. Third Sea Lord Rear-Admiral Moore described her loss as being ‘unfortunate, not so much by reason of any deductions that could have been formed from a survey of her condition

²⁰⁸ Callaghan to Admiralty, ‘T.B.D.s. Their function, design and practices’, 3 August 1912, No. 1695/H.F. 0184, f. 112a, Ships Cover 284 (L Class). The various responses gathered by the Admiralty from a wide number of serving officers on this submission illustrate the argument over the destroyers’ duties. Callaghan, ‘T.B.D.s. Their functions, design and practice.’, 3 August 1912, f. 112, Ships Cover 284, D.N.C. MSS.

²⁰⁹ Callaghan warned against destroyers firing at the absolute maximum range if it could be avoided, though he refused to rule such attacks out entirely, noting that ‘the employment of long-range fire by destroyers is a matter which requires close consideration; all destroyer officers should be well acquainted both with the possibilities and limitations of the torpedo.’ Callaghan, ‘Employment of Destroyers in a Fleet Action’, 18 March 1914, H.F. 0184, DRAX 1/56, Drax MSS.

[after the firings were complete]... but because of the financial loss of her sale value.’²¹⁰ Admiral Callaghan too regarded her loss as a lost opportunity, but for a different reason. The Home Fleet C.-in-C. had hoped that ‘long-range runs’ by *Neptune* and *Hercules*, a ‘local control’ run by *King George V*, and a full speed run by *Lion* could have been carried out. However, Callaghan also believed *Empress*’s loss had ‘a satisfactory feature in that officers and men are now better able to appreciate the object of the gunnery training they receive.’²¹¹

The difference in opinions regarding the results of *Empress*’s loss—the Admiralty regretting the monetary loss versus the Fleet’s unease at the loss of valuable combat practice—illustrate vividly the quandary that the Royal Navy found itself in after the 1912 *Novelle*. Furthermore, it illustrates the central debate that ran through the entire prewar period: economy set against the need for adequate preparations for a war at sea. The sale of ships after their use in experimental trials as well as fleet gunnery practice was not in itself unusual, as the ultimate fates of the ironclad *Belleisle* and the turret ship *Edinburgh* illustrate.²¹² However Admiral Moore’s statement, combined with an earlier argument used by Churchill to justify the expense of the trial to Asquith,²¹³ show that there was more to *Empress of India*’s potential sale than ordinary penny-wisdom by the Admiralty. The other *Royal Sovereigns* sold for scrappage prewar brought an average of around £38,000,²¹⁴ while the Navy Estimates in preparation for the 1914-15 financial year were initially estimated by the Admiralty Finance Committee as over

²¹⁰ Moore minute, ‘Firings Carried Out at “Empress of India”’, in D.N.O. ‘Gunnery Practice at Sea. Sinking of “HMS Empress of India” (4/11/13)’, G.01303/13, ADM 1/8346.

²¹¹ Callaghan to Admiralty, No. 1947/H.F. 0505, 8 December 1913, in D.N.O. ‘Gunnery Practice at Sea. Sinking of “HMS Empress of India” (4/11/13)’, G.01303/13, ADM 1/8346.

²¹² *Belleisle* was sold for £8,600, *Edinburgh* for somewhere around £18,000 assuming she fetched a similar price to her sister *Colossus*. Parkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 271, 292.

²¹³ Churchill to Asquith, 4 February 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 22, NHB.

²¹⁴ Exact figures are: *Royal Sovereign*: £40,000, *Ramillies*: £42,300, *Royal Oak*: £36,450, *Repulse*: £33,550. *Resolution*’s sale price is not easily available. *Revenge* remained in service until after the Armistice and her half-sister *Hood* would be scuttled as a breakwater. Parkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-363.

£50,000,000.²¹⁵ The concern over such a small amount of potential income illustrates the depths of the financial exigencies that burdened the Admiralty as 1914 began. Throughout the year the Navy's fiscal requirements were increasingly contrary to the political desires of the Cabinet, to the point that some argue the situation would be intractable without a major shift or concession by one side or the other. Implied—but always left unsaid—is a notion that could have come straight from Dangerfield's *Strange Death of Liberal England*: that only war prevented a major crisis for the country regarding expenditure on the Royal Navy.

Nicholas Lambert argues that the Navy was prepared to make that shift through the revival of Winston Churchill's earlier proposal to substitute torpedo craft for the capital ships authorized in the Estimates for the 1914-15 financial year. In fact he goes considerably further than this. His writings, in particular the final chapter of *John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, are devoted to presenting what is described as incontrovertible evidence suggesting that substitution policy had been accepted by the principal figures at the Admiralty, and was ready in all ways for adoption bar having been actually and officially put into writing when the First World War broke out.²¹⁶ This claim, as has already been mentioned, is an overstatement of the evidence. Closer examination of both Lambert's own cited evidence and other surviving material suggests that matters were far from being as clear-cut as the substitution policy narrative implies.

The Estimates Crisis

The spectre of the budget had already arisen even before the Empress of India began her final voyage. While Churchill had already warned the Cabinet that the 1914-15 Estimates would

²¹⁵ T.J. MacNamara, 'A General Comment on Naval Expenditure by the Parliamentary and Financial Secretary', January 1914, in Admiralty Finance Committee, 'Reports of the Finance Committee of the Admiralty on the Sketch Navy Estimates 1914-15, prepared in October-December, 1913, and the First Annual Report on the Committee's Operations, October 1912-October 1913.', January 1914, ADM 116/3152.

²¹⁶ Nicholas Lambert, *JNFR*, pp. 299-303.

likely exceed 'perhaps to the extent of £2,000,000' the 1913-14 Estimates, the reaction to this was muted.²¹⁷ Churchill was as eager as anyone to avoid such expenditures, and hoped, as in 1912, that the Germans might come to his rescue. To that end he made a final offer for an Anglo-German naval holiday during a speech in Manchester on October 18th, perhaps hoping the German government would reject the offer and strengthen his position when discussion of the next estimates began, although the First Lord probably retained a genuine desire to reach such an accord with Germany.²¹⁸ In any case, his motivations were rendered moot; the German government never responded officially.²¹⁹

Six days after the *Empress of India* sank Churchill managed to alienate the Radicals further during a speech at Guildhall. Instead of again offering the olive branch of a building holiday or any sort of cushion to soften the blow of higher naval estimates, Churchill seemed to contradict himself (in the eyes of some) when he both talked up the British naval position but insisted that 'expenditures and exertions greater than we have ever made in times of peace' would be necessary, and that as First Lord he was duty-bound 'to present to Parliament Estimates substantially greater than the enormous sums originally voted in the present year.'²²⁰ It is tempting to agree with F.W. Wiemann that '[o]ne can hardly understand why Churchill, who in 1909 had himself been leading the fight for 'economy', could not have foreseen' the furore this statement would provoke from his economist colleagues.²²¹ It seems likely that Churchill honestly felt his case was obvious and unarguable on its merits alone, a failing of his that would recur throughout his career. He may also have felt the most important question that would be

²¹⁷ Churchill, 'Summary of Draft Navy Estimates, 1913-14.', p. 2, CAB 37/114/11; F.W. Wiemann, 'Lloyd George and the Struggle for the Navy Estimates of 1914', in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: Twelve Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), p. 75.

²¹⁸ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²²⁰ 'Guildhall Banquet. The Prime Minister on Mexico. Anglo-American Relations. Mr. Churchill's Forward Policy', *The Times*, no. 40366, 11 November 1913, p. 9.

²²¹ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

discussed by the Cabinet would be the expansion of the Royal Navy's construction programme.²²² In either case, the speech was a miscalculation; that Churchill's statement was injudicious at best was widely recognized. Margot Asquith wrote that if the Cabinet 'let Winston have too much money' the result would be a Liberal party in 'local war', both within itself and with Labour. 'If one can't be a little economical when all foreign countries are peaceful then I don't know *when* we can.'²²³

Churchill's initial memorandum to the Cabinet of December 5th asked for close to £53 million, of which £50.7 million would be contained in the regular estimates and the rest in a special Supplementary Estimate.²²⁴ The combination of this figure plus a poorly-timed dinner with members of the shadow cabinet set a faction of the Cabinet to work on either reducing the Naval Estimates or ousting the First Lord.²²⁵ Amongst their ranks was, unsurprisingly, the vengeful McKenna. Others included Charles Hobhouse, Walter Runciman, Pease, and Lord Samuel.²²⁶ Lloyd George, while not interested in removing his friend from power, nevertheless wanted the Estimates cut, as he felt they would be 'distinctly provocative' since Anglo-German relations seemed to be thawing.²²⁷ At a Cabinet meeting on December 15th, Churchill suggested that £700,000 in reductions could be found, and a tentative agreement was reached for an Estimate totalling £49.7 million.²²⁸

²²² Christopher Bell, 'Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution Reconsidered: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911-1914', *War in History* 18, no. 3 (July 2011), p. 342.

²²³ Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 2, p. 655n.

²²⁴ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²²⁷ Admiralty, 'Navy Estimates, 1914-15', 24 December 1913, CAB 37/117/97; Wiemann, *loc. cit.*

²²⁸ Wiemann, *loc cit.*

The issue did not end there. The anti-Churchill group pressed for more cuts, including the elimination of two battleships.²²⁹ Even Churchill's aunt, Lady Cornelia Wimborne, wrote to him, scolding that he was 'breaking with the traditions of Liberalism in your Naval expenditure; you are in danger of becoming purely a 'Navy Man' and losing sight of the far greater job of a great leader of the Liberal party. Peace, retrenchment and reform must ever be its policy and you are being carried away by the attraction of perfecting your machine for war expenditure.'²³⁰ The holidays did little to slow the gathering storm. On Boxing Day Churchill warned the First Sea Lord of a new memorandum issued a few days previously by Lloyd George which 'must be regarded as a most serious challenge to the whole of our policy', and asked the Sea Lords to study it and produce a 'restatement of the case for the programmes and standards the Admiralty are pursuing.'²³¹

Then an interview with Lloyd George appeared on New Year's Day in the *Daily Chronicle*. Beyond calling for 'a bold and independent step towards disarmament',²³² the Chancellor blamed the increase in military expenditure for increased taxation, claiming that if said expenditure had remained at the level of 1887, a savings of 4s on the pound on local rates would have occurred. Furthermore, Lloyd George reminded readers that Lord Randolph Churchill had considered the 1887 estimates excessive.²³³ Considering Churchill's complicated relationship to his father and his political activities, this can only be considered a direct personal attack. Though some of Churchill's opponents—including Samuel—found the interview too far a

²²⁹ It is significant that the First Lord took the time to reassure the Canadian Prime Minister that despite this 'general movement' for economy, the Admiralty's intentions remained firm and 'unchanged from that described in the Secret & publishable memoranda.' Churchill to Borden, 19 December 1913, in Nicholas Tracy (ed.), *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire, 1900-1940* (London: Navy Records Society, 1997), p. 223.

²³⁰ Lady Wimborne to Churchill, 18 December 1913, quoted in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 663-664.

²³¹ Churchill to Battenberg, 26 December 1913. Quoted in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 664-665.

²³² Wiemann, *op cit*, p. 80.

²³³ Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 665-666.

step, the possibility that a backbench revolt could occur must have worried Asquith.²³⁴ Sir Francis Hopwood believed that ‘the Cabinet is sick of Churchill’s perpetually undermining & exploiting its policy and are picking a quarrel with him’, although ‘their battleground is very ill chosen as in consequence of their indolence he has probably got chapter and verse for every item of the Naval Programme.’²³⁵ For his part, Churchill observed ‘a dignified and moody silence.’²³⁶ Matters could not have been improved when the Admiralty Finance Committee returned a Sketch Estimate totalling £51,986,948 gross. Of this, the Estimate proper was £49,966,700; the remaining £2,020,248 was ‘Appropriations in Aid’.²³⁷

The problem, wrote Financial Secretary MacNamara, was that ‘the great bulk of the expenditure necessary in 1914-15 is the result of commitments already approved by Parliament.’ Even a total elimination of new construction would only save £2,030,000 from the proposed sum. ‘This obvious fact is sometimes overlooked when critics comment on the size of Navy Estimates.’ MacNamara added acidly.²³⁸ When the suggestion of cutting two battleships was proposed in Cabinet, Churchill retorted that it would jeopardize the agreed-upon standard of naval superiority since even four battleships would ‘only just [maintain] the 60 per cent standard’.²³⁹ On January 19th Churchill wrote a minute to the Third Sea Lord asking for sketch estimates for 1915-16 and 1916-17 assuming an identical construction programme each year. ‘The object of these figures’, the First Lord explained, ‘is to show how heavily we are burdened by arrears and accelerations in

²³⁴ Churchill wrote Sir Francis Hopwood that the crisis ‘may prove fatal to the Government unless it should turn out that the Ch of Ex is only trying it on’. Hopwood to Stamfordham, 11 January 1914. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 668.

²³⁵ Hopwood to Stamfordham, 5 January 1914, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 667.

²³⁶ Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 6 January 1914, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 666.

²³⁷ MacNamara, ‘A General Comment on Naval Expenditure by the Parliamentary and Financial Secretary’, January 1914, in Admiralty Finance Committee, ‘Reports of the Finance Committee of the Admiralty on the Sketch Navy Estimates 1914-15, prepared in October-December, 1913, and the First Annual Report on the Committee’s Operations, October 1912-October 1913.’, January 1914, p. ii, ADM 116/3152.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

²³⁹ Churchill, ‘Naval Estimates: Notes on various suggestions for reduction.’, 13 December 1913, CAB 37/117/93.

these years, and how greatly the Estimates would be relieved if these exceptional charges were removed.²⁴⁰

Lloyd George, meanwhile, informed *Manchester Guardian* editor C.P. Scott on January 18th that he, McKenna, and Samuel were agreed that Churchill should be forced out.²⁴¹ King George wrote Churchill encouragingly that same day, agreeing that ‘if the Government are to carry out the Naval policy which they have already sanctioned, this year’s programme of 4 Battleships must be adhered to.’²⁴²

Two days later Asquith and Grey—the latter one of Churchill’s supporters within the Cabinet—were of the opinion that rather than risk ‘smash-up and resignation’ it might be better to ‘dissolve parliament and run the risk of the election’.²⁴³ The next day one more attempt was made by Asquith to settle matters between Lloyd George and Churchill. Faced with the Prime Minister’s backing of the First Lord, the Chancellor threatened resignation. Asquith replied that this would lead to a general election. The Chancellor, who had not started the row and may, as Hopwood suspected, have been ‘trying it on’ after all,²⁴⁴ seems to have blinked, and the next day suggested that he would concur with all four planned dreadnoughts in 1914-15 as well as other ‘present obligations’ provided that the 1915-16 Estimates would contain strenuous reductions.²⁴⁵

Almost immediately the Financial Secretary responded unfavourably. ‘I do not at all agree with the policy of 53 or 54 millions for 1914-15 in order that 1915-16 may be relieved.’ MacNamara raised the spectre of a Parliamentary Enquiry by the ‘Little Navy people’, although

²⁴⁰ Churchill to Moore, 19 January 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 13, NHB.

²⁴¹ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Diary entry, 18 January 1914, in Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 75.

²⁴² King George V to Churchill, 18 January 1914. Quoted in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 670.

²⁴³ J.A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith*, ii (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1932), p. 76.

²⁴⁴ Hopwood to Stamfordham, 11 January 1914. Quoted in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 668.

²⁴⁵ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

he admitted ‘whatever provision is made, you must contemplate a demand for Enquiry.’ He added that ‘we want 51½ millions’ for the 1914-15 Estimates, which ‘might get us through without Supplementary’. For the next two years he speculated either £50 million or £51 million.²⁴⁶ This letter was presumably preceded by other similar discussions, because on January 26th the First Lord wrote Lloyd George that he could not hold up his end of the arrangement. Churchill insisted that

‘There is no act of Admiralty administration for which I am responsible wh cannot be vindicated to the House of Commons. I cannot buy a year of office by a bargain under duress about the estimates of 1915-16. No forecasts beyond the year have ever been made by my predecessors. I have no power—even if I were willing—to bind the Board of Admiralty of 1915 to any exact decision.’²⁴⁷

The Chancellor reacted aggressively—at first. He wrote back warning Churchill that

‘This intimation completely alters the situation. I now fully appreciate your idea of a bargain: it is an argument which binds the Treasury not even to attempt any further economies in the interest of the taxpayer, whilst it does not in the least impose any obligation on the Admiralty no to incur fresh liabilities.’²⁴⁸

Subsequently, McKenna received an invitation to a council of war from Lloyd George that Winston had ‘[put] to an end all my efforts for peace.’²⁴⁹ However at Cabinet on January 28th Lloyd George seems to have backed down once more, leaving Churchill to carry the day.²⁵⁰ A strongly worded letter signed by five of the anti-Churchill hardliners reached Asquith soon afterwards,²⁵¹ but with their ranks thinned by defectors such as Sir John Simon,²⁵² the Admiralty’s success was no longer in serious doubt. Even so, the First Lord would offer cuts totalling £920,000 in a memorandum on February 6th.²⁵³

²⁴⁶ MacNamara to Churchill, 27 January 1914, ADM 116/3152.

²⁴⁷ Draft of Churchill to Lloyd George, 26 January 1914. Quoted in Randolph Churchill, *YS*, p. 671.

²⁴⁸ Lloyd George to Churchill, 27 January 1914. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 672.

²⁴⁹ Lloyd George to McKenna, 27 January 1914, f. 24, MCKN 4/4, McKenna MSS.

²⁵⁰ Wiemann, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²⁵¹ Randolph Churchill, *YS*, pp. 676-677.

²⁵² See Sir John Simon to Asquith, n.d. [January 1914]. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 677.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

The thinness of the Admiralty's financial margin can be seen in one of the casualties of Churchill's efforts at economies, the nascent Royal Naval Air Service. During the height of the crisis, Battenberg offered this advice: 'I prefer a reduction in "Air" to that in Cruisers. The latter are the weapon, the actual means to an end; the Hydroplane or Airship may turn out to be good aids of the former, but can never be a substitute.'²⁵⁴ Aircraft, an as-yet unproven weapon—or at the very least an underproven one—were considered a lower priority than building new light cruisers. It was unsurprising, then, that the proposed rigid airships for that year came under scrutiny, resulting in a cut in procurement from four to two.²⁵⁵ In addition a Forlanini-type semi-rigid airship would be deferred until 1915-1916.²⁵⁶ Despite these setbacks, Captain Murray Sueter, the head of the R.N.A.S., still hoped to that in the 1916-17 Estimates £60,000 (reduced from £100,000) could be spent on the construction of a 'special high speed aeroplane ship'.²⁵⁷ The ultimate form this ship would have taken is unknown, but given that designs for a full-decked aircraft carrier had already been submitted to the Admiralty by one firm,²⁵⁸ the possibilities are intriguing, to say the least.

The Manpower Crisis

Even as the Cabinet chose sides over the 1914-15 Estimates, Churchill and the Admiralty were already coming to grips with a related issue that was also reaching a moment of acute crisis: the Navy's manpower situation. Nicholas Lambert commented correctly that the Royal Navy saw

²⁵⁴ Battenberg to Churchill, 16 January 1914, MB1/T29/271, Battenberg MSS.

²⁵⁵ Recent German successes with Zeppelins had encouraged the Admiralty, led by the air-minded Churchill, to reconsider their abandonment of rigid airship development after the ill-fated *Mayfly* project.

²⁵⁶ Typescript memorandum, n.d., 'Estimates 1914-15', AIR 1/2439, , AIR 1/652/17/122/480, Air Ministry MSS, TNA.

²⁵⁷ 'Air Service Estimates', 23 January 1914, AIR 1/2440.

²⁵⁸ William Beardmore & Co., Ltd. To Admiralty, n.d. [December 1912], "Outline Specification for a Proposed Parent Ship for Naval Aeroplanes", AIR 1/2454. See also D.K. Brown, *Grand Fleet*, pp. 75-76; R.D. Layman, *To Ascend from a Floating Base: Shipboard Aeronautics and Aviation, 1783-1914* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1979), pp. 186-187. An earlier proposal for a similar ship came from Admiral Mark Kerr. See Admiral Mark Kerr, *The Navy in My Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1933), p. 222.

this issue ‘as its worst long-term problem.’²⁵⁹ The issue was not confined to enlisted personnel; the officer corps suffered too,²⁶⁰ and by the time the 1914-15 Estimates were being drawn up the issue was urgent. On January 21st the Mobilisation Department of the War Staff submitted a memorandum to the Board which showed that even with some generous omissions and changes the Navy would fall short of its estimated personnel requirements substantially from October 1915 through to April 1917.²⁶¹

There was also a severe shortage of young officers, especially Lieutenants. In March Churchill proposed some drastic expedients to Second Sea Lord Jellicoe. These included the immediate promotion of one hundred Sub-Lieutenants (to be replaced by an equal number of promoted Midshipmen), abolition of cadet training ships *Cornwall* and *Cumberland* in favour of ‘appoint[ing] the two next batches of Midshipmen direct from Dartmouth’, and cutting Osborne classes from six to five ‘and fill up by new entries’.²⁶² Retaining existing trained ratings was also crucial owing to the ever-increasing complexities of warships. Soon after this proposal Churchill raised the issue of ‘how to encourage men to serve after twelve years,’ and requested proposals on the principle ‘that after completing his first engagement the sailor who had not become a petty officer should nevertheless receive distinctive treatment’.²⁶³ In the same minute Churchill encouraged a reconsideration of marriage allowances and widow’s pensions.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 111.

²⁶⁰ Davison, *Challenges of Command*, pp. 98-114.

²⁶¹ Duff memorandum, 21 January 1914, MB1/T29/275, Battenberg MSS.

²⁶² Churchill to Jellicoe, 10 March 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, pp. 35-36.

²⁶³ Specifically, they should be given higher pay and status.

²⁶⁴ Churchill to Jellicoe, 26 March 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Methods to increase enlistment, such reducing the physical standard for Boys and Stokers, were also approved.²⁶⁵

Despite these measures, as late as the end of May 1914 the First Lord was still very concerned about the shortages of both junior officers and men ‘consistently complained of’.²⁶⁶

Borkum Once More

In January 1913, Rear-Admiral Lewis Bayly had been given the task of examining the possibilities of seizing Borkum as an advanced base, in other words a reversion to the old observational blockade strategy, albeit with the odd new wrinkle of the operation being suggested as an early-warning system against a German attempt at landing troops on British shores.²⁶⁷ This proposal was not well received, to say the least.²⁶⁸ In spite of this, June 1914 saw Churchill mount a final effort to develop a Borkum alternative to the distant blockade paradigm. On June 11th, the First Lord instructed Battenberg to request that both Callaghan and Jellicoe prepare plans ‘subsidiary & incidental to the main plans’ for a series of opening gambits against Germany. These were:

Plan M: ‘A general drive at the outset of the war’ perhaps on the third day following the assumption of war stations.

Plan L: ‘A close blockade of the Heligoland Bight by strongly supported flotillas maintained for 4 or 5 days at the least – closing the Elbe absolutely during that period.’

²⁶⁵ Admiralty, ‘Proposed Reduction in Standard for Boys and Stokers.’, 9 April 1914, ADM 1/8374/97. The immediate stimulus of this proposal was a report by the Accountant General that the Navy was short of its voted strength by 399 men.

²⁶⁶ Churchill to Battenberg, 30 May 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 69.

²⁶⁷ Admiralty Historical Section, ‘Seizure of Advanced Base’, H.S. 452, ADM 137/452. Even Bayly was skeptical of the suggestion of using an advanced base to warn of departing raids. Perhaps consciously summing up the ‘navalist’ position on the entire question of foreign landing attempts, he wondered ‘why are we to fear a German raid or invasion, if we, with a superior Navy, are afraid to do the same?’ Bayly, ‘Remarks by Rear-Admiral Bayly’, 17 March 1913, f. 15, *ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Grimes, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-185; Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 270. See also Ballard to Jackson, 10 July 1913, f. 121-127, ADM 137/452.

This plan had two sub-variants: **Plan L.a** assumed the Navy would not have an ‘oversea base’ (Borkum) to work from, while **L.b** assumed possession of such a base.

Plan T: ‘The establishment of a cruiser & flotilla base in the neighbourhood of Stavanger to control the debouches of the Skaw.’²⁶⁹

Callaghan’s reaction to this request can be guessed from his reply. Although Grimes describes the C.-in-C.’s response as ‘neither complementary nor supportive’,²⁷⁰ it was rather more than that: Callaghan made no mention of the plans at all, confining his comments to the main War Plan.²⁷¹ Jellicoe was equally nonplussed by the proposals. Regarding a close blockade of Heligoland he wrote that ‘we should be as likely to achieve the safety of the Expeditionary Force on the one hand, and the prevention of reinforcements being sent on the other hand...with much less loss to ourselves, if we keep our forces nearer home instead of sending them off the German coast.’ He continued by flatly declaring that he could ‘see no advantage beyond that of an *apparent* offensive in maintaining the T.B.D.’s in the Heligoland Bight.’ He was equally scathing about an assault on Borkum or Sylt, not only considering them not worth the losses in ships or men, but also doubting that the Army would provide a force to carry out the landings. If landing operations had to be undertaken against the German coast, ‘I think it would be far better to strike at one of the enemy’s naval bases direct.’²⁷² Jellicoe obviously felt that the risks were such that an attack on a German base was no less dangerous than against one of the outlying islands.

This strong reaction by the two principle fleet commanders abruptly ended the discussion, and the Royal Navy would go to war committed to a policy of distant blockade.

²⁶⁹ Churchill to Battenberg, 11 June 1914, ADM 116/3096.

²⁷⁰ Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

²⁷¹ Callaghan, ‘Remarks of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleets, on the Draft of the proposed new War Plans and Orders, forwarded to him by the direction of the Board under cover of the Chief of War Staff’s Reference Sheet dated 15th June 1914.’, 23 June 1914, ADM 116/3096.

²⁷² Jellicoe to Sturdee, 27 July 1914, in Temple Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, i, pp. 40-41.

New Year, New Designs, New Policy?

For a long time, the following was accepted concerning the battleships cancelled at the outbreak of war: The 1914-15 Estimates included funds to build four new dreadnoughts, of which two were to be built in the Dockyards and two by private contract. Three would be repeats of the previous year's *Revenge* class and the fourth a *Queen Elizabeth*, their respective names being *Renown*, *Repulse*, *Resistance*, and *Agincourt*. However this can be challenged thanks to the availability of D.N.C. Sir Eustace Tennyson d'Eyncourt's design notebook²⁷³ which resurfaced in time for D.K. Brown and Keith McBride to make use of it.²⁷⁴ Other material from d'Eyncourt's personal papers given to the National Maritime Museum put flesh on the bones of the bare design outlines given in the notebook, especially early wartime correspondence between d'Eyncourt and the former Third Sea Lord, Sir Archibald Gordon Moore.²⁷⁵

Furthermore, these and other documents show that the dreadnoughts were not the only ships for which radically different proposals were being considered. An entire crop of new designs died either at the outbreak of war or soon thereafter as the existing classes under construction were chosen for the emergency programmes implemented in the fall of 1914. Besides the modified *Royal Sovereign* and *Queen Elizabeth* battleships, there were several 'E' class submarines incorporating new engine types,²⁷⁶ the controversial 1914-15 destroyer design, and an extraordinary 'Torpedo Cruiser'.

The initial *Royal Sovereign* design had been known as T₁, and throughout 1913 several studies were made to improve upon it. February 1913 saw T₂ and T₃, which would have

²⁷³ d'Eyncourt, 'Design Particulars', MS 93/011, Uncategorised MSS, NMM. Hereafter 'd'Eyncourt Notebook'.

²⁷⁴ D.K. Brown, *Grand Fleet*, pp. 53-54; Keith McBride, 'On the Brink of Armageddon: Capital ship development on the eve of the First World War', in John Roberts (ed.), *Warship 1995* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1995), pp. 61-63. Stampings inside the Notebook suggest that it remained at the Public Record Office for a time before 1993, when it was given to the National Maritime Museum.

²⁷⁵ The title of Controller had been abolished in 1912.

²⁷⁶ Much like the 'Battle of the Boilers' in the 1890s.

increased the main armament to ten guns, T₂ using a combined twin and triple turret arrangement like that of the U. S. Navy's *Nevadas* and T₃ reverting to the *Iron Duke* layout of five twins. In both cases this increase added ten feet to the hull and brought displacement past 27,000 tons.²⁷⁷ T₄, essentially T₁ with a single triple turret on 'Y' barbette, thus giving a nine-gun broadside, followed on June 9th.²⁷⁸ None was considered acceptable alternatives to T₁. Another proposal, V₁, is known to exist from the records of the Admiralty Experiment Works, Haslar, where it was tested as model V_F in November 1913. Apart from a draught of 28 feet, 6 inches and a 'naked displ[acement]' of 25,100 tons (suggesting it was another *Royal Sovereign* variant), nothing further is known about V₁.²⁷⁹ Much better attested is W₁, the first design completed specifically for the 1914-15 dreadnoughts.²⁸⁰

W₁'s major difference from the original *Royal Sovereign* is the concentration of the anti-torpedo boat armament amidships in a two-deck battery, apart from two pairs of guns directly under 'A' and 'X' turrets. This design, submitted in February 1914, was dropped according to the design notebook, but it or a similar design was resurrected later in the year owing to reports from the fleet that the *Iron Dukes*' 6-inchers, which had been placed well forward, were hopelessly flooded out in a seaway.²⁸¹ The double-decker arrangement was revived towards the end of summer for the new ships, and even after the outbreak of war thought was even given to converting the five *Royal Sovereigns* already under construction to the new design.²⁸² In any case, a new variant of the basic T₁ design was submitted in May 1914 for the two contract-built battleships. This design contained only a few changes from the original, including an increase in

²⁷⁷ d'Eyncourt Notebook, pp. 5-7.

²⁷⁸ d'Eyncourt Notebook, p. 10; Unsigned, 'Single Triple Turret aft – so 9-15" guns', 5 May 1913, DEY/27, d'Eyncourt MSS.

²⁷⁹ R.E. Froude to D.N.C., 'Battleship Design V₁', f. 74, 18 November 1913, ADM 226/17.

²⁸⁰ d'Eyncourt Notebook, p. 20.

²⁸¹ Moore minute, 5 June 1914, on Callaghan to Admiralty, 'Armament for Defence Against Torpedo Craft', 2 April 1914, G.0243/1914, ADM 1/8367/27.

²⁸² Moore to d'Eyncourt, 6 December 1914, DEY/16, d'Eyncourt MSS.

wing bulkhead protection, enlargement of both the conning and torpedo control towers, and increase of the forward turrets ammunition storage from 80 to 100 shells.²⁸³ Simultaneously a new version of W₁ was submitted for the dockyard-built *Revenge* but was again rejected.²⁸⁴

The single *Queen Elizabeth* planned for 1914-15, *Agincourt*, had a similar panoply of designs considered during the early months of 1914. The first was February's U₃ (U₁ and U₂ being used for the proposed Canadian *Queen Elizabeths*²⁸⁵) which had only one funnel but was otherwise little different. U₄ and U₅ were based on U₃ but saw their armament radically redistributed: superfiring turrets were abandoned and the armoured conning tower was moved forward to a position between 'A' and 'B' turrets. In U₄ the turrets remained on the centreline, but in U₅ the forward pair would be placed *en echelon*. In all three designs the 6-inch battery would be arranged as in W₁.²⁸⁶ The purpose of such radical changes is obscure. Keith McBride supposed that U₄ and U₅ possibly 'were 'Aunt Sallies', put forward to show how much better was the design which the DNC (and/or the Third Sea Lord?) preferred,' which McBride speculated was either U₁ or U₃.²⁸⁷ D.K. Brown thought the turret rearrangement was likely meant to lower the centre of gravity, since 'if the superfiring guns could not fire over the lower turret, what was the point in raising them?'²⁸⁸ None of the U series proved acceptable and as a result, the D.N.C. went back to work. The results were two closely related designs, X₁ and X₂. X₁ was a *Queen Elizabeth* with a 13-inch belt and a sloped two-inch deck inherited from the *Royal*

²⁸³ d'Eyncourt Notebook, p. 23.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁸⁵ The major difference between the two designs was their fuel loads. U₁ carried a mixture of oil and coal, while U₂ used oil alone. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁸⁷ McBride, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

²⁸⁸ D.K. Brown, *Grand Fleet*, p. 54. The inability of British dreadnoughts to fire their entire armament directly ahead or astern was due to the siting of the turret aiming hoods at the rear of the turret, thus directly underneath the guns of a superfiring turret. This design flaw delayed the adoption of superfiring turrets until the *Neptune* and a weight-saving all-centreline turret arrangement until the *Orions*. Such concerns would also explain the *en echelon* arrangement proposed for U₅.

Sovereigns. To meet the increase in displacement (28,500 tons) the beam was increased to 94 feet. X_2 was more radical, being twenty feet longer than X_1 in order to reduce the necessary horsepower required for 25 knots and with further modifications in armour layout. X_2 also used the double-decker arrangement for the 6-inch armament. The increased beam left both designs unable to dock for maintenance anywhere besides Portsmouth or Rosyth when the latter finally completed. Given these limitations, it is unsurprising both were rejected by Moore.

One more battleship design exists, and is perhaps the most intriguing of all, with Nicholas Lambert apparently misconstruing it as a battlecruiser variant of the *Queen Elizabeth* class.²⁸⁹ Known as Design Y, it was a proposal for a 31,350 ton 30 knot battleship carrying the same armament as the *Queen Elizabeths* with an 11½-inch belt.²⁹⁰ The origins of this design are sketchy, and the following is as a result very much speculation.

It is well-known that Fisher had written on several occasions to Churchill advocating a new ‘super Lion’ design carrying ten 15 inch guns, but sacrificing armour in order to obtain both a speed of over 30 knots and a cost of £1,995,000.²⁹¹ Even after the *Queen Elizabeths* were ordered, much to Fisher’s consternation as seen in Chapter 6, the old Admiral continued to press Churchill to build his preferred design or something similar.²⁹² Finally, in May 1914, Churchill asked the Third Sea Lord:

‘The third battleship of this year’s programme to be laid down at Portsmouth is a “Queen Elizabeth.” Please report what increase of cost or diminution of armour would be necessary to raise her speed to that of the “Tiger.” I do not see much harm in coming down to 11-inch armour over a large portion of the belt, especially if the fact is concealed. But she must carry full battleship armament. I think it is essential that this ship should be as fast as anything now projected. Please make me the best proposition you can.’²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

²⁹⁰ d’Eyncourt Notebook, p. 27.

²⁹¹ Fisher to Churchill, 16 January 1912, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, pp. 426-427.

²⁹² Fisher to Churchill, 22 April 1912, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, pp. 1545-1546.

²⁹³ Churchill to Moore, 11 May 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, pp. 53-54.

This was most likely the impetus for Design Y. Unfortunately D.N.C. d'Eyncourt had been stricken by typhoid; so much of the work fell to the junior constructors, possibly with the assistance of Sir Philip Watts.²⁹⁴ Completed in time for submission on July 8th, the sketch design bears a remarkable resemblance to the later *Hood*, and may be a remote ancestor, although most trace that famous ship's origins to a wartime specification.²⁹⁵ Whatever the influence Design Y had on later designs, it was rejected due to inadequate torpedo protection.

One feature of the 1914 battleships designs is the provision of a fire control position right forward in the bow. This feature is another result of the *Empress of India* trials. Callaghan's report included the following commentary which survived into the officially issued report:

‘The probable advantages of a spotting position on the forecastle have been brought forward at various times during the year, and I consider this opinion has been borne out by these firings; the forecastle is not only less likely to be hit than the centre of the ship, but also clears [of smoke] first. The further forward the position is placed the better; it should certainly be protected to a sufficient extent to keep out fragments of shell.’²⁹⁶

Callaghan thought of the proposed bow station as a spotting position only, and it was ‘not proposed that such a position should be used for control of fire, or that it should be of a size to hold more than two persons; it is considered better that it should be regarded solely as a position for *observation of fire*.’²⁹⁷ The outbreak of war seems to have killed this idea and it was not included in any of the wartime dreadnought designs.

While the battleship proposals were the results of linear evolution, the 1914-15 Destroyer was a complete break with the previous *River*-derived designs. Nor was the new design related

²⁹⁴ Moore to d'Eyncourt, 6 December 1914, DEY/16, d'Eyncourt MSS; Churchill minute, 1 June 1914, f. 2, Ships Cover 333A (Torpedo Cruiser), D.N.C. MSS.

²⁹⁵ D.K. Brown, *Grand Fleet*, p. 98; John Roberts, *Battlecruisers*, p. 55.

²⁹⁶ Admiralty, ‘Report on Firings at H.M.S. “Empress of India” carried out by First Fleet on the 4th November 1913.’, September 1914, p. 8, ADM 1/30664.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

to either of the components of Fisher's initial 'high-low mix'. The financial situation being what it was, the unit cost was to be £80,000.²⁹⁸ To achieve this both size and speed had to be reduced—32 knots and 700 tons were specified in the D.N.C. instructions of 12 February. Gunpower was also cut back by a return to 12 pounders and reducing their number from three to two. The only armament increase was in torpedoes, possibly in deference to Admiral Callaghan's desire to include torpedo attack by his flotillas in the Home Fleet's tactical repertoire.²⁹⁹ The resulting design was not without detractors, notable of which was Captain Superintendent of Torpedo Boat Destroyers Douglas Dent, who in an annoyed minute to the Director of Naval Equipment stated

‘To call these craft Torpedo Boat Destroyers would appear to be wholly misleading, as there are no modern foreign torpedo craft afloat, or as far as known, projected, which are not superior in gun armament. It is therefore strongly recommended that they should be described as torpedo boats.’³⁰⁰

In fact, a design for genuine torpedo boats—intended to replace the elderly Victorian examples still in service in 1914—was drawn up in late 1913 for inclusion in the 1914-15 estimates. It was ultimately abandoned due to the need for economy and a high estimated unit cost.³⁰¹

The same fate overtook a pair of proposals for new armoured cruisers. These, designated E₂ and E₃, were drawn up in October 1913. In appearance the 'E' series was 'a beautiful, mini-*Queen Elizabeth*'.³⁰² E₂ was 560 feet long, displaced 15,500 tons, and was capable of 28 knots with an armament of eight 9.2-inch and eight 6-inch. E₃ was 580 feet long and displaced 17,850 tons, the length and weight going to heavier armour. Presumably intended to replace older

²⁹⁸ Unsigned, 'Copy of instructions received from Asst. D.N.C', n.d. [February 1914], f. 1, Ship's Cover 329 (1914-15 Destroyers), D.N.C. MSS.

²⁹⁹ Friedman, *British Destroyers*, p. 137.

³⁰⁰ D.N.C., 'T.B.D.s. 1914-15. Modifications to Specification.', May 1914, S.0291/1914, f. 28, Ship's Cover 329 (1914-15 Destroyers), D.N.C. MSS.

³⁰¹ The majority of surviving information about the proposed torpedo boats, including a sketch design, is contained in f. 1-8, Ship's Cover 323 (M Class T.B.Ds 1914-1915 and Emergency T.B.Ds), D.N.C. MSS.

³⁰² D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought*, p. 193.

armoured cruisers in fleet duties, they were too expensive to justify and the design was dropped without any attempt to fit them into the 1914-15 Estimates.³⁰³

Two further classes of cruiser were proposed for inclusion. The first was a further 'C' class variation, but the other is one of the most remarkable designs of the Prewar Era. This was the 'Torpedo Cruiser', often referred to as the '*Polyphemus*' after the Victorian torpedo ram. Except perhaps for the two armoured cruiser proposals of late 1913, the '*Polyphemus*' is the most obscure of the designs that died on the outbreak of war; no complete plans have survived and it went unmentioned in all postwar design histories including D.K. Brown's *The Grand Fleet*. Nicholas Lambert referred in passing and inaccurately as a 'semi-submersible'.³⁰⁴ The first detailed description appeared only in late 2009, written by the ubiquitous Norman Friedman.³⁰⁵

Surviving documentation of the Torpedo Cruiser is sparse and so much of her history is necessarily conjectural, but she may have arisen from discussions related to the development of the infamous fleet submarine project. In December 1913, during discussion of a 24 knot steam submarine proposal, d'Eyncourt offered his opinion that if the design 'failed as a submarine, it would still be a very formidable surface torpedo craft. [Later] the design was discussed in its relation to the late *Polyphemus*.'³⁰⁶ The idea of a large torpedo vessel seems to have stuck with Churchill, apparently reinforced by Lewis Bayly's support for the type.³⁰⁷ Whatever the case, work began on the design in earnest on February 24th.

³⁰³ d'Eyncourt Notebook, pp. 15-16.

³⁰⁴ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

³⁰⁵ Friedman, *British Destroyers*, pp. 277-278.

³⁰⁶ 'Minutes of Admiralty Conference on Submarine Policy', in Nicholas Lambert (ed.), *Submarine Service*, p. 235. However this may not be the true origin of the design. Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, cites a 'diary entry' by d'Eyncourt from November 1913 located in DEY/31, d'Eyncourt MSS. Unfortunately, this document now seems to be missing from DEY/31, although it may refer to the d'Eyncourt Notebook. Possibly the published footnote contains a typo.

³⁰⁷ At least, this was Rear-Admiral Frederick Tudor's impression in late 1914 when as Third Sea Lord he wrote a very unfavourable report on the proposed vessel. See Tudor, 'Remarks on design of Torpedo Cruiser got out by DNC in accordance with verbal instructions from First Lord and originated by Admiral Bayly', 4 December 1914, in Admiralty, 'Memorandum on New Construction', 12 October 1914, S.0796/1914, ADM1/8397/365. Note the

Constructor Stanley Goodall drafted the initial design submitted to d'Eyncourt on March 11th.³⁰⁸ The preliminary design was 380 feet long between perpendiculars and displaced 3,400 tons. Carrying an armament of eight submerged 21-inch torpedo tubes and twenty torpedoes, the design's maximum speed was 28 knots with sufficient fuel for 5000 nautical miles range. While the design's hull form was generally along light cruiser lines, it was intended to reduce freeboard to the 'minimum possible', and surviving sketches show only a small conning tower, two very short funnels, and two light masts for signalling and wireless.³⁰⁹ Significantly, the only guns included were two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. Armour was limited almost entirely to the conning tower and a 3-inch protective deck of 'Vanadium steel', presumably a reference to steel alloyed with vanadium for additional strength.³¹⁰ Testing of this novel armour type was underway when war broke out.³¹¹

Unsurprisingly, problems soon arose, principally that Goodall's design could only fire her submerged tubes at a maximum of 10 knots speed, which was not at all what was desired. Thus in June the D.N.C. were instructed to have another go since 'it is now understood to be necessary to fight the tubes up to the full speed of the ship'.³¹² Recasting was completed in June, the new design having grown to 420' between perpendiculars, 4400 tons displacement, and thirty-two

heading. Further evidence for Churchill's support of the design comes from a similar design briefly considered during February 1940. Apart from the similarity of the two proposals, the common factor on both occasions is Churchill himself. See D.K. Brown, *Nelson to Vanguard*, p. 84; Friedman, *British Cruisers: Two World Wars*, p. 252, 368n1.

³⁰⁸ Unsigned, 'H.M.S. Torpedo Cruiser. Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c.', n.d. [March 1914], f. 1, Ship's Cover 333A, D.N.C. MSS.

³⁰⁹ This reduction of freeboard probably explains Nicholas Lambert's belief that the design was 'semi-submersible'.

³¹⁰ Stanley Goodall to d'Eyncourt, 'Proposed Torpedo Cruiser', 11 March 1914, f. 1B, Ship's Cover 333A, D.N.C. MSS.

³¹¹ Unsigned, 'Copy of submission Enclosed in docket marked C.P. SCW. 3rd Sea Lord.', 17 September 1914, f. 8, Ships Cover 333A, D.N.C. MSS.

³¹² Unsigned minute, n.d. [after 4 June 1914], f. 2, Ships Cover 333A.

torpedoes.³¹³ This was duly submitted to Moore on July 1st, but little else was done prior to hostilities, though work continued until the beginning of 1915, by which time there was almost no chance of the design being ordered.

The First Lord's enthusiasm for the Torpedo Cruiser is in stark contrast to senior officers, who found it objectionable. The incoming Chief of the War Staff, Rear-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee, considered the type, like the original *Polyphemus*, of no peacetime value and of no strategic value as she was unable to perform any of the combat functions of a normal cruiser, such as reconnaissance. Even as a torpedo vessel her utility was marginal: compared with destroyers, the Torpedo Cruiser was a larger, slower target with no anti-flotilla capability, and unlike the most modern submarines, the Torpedo Cruiser could not carry out blockade duties.³¹⁴ In Sturdee's opinion, 'It does not appear that the Polyphemus is the true reply to the torpedo menace or any real substitute for Battleships, Destroyers, or Submarines.'³¹⁵ Rear-Admiral Sir Frederick Tudor, promoted to Third Sea Lord after the outbreak of war, held much the same views.³¹⁶

Like the original *Polyphemus*, the Torpedo Cruiser proved a dead end design of limited use in war outside a fleet to fleet encounter and of almost zero peacetime utility, but in fairness to Churchill and Bayly, others thought that surface ships armed with heavy torpedo batteries were worthy of study. The U.S. Navy spent a not inconsiderable effort developing the concept of a torpedo dreadnought, ultimately producing design studies for a 36,000 ton vessel capable of 31

³¹³ Unsigned, 'Design for a Torpedo Cruiser. Statement of Dimensions, Estimate of Weights, &c.', June 1914, f. 4, *ibid.* A variation was also proposed that carried a set of twin above-water torpedo tubes and four extra torpedoes, but this was rejected.

³¹⁴ Sturdee, 'What is the Raison d'être of a Polyphemus at the Present Time', 24 July 1914, MB1/T37/361, Battenberg MSS.

³¹⁵ Sturdee, 'What is the Strategic and Tactical Value of a Polyphemus?', 24 July 1914, MB1/T37/362, Battenberg MSS.

³¹⁶ Tudor, 'Remarks on design of Torpedo Cruiser got out by DNC in accordance with verbal instructions from First Lord and originated by Admiral Bayly', 4 December 1914, in D.N.C., 'Memorandum on New Construction', 12 October 1914, S.0796/1914, ADM1/8397/365.

knots in 1911. The General Board reached the same conclusions as their Admiralty counterparts would three years later, and the project was abandoned.³¹⁷ The Japanese alone thought the integration of heavy torpedo batteries into large surface vessels worth undertaking, in large part owing to their development of the excellent 'Long Lance' torpedo.

Having described the various designs prepared for construction under the 1914-15 Estimates, the Navy's construction plans for those estimates must be examined. In December 1913 the planned programme for 1914-15 was:

- 4 Dreadnoughts
- 4 Town class Light Cruisers
- 20 Destroyers
- 10 Torpedo Boats³¹⁸
- 8 Submarines

As the fight over the Estimates raged this programme inevitably took casualties. In December 1913 Churchill instructed Battenberg and Moore to make major alterations. The four 'Towns' became eight 'C' class ships, while the destroyers were reduced to ten plus two flotilla leaders.³¹⁹ Then in January the first-class torpedo boats were apparently dropped entirely.³²⁰ As of February 1914 the planned programme³²¹ was:

- 4 Dreadnoughts
- 4 Light Cruisers
- 2 Flotilla Leaders
- 10 Destroyers
- 8 Submarines

In his quest to strip every excess penny from the Estimates the First Lord suggested several even more radical alterations. Beginning in December he corresponded with Battenberg, Jellicoe, and

³¹⁷ Friedman, *U.S. Battleships*, pp. 143-145.

³¹⁸ Admiralty, 'Remarks on the Treasury Paper "Navy Estimates," 1914-15.', January 1914, ADM 116/3152.

³¹⁹ Churchill to Moore and Battenberg, 9 December 1913, 'First Lord's Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914', p. 1.

³²⁰ Churchill to Moore, 14 January 1914, p. 9, *ibid*.

³²¹ Admiralty, 'New Programme – 1914-15.', S.0146/1914., f.1, Ships Cover 314 (*Cambrian* Class).

Moore in utmost secrecy on various schemes ‘for an extraordinary substitution programme[.]’³²² On January 16th he asked Moore to drop the surface flotilla craft entirely and built four dreadnoughts, ten *Arethusas*, and £1,650,000 in ‘submarines and miscellaneous small craft.’³²³ Six days later Churchill suggested substituting fourteen submarines for the *Resistance* and arranging that ‘the whole batch might be ready by June 1917, *i.e.*, the date when [*Resistance*] is required?’³²⁴ He had already enquired how many submarines could be built for the price of the *Resistance*, cautioning Moore that ‘Extreme secrecy must be observed in handling this paper.’³²⁵

Almost as soon as Churchill had proposed these substitutions, he seems to have backed down. The reasons are unknown, since none of the Sea Lords’ replies to Churchill’s minutes survive, if they ever existed on paper. By May however, he was once again actively seeking to modify the coming construction programme, writing in a minute that ‘I cannot help feeling misgivings about the torpedo-boat policy on which we have provisionally decided.’³²⁶ According to Fisher, the First Lord had recruited Battenberg to the cause of substitution.³²⁷ To this end he suggested replacing the ten destroyers with four more light cruisers as well as replacing the fourth dreadnought with submarines.³²⁸ A glimpse into Churchill’s motives can be seen in a related minute to Third Sea Lord Moore; if the fourth dreadnought was replaced with submarines, wrote Churchill, ‘I imagine there should be a considerable relief in 1915-16.’³²⁹ Further, it is

³²² Churchill to Battenberg, Jellicoe, and Moore, 25 December 1913, f. 261-266, CHAR 13/22B.

³²³ Churchill to Moore, 16 January 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 12.

³²⁴ Churchill to Moore, 22 January 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 16.

³²⁵ Churchill to Moore, 14 January 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 9.

³²⁶ Churchill to Battenberg, Hamilton, Moore, Lambert, and Graham Greene, 1 June 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 62.

³²⁷ Fisher to Jellicoe, 25 May 1914, in Marder, *FGDN*, ii, p. 506.

³²⁸ Churchill to Battenberg, Hamilton, Moore, Lambert, and Graham Greene, 1 June 1914, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 62.

³²⁹ Churchill to Moore, 1 June 1916, ‘First Lord’s Minutes. Third Series—December 1913 to June 1914’, p. 63.

surely not coincidental that Lloyd George's budget for 1914-15 was running into serious difficulties at precisely this time.³³⁰

Substitution Policy?

On the basis of the above minutes and other evidence it is unarguable that considerable modifications to the Navy's 1914-15 construction programme were under consideration in the summer of 1914. However the question of how likely any of the various substitution proposals—and there were several under consideration in June-July 1914—were likely to become decided Admiralty policy is much less clear. Nicholas Lambert believes they were certain to become official and that only the outbreak of war meant that there 'was no time for the revolution in British naval policy to become apparent to all.'³³¹ While most have accepted Lambert's position,³³² Christopher Bell has expressed his doubts on the likelihood of a revolutionary 'substitution policy' taking effect in the absence of war.³³³ What follows is an attempt to establish exactly in which way forward the Admiralty was preparing to go in the last weeks of peace.

June 1914 saw Admiral Jellicoe depart the post of Second Sea Lord for a rest cure prior to his succeeding Admiral Callaghan as C.-in-C. Home Fleets in December.³³⁴ His replacement was cruiser expert and friend of the King Admiral Sir Frederick Hamilton.³³⁵ Sometime in June the new Second Sea Lord composed a memorandum outlining the various substitution proposals

³³⁰ Bruce K. Murray, "'Battered and Shattered": Lloyd George and the 1914 Budget Fiasco', *Albion* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 483-507.

³³¹ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 303.

³³² Friedman, *British Destroyers*, p. 137; Grove, *Royal Navy since 1815*, pp. 105-107.

³³³ Christopher Bell, 'Revolution Reconsidered', pp. 333-356.

³³⁴ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

³³⁵ In 1911 Admiral Hamilton, having recently been Rear-Admiral Commanding Fifth Cruiser Squadron, was involved in the rewriting of the Royal Navy's Cruiser Manual, having previously been involved in the development of the Home Fleet's cruiser tactics with Admiral May. See various papers, including early draft chapters of the Cruiser Manual, in HTN/113, Hamilton MSS. For Hamilton's friendship with George V, see Bridgeman to Sandars, 8 March 1916, f. 62, MS.Eng.hist.c.769, Sandars MSS.

being discussed as well as his own thoughts on them.³³⁶ Furthermore he sent the memorandum to both Jellicoe and Third Sea Lord Moore for their input. Any analysis of the Royal Navy's planning for the future in 1914 must take this invaluable document into account. To judge by the memorandum, the Torpedo Cruiser was now being seriously considered as an alternative to one of the 1914-15 battleships, probably the *Resistance*.³³⁷ Hamilton's memorandum describes the substitution of six of the new type for the aforementioned dreadnought.³³⁸ However there were two other possibilities considered: replacing a second dreadnought with sixteen submarines 'of the latest pattern', and replacing the entire destroyer order (minus the flotilla leaders) with four *Calliope* class light cruisers or a mix of four leaders and four submarines.³³⁹

Furthermore, the Hamilton Memorandum shows that, however great Churchill's enthusiasm for the various substitution proposals was, the remaining members of the Admiralty seem to have been more sanguine. Hamilton stated at the outset that it was '*assumed that it is admitted* that the time has come when the proportion of Torpedo craft (especially submarines) to Battleships should be increased' [emphasis added] and he later added the further qualification that consideration demanded that any change in policy 'should be gradual' to avoid giving 'an excuse for the chauvinists of other countries to press for increased estimates' and, significantly, Hamilton believed that 'it is more than doubtful if we have the means to provide the necessary personnel or Torpedoes'. Furthermore, while Hamilton felt that 'we have now an approved standard to work on [the 60% standard] ... and it should not be lightly be departed from' since there could be problems with public acceptance of a new standard of naval power, although he

³³⁶ Hamilton, Untitled memorandum, n.d. [June 1914], HTN/124, Hamilton MSS. Hereafter cited as Hamilton Memorandum.

³³⁷ A Ships Cover exists for *Renown* and *Repulse*, and orders were placed for their turrets at the end of July. Ship's Cover 325 (*Royal Sovereign* Class, 1914-15 Programme).

³³⁸ Hamilton Memorandum, HTN/124, Hamilton MSS.

³³⁹ Ibid.

felt this could be overcome if the public were given the facts of the case. He also raised concerns about the effect of the proposal on the Admiralty's efforts towards the Canadian battleships, which seemed at the time to be gaining traction.³⁴⁰ Hamilton's own opinion was that the best option for substitution was to replace one battleship and the year's destroyers in favour of six torpedo cruisers and either the four *Calliopes* or the mix of flotilla leaders and submarines.³⁴¹

Both Moore and Jellicoe replied with comments for Hamilton. Moore noted that whether a departure from the existing standard was needed at all was 'the most dominating question',³⁴² and that 'it would savour of insincerity or stupidity to make a sudden departure' [emphasis original], and agreed that *any* change from the existing standard should be a gradual one. Jellicoe appears to have been even less enthusiastic, and wrote 'the only substitution that I favour is that of Polyphemus class for the TBD's of the current programme except flotilla leaders.'³⁴³ This may have been due to his selection as Callaghan's successor as C.-in-C. Home Fleet; the newest destroyer design may have appeared incapable of operating with the battle fleet at sea, a trait the torpedo cruisers did not share.

The Fleet That Never Was

The Royal Navy's final prewar deployment programme survives in the National Archives.³⁴⁴ Like an insect caught in amber, it shows the state of British maritime strategy at almost the moment the lights of Europe went out. As such it can well be termed the final piece of the substitution policy puzzle. Furthermore, it throws suspicion on Nicholas Lambert's contention that Fisher's theorized flotilla defence revolution had been rekindled.

³⁴⁰ Churchill to Borden, 6 March 1914, f. 126-128; Churchill to Harcourt, 13 July 1914, f. 122-124, both CAB 1/34. Also see Nicholas Lambert, *loc. cit.*

³⁴¹ Hamilton Memorandum, HTN/124, Hamilton MSS.

³⁴² Moore notes on Hamilton Memorandum, n.d. [June-July 1914], HTN/124, Hamilton MSS.

³⁴³ Jellicoe notes on Hamilton Memorandum, n.d. [June-July 1914], HTN/124, Hamilton MSS.

³⁴⁴ Admiralty, 'Battle and Cruiser Squadrons – Programme.', 8 July 1914, ADM 1/8383/179.

The Director of Naval Mobilisation, Rear-Admiral Leveson, submitted the scheme to the Board on 8 July and a minute of recommended changes in First Lord Winston Churchill's hand is dated 15 July—the same day substitution policy was agreed upon at a Board of Admiralty meeting according to Lambert. Further suggestions from First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg and Churchill are dated to July 16th and 17th. The final scheme was completed by Leveson's team on July 20th and showed the planned deployment of British capital ships through April 1917. At that time, the First Fleet would comprise four all-dreadnought battle squadrons and four mixed cruiser squadrons of two battlecruisers and four modern light cruisers (the current Battle Cruiser Squadrons would be broken up after Admiral Beatty hauled down his flag in the spring of 1915). Both battleships Lambert claims were to be replaced by light craft according to a revived substitution policy, *Agincourt* and *Resistance*, are shown as being in service in April 1917, *Agincourt* assigned to the 3rd Battle Squadron with her sister *Queen Elizabeths*, and *Resistance* in the 4th Battle Squadron alongside the other seven *Royal Sovereigns*. Furthermore, a reborn Mediterranean Fleet comprised of the eight oldest dreadnoughts supported by the First Cruiser Squadron, Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, several light cruisers, and—subject to the presence of a German battlecruiser in the Mediterranean—the *New Zealand*. The new *Marksman*-class leaders were to replace the several of the scout cruisers as the flagships of the First Fleet's destroyer flotillas, improving the mobility of the flotillas in action and affording a savings in manpower (just over 100 men were needed to crew a *Marksman*, as opposed to 300 or so needed for a *Boadicea* or a *Sentinel*.)

The value of this docket is enormous. Churchill's minute, written on July 15th, is particularly insightful, beginning as it does: 'I approve the Battleship organisation proposed both

for Home & Medⁿ.³⁴⁵ As a following table illustrates, this organisation includes all four of the 1914-15 dreadnoughts as coming into commission during the first quarter of 1917:

Planned Dreadnought Organization for April 1917 ^a				
1 st Battle Squadron	2 nd Battle Squadron	3 rd Battle Squadron	4 th Battle Squadron	Mediterranean Fleet
<i>Marlborough</i>	<i>King George V</i>	<i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	<i>Resolution</i>	<i>Collingwood</i>
<i>Benbow</i>	<i>Ajax</i>	<i>Warspite</i>	<i>Ramillies</i>	<i>Dreadnought</i>
<i>Emperor of India</i>	<i>Audacious</i>	<i>Valiant</i>	<i>Revenge</i>	<i>Temeraire</i>
<i>Neptune</i>	<i>Centurion</i>	<i>Barham</i>	<i>Royal Oak</i>	<i>Bellerophon</i>
<i>Colossus</i>	<i>Orion</i>	<i>Malaya</i>	<i>Royal Sovereign</i>	<i>Superb</i>
<i>Neptune</i>	<i>Monarch</i>	<i>Agincourt</i>	<i>Renown</i>	<i>St. Vincent</i>
	<i>Thunderer</i>		<i>Repulse</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>
	<i>Conqueror</i>		<i>Resistance</i>	

^a *Iron Duke* was officially designated as Fleet Flagship, and independent of the Battle Squadrons.

Owing to the outbreak of war, this scheme apparently got no further. Nicholas Lambert takes the presence of just two contracts for main gun turrets in the Ships' Cover for the never-built *Renown* and *Repulse* as 'irrefutable' evidence that *Resistance* and *Agincourt* were to be replaced with light craft.³⁴⁶ However, Ship Covers in general are composed of whatever working papers existed in the Department of Naval Construction and are not even close to a complete design or construction history. Furthermore, it is important to note that *Renown* and *Repulse* were to be built under contract in private yards, while *Resistance* and *Agincourt* were to be built in naval dockyards. In any case, neither of the two ships had been ordered when hostilities began.

In view of this detailed plan, the question naturally arises of what happened to Churchill's plans to replace *Resistance*, *Agincourt*, or both, with submarines or other torpedo craft that Nicholas Lambert so strongly argues in *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* and elsewhere? This question is given further gravity by the surviving early draft of Churchill's *The World Crisis* where Churchill wrote that having secured funds for four battleships, he planned to

³⁴⁵ Churchill minute, 15 July 1914, on Admiralty, 'Battle and Cruiser Squadrons – Programme.', 8 July 1914, ADM 1/8383/179.

³⁴⁶ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

‘transform two of these precious machines into thirty or forty submarines and torpedo-craft’ and had convinced the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of this policy with the support of Battenberg.³⁴⁷ This same draft offers the necessary clues. Firstly, Churchill wrote that this substitution plan was ‘a very difficult path to tread, full of hazards and pitfalls’, despite his ‘overwhelming conviction’ that it was ‘best for the Navy’. He sent the First Sea Lord ‘to convince his professional colleagues’ to support the change, but his phrasing suggests this was as far as matters got.³⁴⁸ Surviving evidence from these ‘professional colleagues’ will be seen to imply Battenberg was less than successful. Finally, in his draft Churchill confessed that not only had he ‘not been able to arrive at any exact standard to govern the change’, but that he ‘did not agree with those who considered that the days of the battleship were ended.’³⁴⁹

The answer is, simply, that either no final decision had been taken on the ‘substitution policy’ prior to the outbreak of war, or Churchill had given in to the views of his doubtful professional advisors. Of the two, the second seems likely. Churchill wrote to Battenberg on July 12th of the substitution proposals that

‘I am convinced that the time has come for action on these lines and although the steps are serious I do not feel any anxiety about taking them. They will add greatly to the war power of the Fleet and bring credit to all associated with them.’³⁵⁰

The ‘steps’ were to replace the *Resistance* with fifteen improved ‘E’ class submarines, replace the *Agincourt* with six Torpedo Cruisers, and either substitute four light cruisers or four flotilla

³⁴⁷ Churchill, Draft of *World Crisis*, n.d. [c. 1918], CHAR 8/61, in Nicholas Lambert (ed.), *The Submarine Service*, pp. 259-261.

³⁴⁸ Quoted in Christopher M. Bell, ‘On Standards and Scholarship: A Response to Nicholas Lambert’, *War in History* 20, no. 3 (July 2013), p. 408.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Churchill to Battenberg, 12 July 1914, f. 116, CAB 1/34.

leaders and four more submarines for the ten destroyers.³⁵¹ Churchill evidently wanted to have a full discussion of the matter at the next meeting of the Admiralty Board, set for July 15th.

What happened next is extremely obscure and will likely remain so. The Admiralty Board did meet on July 15th, but the official minutes show no discussion of substitution, although the designs of both a 'new Cruiser' and the 'New Torpedo Boat Destroyer' (i.e. the 'New *Firedrake*' type) were considered and provisionally approved.³⁵² In addition Churchill seems to have once again considered walking back from substitution as a whole, for in an unsent minute to the First Sea Lord he wrote

'I propose that at the Board Meeting next Wednesday we should simply deal with the *Polyphemus* on her merits and settle whether the design is or is not a good one without reference to any substitution. No doubt we shall have to refer to the possibility of substitution, but I do not wish to take any decision on the subject then.'³⁵³

Considering that the volume of Board Minutes for 1912 includes George Lambert's strong dissent against the *Queen Elizabeth* class's approval it is very strange that an even more massive change in naval policy should pass unremarked in the official minutes.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, Churchill signed off approvingly on Leveson's future fleet distribution on July 15th which included the *Resistance* and *Agincourt* as coming into service in 1917 with no mention of their replacement with torpedo vessels. Nor can it be assumed the inclusion of *Agincourt* and *Resistance* is down to D.O.D. Leveson being 'out of the loop' on the new substitution policy, since neither Churchill nor Battenberg made any effort, either before or after the July 15th meeting, to correct the scheme's assumption that all four 1914-15 dreadnoughts would be built. The extreme secrecy that a radical substitution policy demanded is irrelevant, as surely the top two men at the

³⁵¹ Churchill to Battenberg and Graham Greene, 12 July 1914, f. 118, CAB 1/34.

³⁵² Admiralty, 'Board Minutes. Wednesday, 15th July 1914.', f. 7, in Admiralty 'Board Minutes. 1914.', ADM 167/48.

³⁵³ Churchill to Battenberg (not sent), 11 July 1914, Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, pp. 1986-1987.

³⁵⁴ George Lambert minute, 17 July 1912, f. 24a, 'Board Minutes. 1912.', ADM 146/46.

Admiralty would inform one of the responsible Admiralty officials of its existence, especially since if Churchill's draft memoirs were right both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were aware of the plan. To not inform Leveson of such a change of policy would go beyond incompetence to deliberate—not to mention senseless—maliciousness.

At this point war intervened. Although only two of the four dreadnoughts are known to have been officially contracted for, this is not proof the other two had been abandoned.³⁵⁵ Indeed the approved fleet distribution plan suggests strongly they would not be abandoned, and thus if any substitution of types took place in the implementation of the 1914-15 Programme, it would involve cruisers and flotilla craft, not the dreadnoughts. It is also possible that no final decision had been made.³⁵⁶ In the end, the remaining evidence is perhaps too vague to establish a definitive answer. It can, however, establish that the 'revolution in British naval policy' as Lambert calls it, was not the established course being charted by the Admiralty, or even a certain outcome of discussions that were overtaken by the march to war.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 354. An additional argument against their cancellation is that *Agincourt* and *Resistance* were the year's Dockyard battleships, and canceling orders for a government yard (regardless of their later replacement by other ships) while leaving contracts with private yards untouched would require a great deal of political gymnastics.

³⁵⁶ The strongest evidence for this conclusion is Director of Dockyards and Dockyard Work, 'Effect on Dockyard Employment by Withdrawal of Two Battleships', D.0212/1914, 9 September 1914, F.P. 819, f. 52-60, FISR 1/15, Fisher MSS.

³⁵⁷ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 303.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Home Fleet Goes to War

On June 28th, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his pregnant wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo. The Austrian government were not terribly upset by the loss of the unpopular Archduke and his morganatic wife, but were prepared to use the event to attack Serbia, which was perceived as a major threat to the Dual Monarchy's internal stability. Germany, partly encouraged by Kaiser Wilhelm (one of Franz Ferdinand's few personal friends), offered their secret support for an Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia, though this support was likely meant to be predicated on an immediate Austro-Hungarian invasion—a key distinction from the popular notion of a 'blank check'.¹ Subsequently the European powers lurched unsteadily towards war.

Throughout most of this period, Britain had, with the exception of the Foreign Office, been preoccupied with other matters, such as the deteriorating situation in Ireland.² The breakup of the Buckingham Palace Conference on July 24th, and the resulting spectre of armed clashes between Unionist and Home Rule factions had left Asquith 'glum'.³ Still, Sir Edward Grey's announcement to Cabinet 'that the Ultimatum by Austria to Serbia had brought us nearer to a European Armageddon than we had been through all the Balkan troubles' made an impression on the Cabinet.⁴

Impressions made or no, the general attitude among the Cabinet can be expressed by what Asquith told Venetia Stanley: 'Happily, there seems to be no reason why we should be

¹ David Fromkin, *Europe's Last Summer* (London: Vintage, 2005), pp. 153-161.

² See amongst many others: Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland*, paperback ed. (London: Pan Books, 2007); A.P. Ryan, *Mutiny at the Curragh* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1956). For the Royal Navy specifically, see Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Jeffery, 'The Royal Navy and the Curragh Incident', *Historical Research* 62, no. 147 (February 1989), pp. 54-69.

³ Domville diary, 24 July 1914, DOM/24, Domville MSS.

⁴ Hobhouse diary, 24 July 1914, in David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet*, p. 176.

anything more than spectators.’⁵ The rest of the Liberal government was similarly disposed towards carrying on as usual, and it was unsurprising that most of the Cabinet departed to the countryside for the weekend. Churchill went to Cromer with his wife and children for some idyllic time by the seaside.⁶ Asquith returned to his weekend home in Sutton Courtenay, where he played golf and, in the evening, bridge.⁷ On the 26th, even the Foreign Secretary, having felt the situation was ‘not yet so critical that it was unsafe to be out of town even for the Sunday’, and left to fish for trout at Itchen Abbas.⁸

One man who had not left London was Prince Louis of Battenberg.⁹ He remained in London through the weekend with his younger son, the future Lord Louis Mountbatten.¹⁰ Aside from his son, however, Battenberg was virtually alone at the Admiralty. With the other principals dispersed, the First Sea Lord was left ‘in charge of the Navy at the moment of the country’s greatest peril.’¹¹ Until the Cabinet returned, practically the empire’s entire defence was in His Serene Highness’s hands, along with the many issues relating thereto.

The most pressing issue was that the Test Mobilisation of the First, Second, and Third Fleets previously described was due to end on Monday the 27th July. Once that ended the Second and Third Fleets would discharge their reservists and the First Fleet would disperse throughout the Home Ports and elsewhere.¹² Though hostilities had not yet broken out, diplomatic cables

⁵ Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24 July 1914, in Brock and Brock (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 159.

⁷ Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 27 July 1914, in Brock and Brock (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁸ Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, i, p. 315; Keith Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: A Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London: Cassell, 1971), p. 290.

⁹ Battenberg was not the only senior man in London that weekend. Sir Edward Grey had left the Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs Sir Arthur Nicolson in charge of the Foreign Office in his absence. Fromkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107; Grey, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Who would in due time become a First Sea Lord himself.

¹¹ Statement by Lord Mountbatten, n.d., in Unsigned, ‘Standing the Fleet Fast in 1914’, MB1/T85, Battenberg MSS.

¹² For a partial list of the First Fleet’s intended sailing destinations, see Callaghan to Admiralty, Telegram No. 337, 25 July 1914, f. 21, ADM 137/50.

from Vienna suggested war might very well be ‘imminent’.¹³ Battenberg had already telegraphed his wife that he would be unable to join them in Russia that August.¹⁴

The crucial day was July 26th, a Sunday. Churchill telephoned twice that morning from Cromer for news,¹⁵ and Battenberg explained that the situation was rapidly deteriorating and that, with war fast approaching, ‘a decision was required that very day whether to let the Test Mobilisation end the following morning...or whether the Fleets were to be ordered to “stand fast”’.¹⁶ The First Lord’s advice was something of a politician’s reply: he said that the First Sea Lord was in charge of the Navy but that delaying the end of the Test Mobilisation would have ‘political implications’.¹⁷ Presumably Churchill was speaking of the diplomatic consequences of such an action, but relevant domestic considerations could not have been far from his mind either. This was not what Battenberg wanted to hear, and he complained to Mark Kerr two days later that ‘Ministers with their week-end holidays are incorrigible.’¹⁸ As diplomatic telegrams from overseas kept coming in, Battenberg may have been the only man at the Admiralty who appreciated the gravity of the situation, because Herbert Richmond wrote a few days later that:

‘The Operations Division had no information to work upon on Saturday [July 25th] & knew nothing of whether the crisis was serious or not.’¹⁹

With the War Staff—or at least parts of it—in the dark and his political superiors either absent or of little help, Battenberg took matters into his own hands. At 4 PM the following signal went out from the Admiralty:

‘Decypher. No ships of First Fleet or Flotillas are to leave Portland until further orders. Acknowledge[.]’²⁰

¹³ Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, ii (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 390.

¹⁴ Mountbatten statement, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Churchill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁶ Mountbatten statement, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Battenberg to Mark Kerr, 28 July 1914. Quoted in Kerr, *Battenberg*, p. 243.

¹⁹ Richmond, ‘Points noticed with the first few days of war’, n.d. [August 1914], RIC/1/9, Richmond MSS.

²⁰ Admiralty to Callaghan, Telegram No. 258, 4 PM, 26 July 1914, f. 28, ADM 137/50.

As mentioned previous, it was Sunday and the Admiralty was practically deserted. As a consequence Battenberg and the resident clerk 'had to write out all the telegrams and send them off themselves.'²¹ The order went out just in time. The Home Fleet's squadrons were already preparing to leave Portland and some had left already. The dreadnought *Bellerophon* was *en route* to Gibraltar, and the minesweepers, several cruisers, and the First and Second Destroyer Flotillas were at the Home Ports giving leave.²² More orders followed on quickly:

'Complete First Fleet with coal. Gunnery practices to be carried out from Portland can be continued.'²³

'Before giving leave to the 6th and 8th Flotillas, further Admiralty approval is to be obtained.'²⁴

The members of the Cabinet were already returning to London as these orders went out, and 'when the Ministers hurried back late that evening they cordially approved my action, and we had the drawn sword in our hands to back up our urgent advice.'²⁵ Churchill, who had decided to cut short his holiday after his second telephone conversation with the First Sea Lord,²⁶ congratulated Battenberg for his decision, and recalled:

'The First Sea Lord told me in accordance with our conversation he had told the Fleet not to disperse. I took occasion to refer to this four months later in my letter accepting his resignation. I was very glad publicly to testify at that moment of great grief and pain for him that his loyal hand had sent the first order which began our vast naval mobilization.'²⁷

Satisfied with the situation at the Admiralty, Churchill left to visit Sir Edward Grey in Eccleston Square. Sir William Tyrell, Grey's Private Secretary, was also present.

'I told him [Grey] that we were holding the Fleet together. I learned from him that

²¹ Mountbatten statement, *op. cit.*

²² Callaghan to Admiralty, Tel. 338, 26 July 1914, f. 36, ADM 137/50.

²³ Admiralty to Callaghan, Tel. 259, 26 July, f. 31, ADM 137/50.

²⁴ Admiralty to Ballard [Admiral of Patrols], Telegram, 26 July 1914, f. 32, ADM 137/50.

²⁵ Battenberg to Kerr, 28 July 1914, quoted in Kerr, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Churchill, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

he viewed the situation very gravely. He said there was a great deal yet to be done before a really dangerous crisis was reached, but that he did not at all like the way in which this business had begun. I asked whether it would be helpful or the reverse if we stated in public that we were keeping the Fleet together. Both he and Tyrell were most insistent that we should proclaim it at the earliest possible moment: it might have the effect of sobering the Central Powers and steadying Europe. I went back to the Admiralty, sent for the First Sea Lord, and drafted the necessary communiqué.’²⁸

A special notice appeared in the next morning’s papers to this effect.

In the Home Fleet, Battenberg’s decision was not greeted with any undue alarm. ‘I cannot remember any particular excitement about this,’ wrote one officer many years later, ‘we seem to have taken it in our stride.’²⁹ Aboard *Marlborough* the order was tersely recorded in what became the Grand Fleet Diary:

‘*Vanguard* was to have sailed at about 5·30 pm. for Sheerness to give leave, but on asking permission to proceed, was ordered to remain.

‘*Agamemnon* & *Blonde* had already sailed but were recalled & anchored in Weymouth Bay.

‘The fleet was then informed that Admiralty directs that the movement to home port, to practice bases etc were postponed until further orders & first fleet remains at Weymouth till further orders.

‘1st B.S. & 4th B.S. ordered to have steam to proceed inside Portland breakwater at 5 am Monday to complete with coal. 3rd C.S. to come outside to make room.’³⁰

Terse as this entry is, it illustrates how close things had run. Major units of the First Fleet had already begun breaking away to proceed independently to their home ports to give leave and in a few hours’ time more would have done so.

The Admiral of Patrols was further instructed to seek Admiralty approval before allowing the Sixth and Eighth Destroyer Flotillas to grant leave.³¹ Worrying news came in from Norway, where the morning papers had reported that ‘German Fleet numbering 28 large ships received

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Captain Francis S.W. de Winton, *Ships in Bottles*, p. 10, unpublished manuscript, Captain Francis S.W. de Winton MSS, LHCMH.

³⁰ Diary entry, 26 July 1914, ‘Diary of the Grand Fleet’, MAD/1, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Madden MSS, NMM.

³¹ Admiralty to Ballard, Telegram, 26 July 1914, f. 32, ADM 137/50.

orders to concentrate during last night at predetermined point off the Norwegian coast.’³²

Early in the morning of the 27th the absent *Bellerophon* was ordered by wireless to return to Portland ‘with moderate dispatch’.³³ The Admiralty issued a notice to the press that the Navy’s training schools would not re-open after the Home Fleet’s manoeuvres to keep the crews of the Second Fleet together aboard their ships.³⁴

More precise instructions went to the three Home Port Cs.-in-C. and to the fleet commanders. Further issuance of leave was to be stopped though no men were to be recalled. Peacetime appointments not already taken up by officers were suspended. Officers of the Second Fleet who had been mobilized for the Test Mobilisation were to re-join their ships, and those ships were to be completed ‘to full numbers so far as resources allow’. They were also ordered to take on full loads of coal, ammunition, and stores. All the Coastals and the *Tribals* in reserve were to similarly ‘be completed to full crews’. ‘These orders to be carried out as quietly as possible.’³⁵ The Admiral of Patrols was ordered to ‘keep all his vessels and to be responsible for Scottish Coast including Firth of Forth and Shetlands.’ Responsibility for the Orkneys and Shetlands fell to the Home Fleet, which was given eight *Rivers* to operate from Cromarty ‘when ready’.³⁶ Seaplanes were to be assembled (perhaps literally) at Grain Island, Felixstowe, and Yarmouth.³⁷ The four *Majestics* designated for guarding the Humber were ordered to complete to Active Crews for transit, together with two armoured cruisers.³⁸ These orders were largely written by Battenberg himself and probably given straight to the Admiralty clerical staff. As the tempo increased throughout the day, the First Sea Lord began relying on verbal orders written

³² Resident Clerk, Foreign Office to Resident Clerk, Admiralty, 26 July 1914, f. 33, ADM 137/50.

³³ Admiralty to *Bellerophon*, 27 July 1914, f. 37, ADM 137/50.

³⁴ Admiralty minute, 27 July 1914, f. 39, ADM 137/50.

³⁵ Admiralty to C.-in-C. Home Ports, Telegram No. 261, 27 July 1914, f. 43, ADM 137/50.

³⁶ Admiralty to Callaghan, Lowry [S.N.O. Scotland], and Ballard, 27 July 1914, f. 44, ADM 137/50.

³⁷ Admiralty to Poore [C.-in-C. Nore], and Meux [C.-in-C. Portsmouth], 27 July 1914, f. 62, ADM 137/50.

³⁸ Admiralty to Poore, C.-in-C. Devonport, and Vice-Admiral Home Fleet Sheerness, 27 July 1914, f. 64, ADM 137/50.

down and relayed by officers like Captain Charles de Bartolomé.³⁹ That afternoon Battenberg managed to tell Commander Domville that he could not attend a wedding the next day.⁴⁰

In the mid-afternoon a telegram to explain what was obvious in Whitehall but might have not yet reached the ears of the Fleet was issued:

‘SECRET. European political situation makes war between Triple Alliance and Triple Entente Powers by no means impossible.
This is not the warning telegram but be prepared to shadow possible hostile men of war and consider dispositions of H.M. Ships under your command from this point of view. Measure is purely precautionary. The utmost secrecy is to be observed and no unnecessary person is to be informed.’⁴¹

The need for secrecy and the ‘present political situation’ also impelled the Admiral Commanding Reserves, Arthur Farquhar, to suggest ‘that the land line communication between Whitehall and ... W/T Stations should be made good.’ The matter was important because such communication lines ‘generally take two or three days to join up.’ While Farquhar felt the General Post Office staff could be left out of these matters, the concurring minute from Commander William Kettlewell explained that the ‘G.P.O. have already taken steps to prevent delay.’⁴² The Admiralty’s request for ‘direct telegraphic connection’ went through to the Post Office on July 29th.⁴³

Churchill, meanwhile, after consultation with Battenberg, had authorized the appointment of Flag Officers to wartime squadron commands and alphabetic Cruiser Forces left vacant during peacetime.⁴⁴ Amongst these were:

Cruiser Force B: Rear-Admiral Dudley de Chair
Cruiser Force D: Rear-Admiral William Grant
Cruiser Force E: Rear-Admiral Henry Campbell

³⁹ Minute, 27 July 1914, f. 52, ADM 137/50.

⁴⁰ Diary entry, 27 July 1914, DOM/24, Domville MSS.

⁴¹ Admiralty telegram, 27 July 1914, f. 65, ADM 137/50.

⁴² Farquhar to Admiralty, 27 July 1914, f. 153-154, ADM 137/50.

⁴³ Admiralty to Sir Alexander King [Secretary, G.P.O.], 29 July 1914, f. 155, ADM 137/50.

⁴⁴ Minute by Jackson, 27 July 1914, f. 66, ADM 137/50.

Cruiser Force F: Rear-Admiral Robert Phipps Hornby
Cruiser Force G: Rear-Admiral Rosslyn Weymss
Cruiser Force I: Rear-Admiral John de Robeck

These appointments had been proposed to the First Lord only a few days previously.⁴⁵

The First Fleet, meanwhile, had set to work on preparing for sea. Although some ships of the First Fleet were able to coal immediately that morning, *Marlborough* 'found little likelihood of coaling for the forenoon so training classes & Divisional drills were exercised.'⁴⁶ While many ships were able to coal that day, aboard *Marlborough* the Grand Fleet Diary states that 'Owing to indifferent coaling facilities at Portland it was not till 10.45 p.m. Tuesday [July 28th] that V.A. was able to report 1st B.S. complete with coal.'⁴⁷ Other troubles were encountered as well, and again *Marlborough* found herself getting short shrift:

'The state with the stores was not much better [than the coaling situation], lubricating oils etc were received & a certain quantity of consumable stores but no victualing stores & little fresh beef... some ships had only 1 days fresh food on board.'⁴⁸

The next day saw more urgent telegrams come in to the Admiralty. In response to a request for some of his allocated flotilla craft by the Admiral of Patrols, the C.-in-C. Nore sent to the Admiralty for 'instructions... requested urgently' owing to a lack of specific information in a previous Admiralty telegram.⁴⁹ The Admiralty's response shows they were still not willing to cancel extant leaves:

'Destroyers & T Bs [&] Light Cruisers & Depot Ships on Part I Monthly Mobilising List should be completed to full crews as soon as this can be done without upsetting Mobilisation approximations and without recalling men on leave.'⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See Hood to Head of M, 25 July 1914, f. 22-25, ADM 137/50.

⁴⁶ Diary entry, 27 July 1914, GFD, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Poore to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 73, ADM 137/50.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

C.-in-C. Nore responded:

‘Not possible complete to full crews at present eight E class T.B.Ds. [i.e. *Rivers*] attached to First Fleet or vessels of Patrol Flotillas attached Chatham other than Ex-Coastals. It is anticipated they can be completed by Thursday morning 30th when first watch returns from Mobilising leave.’⁵¹

The result of this slight dislocation—slight in comparison to the overall mobilization of the fleet—is recorded by Richmond:

‘There was uncertainty on Monday 27th. As to where the 8 destroyers attached to C.-in-C. were to go in war, or what measures of defence were to be taken in the Orkneys & Cromarty.’⁵²

Shortly after noon the officer in charge at Devonport proposed to only issuing confidential books to one of the *Majestics* set to sail for Humber guard duty as the others lacked appointed captains. The Admiralty signalled its approval the next day.⁵³

From Portland, Callaghan requested a tanker to expedite fuelling of his ships, whose need for bunker fuel was then only being serviced by a 400 ton lighter.⁵⁴ Shortly after five o’clock that afternoon, Callaghan received in quick succession two telegrams from the Admiralty which, aside from not responding to his requests for fuel, would hardly have eased his mind even if they had announced Churchill had sent every tanker in the Empire to Portland:

‘Secret. The First Fleet is to leave Portland tomorrow Wednesday for Scapa Flow. Destination is to be kept secret except to flag & commanding officers. As you are required at the Admiralty Vice Admiral 2 B.S. is to take command. Course from Portland is to be shaped to southward then a middle Channel course to the Straits of Dover. The Squadrons are to pass through the Straits without lights during the night and to pass outside the shoals on their way north. *Agamemnon* is to remain at Portland where the Second Fleet will assemble. Special arrangement for mails will be made by Admiralty in order to preserve secrecy.’⁵⁵

The Admiral’s reaction can only be guessed at. His request for a small amount of additional

⁵¹ Poore to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 77, ADM 137/50.

⁵² Richmond, ‘Points noticed within the first few days of war’, n.d., RIC/1/9, Richmond MSS.

⁵³ Devonport to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 76, ADM 137/50.

⁵⁴ Callaghan to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 85, ADM 137/50.

⁵⁵ Admiralty to Callaghan, 28 July 1914, f. 87, ADM 137/50.

logistical support was met by orders for his ships to proceed to war stations in utmost secrecy and for himself to proceed to Whitehall. The latter order was expanded on in the second telegram:

‘Arrange to come to the Admiralty by first train tomorrow Wednesday with your own proposals on the war plan accompanied by any members of your staff you wish to bring. Iron Duke to meet you at Queensferry and rejoin fleet en route to its destination.’⁵⁶

Callaghan fired back:

‘Assuming fuel requirements of fleet are being provided for by Admiralty. First Fleet will require approximately 25,000 tons of coal on arrival at Scapa Flow. About 2,000 tons of oil fuel is also required to complete ships and 4th Flotilla will probably require some 4,000 tons in addition.’⁵⁷

There were other concerns besides the fuel situation, of course. One of these was communications. Admiral Jellicoe’s report on the 1913 Grand Manoeuvres had noted the need for additional communications staff.⁵⁸ Now Callaghan told the Admiralty:

‘In view of the amount of telegraph work principally in cypher coming through the Naval Telegraph Office now in *Cyclops* it is requested that Post Office operators may be embarked as soon as possible.’⁵⁹

The C.-in-C. was probably concerned about a repetition of the collapse of the communications network which had occurred during the 1913 Manoeuvres.⁶⁰ In this context, his choice of the *Cyclops*, the repair ship of the First Battle Squadron, is intriguing. It suggests Callaghan was not then concerned of a surprise attack on his fleet at anchor, or of being confronted by an enemy force *en route* north to the Orkneys, since keeping his major communications node on a slow and practically-unarmed auxiliary was a major weakness should a surprise attack occur.

Another potential concern was that the fleet was not yet concentrated, although as events would show there was little to justify any fear as regards this fact. Nevertheless it necessitated a

⁵⁶ Admiralty to Callaghan, 28 July 1914, f. 88, ADM 137/50.

⁵⁷ Callaghan to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 124, ADM 137/50.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Lambert, ‘War Room’, p. 399.

⁵⁹ Callaghan to Admiralty, 28 July 1914, f. 91, ADM 137/50.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

large number of telegrams to various ports ordering squadrons and flotillas into motion. The Fourth Destroyer Flotilla, at Queenstown, was ordered 'to proceed to Scapa at once'.⁶¹ The Second Fleet 'when complete' was ordered to assemble at Portland.⁶² The destroyers *Firedrake* and *Lurcher* were ordered to join the Sixth Flotilla.⁶³

Captain Murray Sueter and the rest of the Air Department were also mobilizing themselves. On July 28th Sueter provided Churchill with a list of German airships, both ready for action and 'whose completion may be accelerated'.⁶⁴ The next day Churchill, obviously worried, asked:

'Where are they?
What is their radius of action?
What cd they conceivably do against us.'⁶⁵

The same day Churchill with the support of the Sea Lords, requested an anti-aircraft gun to defend the Admiralty building, though D.O.D. Leveson considered it would be best for the gun to remain at Woolwich until the order was given to mobilize the Reserves.⁶⁶

July 29th

Captain Ralph Crooke described the situation at the Admiralty on July 28th as busy 'but not unpleasant[.]' By the 29th however, the Admiralty a place of frantic activity, and Crooke laconically noted, 'War Panic begins.'⁶⁷ When Commander Barry Domvile dropped in briefly he 'found confusion'.⁶⁸ This confusion cannot have been helped by a message from the British Minister in the Norwegian capital which arrived midday:

⁶¹ Admiralty to Vice-Admiral Robert Stokes [S.N.O. Ireland], 28 July 1914, f. 102, ADM 137/50.

⁶² Unsigned minute, 28 July 1914, f. 109, ADM 137/50.

⁶³ Admiralty to Meux, 28 July 1914, f. 106, ADM 137/50.

⁶⁴ Sueter minute, 28 July 1914, 'Anti Aircraft Guns and Aeroplanes for London. 29/7/14 – 11/8/14', AIR 1/652/17/122/480.

⁶⁵ Churchill minute, 29 July 1914, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Diary entry, 28 July 1914, CRKE 1/6, Crooke MSS.

⁶⁷ Diary entry, 29 July 1914, CRKE 1/6, Crooke MSS.

⁶⁸ Diary entry, 29 July 1914, DOM/24, Domvile MSS.

‘All German war ships reported on good authority to have (left) Norwegian waters and to have passed the Skaw yesterday.’⁶⁹

Nevertheless orders were still being issued regularly and mobilization was proceeding apace. In response to Callaghan’s representations about fuel availability at Scapa Flow, the collier *Lucullen* was ordered to sail there that morning, with further ships following throughout the week.⁷⁰ Net defences for the Humber guard ships were to be prepared and sent ahead to meet those ships on arrival.⁷¹ Approval was given to Third Fleet ships remaining independent commands for the time being.⁷² Queenstown dockyard sanctioned overtime pay to have the coast guard vessel *Thrush* ready to depart by August 5th on the initiative of the Vice-Admiral Commanding without waiting for Admiralty approval.⁷³ War College officers were recalled to London for duty in the Admiralty’s War Room.⁷⁴ As these orders were sent out, the Admiralty was also concerned with new construction. At 1130 the Third Sea Lord held a conference to see what steps could be taken to expedite getting new ships into service.⁷⁵ This had long been a concern, as Vice-Admiral Charles Anson had led a committee on the subject a few years before.⁷⁶

Amongst these various orders is one that marks a significant milestone in aviation. Inspecting Captain of Aircraft Sueter was given orders to prepare his craft for action. British naval aviation received its first marching orders, which read as follows:

‘Inform I.C.A. for the present the duties of Aircraft are to be confined to affording protection against hostile aircraft.
Scouting and patrol duties in connection with hostile water craft are to be considered secondary to this duty.
All machines are to be kept tuned up and ready for immediate action.’⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Mansfeldt Findlay [Minister, Christiania] to Admiralty, 29 July 1914, f. 156, ADM 137/50.

⁷⁰ Minute by Sturdee, 29 July 1914, f. 124, ADM 137/50.

⁷¹ Admiralty to C-in-C Devonport, 29 July 1914, f. 162, ADM 137/50.

⁷² Admiralty to C-in-C Devonport, 29 July 1914, f. 163, ADM 137/50.

⁷³ Stokes to Admiralty, 29 July 1914, f. 166, ADM 137/50.

⁷⁴ Sturdee to Bethell [Vice Admiral Commanding, Royal Naval War College], 29 July 1914, f. 184, ADM 137/50.

⁷⁵ Diary entry, 29 July 1914, CRKE 1/6, Crooke MSS.

⁷⁶ Admiralty, ‘H.M. Ships in War – Committee’, 1914, ADM 116/1187.

⁷⁷ Admiralty to Poore, Ballard, and Sueter, 29 July 1914, f. 197, ADM 137/50.

The air force that received these orders was a far cry from the Hurricanes and Spitfires flying defensive sorties in another July in another war, but their orders were the same, and the pilots just as eager to prove themselves.

That afternoon, with the situation ever darkening, Battenberg took the final plunge and issued the following order:

‘All officers and men on leave are to be called by telegraph at once[.]’⁷⁸

This was followed by the Admiralty sending out the Warning Telegram. In Home Waters, this took the form of two coded messages to ‘C.Q.’, presumably all forces and bases in the British Isles. The first read ‘Rusticate 53 Certain Powers.’ The second simply read ‘Luminous four.’ The Historical Section copy of the second telegram has the following translation written below: ‘War Stations N^o. 2’. No such translation accompanies the first, but judging by copies of telegrams to foreign stations ‘Rusticate 53’ meant to prepare for war with ‘Certain Powers’.⁷⁹

Confirmations began rolling in the next morning. At 0958 the Nore Defence Flotillas had taken up their patrol stations.⁸⁰ In the evening the Captain (D) of the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla reported from Kirkwall his ships would have filled their bunkers with oil by the morning of the 31st, and that three of his ships were already at Scapa Flow patrolling the entrances.⁸¹

The rest of the Navy was also in motion. Callaghan had called his subordinate Admirals to *Iron Duke* for a conference on the 28th. The second of these meetings is likely where the Commander-in-Chief informed them of the situation and gave them their sailing orders.⁸² The Fleet departed Portland at 7 AM on the 29th ‘in Order 2nd B.S., 3rd B.S., 3rd C.S. (+ *Achilles* &

⁷⁸ Battenberg to Head of M, 29 July 1914, f. 170, ADM 137/50.

⁷⁹ Admiralty to C.Q., tel 239, 29 July 1914, f. 169A-169B, ADM 137/50.

⁸⁰ Poore to Admiralty, 30 July 1914, f. 258, ADM 137/50.

⁸¹ Captain Charles Wintour to Admiralty, 30 July 1914, f. 362, ADM 137/50.

⁸² Diary entry, 28 July 1914, ‘Grand Fleet Diary’, MAD/1, Madden MSS. Hereafter GFD.

Cochrane), 1st Lt C.S. (*Southampton & Birmingham* only)[,] 1st B.S., 1st B.C.S.[,] 4th B.S., *Iron Duke*.⁸³

The Channel was foggy that morning, although there was an alarming encounter with a German mail steamer ‘at this critical moment’, and it was believed the German ship carried wireless gear. The Fleet was ordered ‘to make such preparations for war as could be made without disturbing peace organization’. Then a short time later ‘to prepare torpedoes for War & to go into War routine forthwith.’ That afternoon, orders were issued for the night passage through the Straits of Dover. Ships were to be darkened and anti-torpedo guns issued ammunition.⁸⁴ Midshipman de Winton recalled the passage:

‘Ships were darked at night and we passed through Dover sometime in the early part of the night. (I had the first watch as midshipman of the starboard 9.2” turret). As far as I remember ships were at cruising stations, that is armament manned by one watch.’⁸⁵

As night fell, the squadrons pulled apart from each other—they were ordered to remain two miles apart from each other through the night. After the Warning Telegram arrived, ships were ordered ‘to raise steam for full speed by 1 a.m.’⁸⁶ Night defence stations were maintained with guns loaded and breeches open. At noon the next day *Iron Duke* and her consort *Oak* were detached to Queensferry to retrieve Admiral Callaghan, who had spent the day at the Admiralty in conference with Churchill and Battenberg. Callaghan went north to meet his flagship that evening.⁸⁷ *Iron Duke* and *Oak* were underway from South Queensferry to rejoin the Fleet by 3 PM the next day.⁸⁸ Meanwhile the fleet had the spent forenoon of the 30th preparing for wartime conditions, including removing peacetime fixtures and fittings, though none were yet to be

⁸³ GFD entry, 29 July 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ de Winton, ‘Ships in Bottles’, f. 10, LHCMH.

⁸⁶ GFD, 29 July 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

⁸⁷ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 176; GFD entry, 30 July 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

⁸⁸ Admiral, Dunfermline to Admiralty, 31 July 1914, f. 512, ADM 137/50.

destroyed or thrown overboard. Additional orders were given ‘that great care is to be taken that gun[']s crews are always ready at shortest notice especially from dusk till 8 A.M.’⁸⁹

At the Naval Colleges many of the cadets found themselves in a hucker when the mobilization orders came, despite it having been expected for some time:

‘The “Highflyer” cadets were in barracks in the R.N. College Keyham with the “Cumberland” Cadets. Both of us had been discharged the day before. There were about 90 cadets altogether. We were bundled out of the ship at short notice & pitchforked into the college with our hammocks & chests. The weather was beastly & so altogether we were decidedly “fed up” & simply longed for the War to begin, so that we could get away to our ships... it seemed too good to be true when at 3 in the afternoon we heard someone shouting “Mobilize at once.” Most people had gone ashore & I was just getting ready to go. The “Recall” & “Assembly” were sounded all over Devonport & soon everyone came rushing back...’⁹⁰

‘I was playing cricket for an XI from Dartmouth College at Kingswear. In the middle of the game one of the masters arrived on his motorcycle to say that the mobilization order which we had been more or less expecting had arrived. Everything was immediately [sic] stopped and a wild dash made for the College. On arrival there we at once got ready to leave the college as soon as possible. In anticipation of the mobilizing order we had already packed most of our gear so there was not a great deal left to do.’⁹¹

July 31st saw the Home Fleet appear at Scapa gradually throughout the afternoon, although the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla had already arrived the previous afternoon. The main fleet (less *Iron Duke* and *Oak*) anchored at 1830, having been preceded by the repair ship *Assistance* and four chartered auxiliaries. Fires were kept ready to make steam at four hours’ notice. Four scout cruisers were detached on picket duty, guarding the entrances.⁹² *Iron Duke* arrived with Callaghan at 0525 on August 1st. The same day, Churchill minuted Asquith on the possibility of a coordinated naval and military descent on points off the German and neutral coasts suitable as

⁸⁹ GFD, 30 July 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

⁹⁰ Diary entry, 1 August 1914, HRP 1/1, Captain Geoffrey Harper MSS, CCAC.

⁹¹ Jack Walters, ‘Personal Diary’, Commander Jack Walters MSS, LHCMH.

⁹² *Blonde, Blanche, Boadicea and Bellona*.

flotilla bases, using the reports Bayly prepared in 1913.⁹³

Change of Command

It will be recalled that Jellicoe, who had recently left the office of Second Sea Lord, was Fisher's most trusted protégé. In 1910 he had written Balfour that Jellicoe was 'Phenomenally young and junior, he will be Nelson at Cape S^t. Vincent until he becomes "Boss" at Trafalgar when Armageddon comes along in 1915 or thereabouts.'⁹⁴ Fisher continued to sing Jellicoe's praises to Churchill after the latter became First Lord. According to one letter from Fisher, Jellicoe had 'all the Nelsonic attributes.'⁹⁵ Churchill soon came to share this high opinion, and Jellicoe's prestige was further enhanced by his actions in the 1913 Manoeuvres.⁹⁶ To Fisher, Churchill wrote that 'Jellicoe has done wonders & fully justified all your confidence in him.'⁹⁷ Therefore it had been little surprise when Jellicoe was chosen as Callaghan's successor in the spring of 1914.⁹⁸

The changeover was set for October 1st.⁹⁹ To aid the transition it had been decided to send Jellicoe to sea (his term as Second Sea Lord ended on July 30th) as Callaghan's second-in-command, flying his flag aboard *Centurion*.¹⁰⁰ However Churchill decided, apparently some time on the 30th or 31st, that Jellicoe would replace Callaghan immediately upon the commencement of hostilities. Jellicoe was informed of this on the 31st by Churchill and Battenberg, and the disclosure 'came upon me as a great surprise' as Jellicoe would later write.¹⁰¹ Jellicoe protested

⁹³ Churchill to Asquith, 1 August 1914, f. 137, ADM 137/452.

⁹⁴ Fisher to Balfour, 23 October 1910, f. 63-64, Add MS 49712, Balfour MSS.

⁹⁵ Fisher to Churchill, 14 January 1912, quoted in Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁹⁶ Churchill to Jellicoe, 28 July 1913, Add MS 49035, f. 47, Jellicoe MSS.

⁹⁷ Churchill to Fisher, 29 July 1913, in Randolph Churchill, *YS Companion* 3, p. 1950.

⁹⁸ Jellicoe, *Grand Fleet*, p. 15.

⁹⁹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

replacing Callaghan on the eve of war, and left for Wick with the erroneous belief that the matter had not been finally decided.¹⁰² In fact that die had already been cast, as Jellicoe was carrying the sealed orders,¹⁰³ handwritten by Graham Greene and dated July 31st:

‘Sir,
I am commanded by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform you that, in the circumstances which will have arisen when the present letter will have been opened, they have been pleased to select you to be Commander in Chief of the Grand or First Fleet in succession to Admiral Sir George Callaghan. You are therefore forthwith on receipt of orders to open this letter to repair with it on board H.M.S. “Iron Duke”, show it to Sir George Callaghan as your authority for so doing, and arrange with him for whatever immediate steps may be necessary to make your succession to his command effective. Thereafter Sir George Callaghan will come ashore.’¹⁰⁴

Officially it had been explained to Jellicoe that Callaghan’s age and health made his ability to stand the strain of wartime command of the Grand Fleet a doubtful proposition.¹⁰⁵ In light of the Bridgeman affair and Callaghan’s wartime service as C.-in-C. Nore, it is reasonable to doubt the veracity of this official explanation, and it would have been uncharacteristic if Jellicoe did not consider this. Whatever the truth of Callaghan’s physical condition, however, Jellicoe had other reasons to object to this sudden change of command. A. Temple Patterson writes that ‘Jellicoe was very strongly conscious of the invidiousness of superseding [Callaghan] in such circumstances and the difficulty of establishing relations with officers who might well feel resentment at what they would consider the injustice done to [Callaghan].’¹⁰⁶ Captain (D) Charles Wintour of the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla put it more bluntly in his diary a few days later when he wrote that Callaghan’s sudden dismissal would ‘cause widespread indignation.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ ‘Only to be opened on receipt of telegraphic instructions from the Admiralty to that effect, which will be conveyed in the words:-

‘Open secret personal envelope taken with you from London’.

¹⁰⁴ Admiralty to Jellicoe, 31 July 1914, HSR/K/4, History MSS, NMM.

¹⁰⁵ Churchill, *World Crisis*, i, p. 176.

¹⁰⁶ A. Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁷ Diary entry, 7 August 1914, Captain Charles J. Wintour MSS, IWM.

Jellicoe himself, being a long-time friend of Callaghan's, was likely more than a little indignant himself, and from Wick he fired back at the Admiralty:

'Detained Wick by fog. Am firmly convinced after consideration that the step you mentioned to me is fraught with gravest danger at this juncture and might easily be disastrous owing to extreme difficulty of getting into touch with everything at short notice.
The transfer even if carried out cannot be accomplished for some time.
I beg earnestly that you will give matter further consideration before you take this step.'¹⁰⁸

From the *Centurion* he sent another protest after arriving at Scapa on August 2nd:

'Reference my personal telegram last night. Am more than ever convinced of vital importance of making no change. Personal feeling are entirely ignored in reaching this conclusion.'¹⁰⁹

Churchill's reply that evening was definite:

'I can give you 48 hours after joining Fleet. You must be ready then.'¹¹⁰

Jellicoe sent another exasperated telegram to his superiors at half an hour to midnight:

'Yours of second. Can only reply am certain step contemplated is most dangerous beg that it may not be carried out. Am perfectly willing to act on board Fleet Flagship as assistant if desired to be in direct communication.
'Hard to believe it is realised what grave difficulties change Commander-in-Chief involves at this moment. Do not forget also long experience of command of Commander-in-Chief.'¹¹¹

Apparently not satisfied that this message was sufficient, Jellicoe sent another early the next morning using language such that there could be no possible doubt as to interpretation:

'Quite impossible to be ready such short notice. Feel it my duty to warn you emphatically you court disaster if you carry out intention of changing before I have thorough grasp of Fleet and situation.
I am sure Hamilton, Madden, or any Admiral recently in Home Fleet will be of my opinion.'¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Temple Patterson (ed.), *Jellicoe Papers*, i, p. 41

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 58.

Amazingly, Jellicoe was apparently still unsatisfied with this blistering missive, or perhaps he felt his language had been *too* strong, and he sent a third wire two hours later. Tacking a new course, Jellicoe emphasized the morale effect of Callaghan's sudden replacement:

‘Add to last message. Fleet is imbued with feelings of extreme admiration and loyalty for Commander-in-Chief. This is very strong factor.’¹¹³

In the end, none of these messages were to any avail. The First Lord's reply, received aboard *Centurion* in the early afternoon of August 3rd, was direct and final:

‘Expeditionary Force will not leave at present, and therefore Fleet movements connected with it will not immediately be required. I am sending Madden to-night to be at your side. I am telegraphing to the Commander-in-Chief directing him to transfer command to you at earliest moment suitable to the interests of the Service I rely on him and you to effect this change quickly and smoothly, personal feeling cannot count now only what is best for all, you should consult with him frankly.’¹¹⁴

This final telegram left no ambiguity. Those who describe other Admiralty orders of this time period—especially those relating to the *Goeben* and *Breslau*—as muddled and unclear might use this signal for an unkind comparison.

Callaghan, meanwhile, was unaware of this drama playing out despite it directly concerning him. As James Goldrick suggests, the first ‘bald message’ the Commander-in-Chief received on the matter ‘must have come as a terrible shock’.¹¹⁵ The message arrived early in the morning of August 4th and read:

‘Their Lordships have determined upon, and H.M. The King has approved, the appointment of Sir John Jellicoe as Commander-in-Chief. You are to strike your flag forthwith, embark in the *Sappho* or other cruiser, and come ashore at Queensferry, reporting yourself at the Admiralty thereafter at your earliest convenience. These orders are imperative.’¹¹⁶

The die thus cast, Jellicoe, with a reluctance that one writer felt to border on ‘self-

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Goldrick, *King's Ships*, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 22.

deselection on grounds of unsuitability', succeeded Callaghan as Commander-in-Chief Home Fleets, a post soon to be renamed Commander-in-Chief Grand Fleet.¹¹⁷ Callaghan privately admitted to his friend Sir George Egerton (who it will be recalled left the post of Second Sea Lord as a result of a similarly sudden personnel change instigated by Churchill) that he 'was treated abominably.' However, Callaghan felt that 'I have a clear conscience in having left the Home Fleet ready' for *Der Tag*.¹¹⁸

As a matter of interest, the Grand Fleet's diary entry for the entire affair reads simply: 'V.A. Jellicoe was appointed C in.C in place of Admiral Callaghan who hauled down his flag & departed in Sappho for Queensferry.'¹¹⁹

To War

While the change of command drama played out, the Home Fleet was gathering at Scapa. Then occurred the first invasion scare of the war. The Admiralty received intelligence reports that three German transports had left the Baltic on August 1st. This information was duly passed on to Callaghan, who responded by sending the Third Cruiser Squadron plus *Achilles* and *Cochrane* 'full speed to Shetland Islands to prevent landing of troops'.¹²⁰ Nothing was found.

The War Telegram was issued by the Admiralty at 2300 on August 4th.¹²¹ The Home Fleet, and the rest of Royal Navy, was now at war.

¹¹⁷ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

¹¹⁸ Callaghan to Egerton, 27 August, 1914, RNMN/EGERTON/3, Admiral Sir George Egerton MSS, Liddle Collection, University of Leeds.

¹¹⁹ GFD entry, 4 August 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

¹²⁰ GFD entry, 3 August 1914, MAD/1, Madden MSS.

¹²¹ Goldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

CONCLUSION

The Grand Fleet that Jellicoe took to war in August 1914 was without doubt the most powerful armada of men o’war ever assembled up to that time. It was an armada that ‘was ready, or, what was almost as valuable, *believed* itself to be ready.’¹ Admiral Usborne recalled that ‘when the Fleet sailed on the 4th we knew that our hour had come.’² Beatty’s Flag Captain, Alfred Chatfield, felt that as the Royal Navy ‘had not fought for a century; it was time we repeated the deeds of our forefathers.’³ Aboard the old cruiser *Endymion*—one of the ships responsible for the northern commercial blockade—Cadet Geoffrey Harper wrote that ‘when the end of the watch came & 8 bells struck I thought “at last — we’ve begun War with Germany after all these years of talk — now we’ll see”. There was a ripping kind of “air” of perfect calm & efficiency about it. We knew the Navy had been preparing for a week & everyone was ready.’⁴

The backbone of the Grand Fleet was the four Battle Squadrons, each of which had once been the core of an independent fleet:

1914 Designation	Original Designation
First Battle Squadron	Nore Division, Home Fleet
Second Battle Squadron	Channel Fleet
Third Battle Squadron	Atlantic Fleet
Fourth Battle Squadron	Mediterranean Fleet

In just over seven years virtually the entire frontline strength of the Royal Navy had been brought together under a single command.

Looking back it seems a clear line of evolution from the original Home Fleet of 1907 to the spearshaft of victory of 1918. That the original Home Fleet was the direct ancestor of the

¹ Marder, *FDSF*, i, p. 435.

² Vice-Admiral C.V. Usborne, *Blast and Counter-Blast: A Naval Impression of the War*, cheap ed. (London: John Murray, 1938), p. 31.

³ Chatfield, Admiral of the Fleet Lord, *The Navy and Defence: The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield, P.C. G.C.B., O.M., Etc.* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1942), p. 120.

⁴ Diary entry, 4 August 1914, HRPR 1/1, Harper MSS.

Grand Fleet is unquestionable. What is questionable is the exact sequence of events that made up this evolution. The journey, not the destination, is the most important thing. With this in mind, there are two competing explanations for the beginning of that journey, i.e. the Home Fleet's devising and creation in 1906-7.

The first explanation is more or less the 'traditionalist' view espoused most notably by Arthur Marder.⁵ Drawing heavily on official Admiralty prints and the writings, published and unpublished, of key naval and government figures, the 'traditionalist' narrative is the same as the official explanations given in 1907: the Home Fleet was a further reorganization of the Royal Navy's strength at home to both adjust to the changing geopolitical situation and further improve the efficiency of the navy's considerable reserve strength. Left unsaid publicly, but obvious to the concerned parties on both sides of the North Sea was the creation of a powerful naval force whose only realistic opponent was the *Kaiserliche Marine*. All that followed was an outgrowth of Sir John Fisher's original intentions for the Home Fleet.

The second creation narrative for the Home Fleet is that advanced forcefully by Nicholas Lambert. Taking into account the same sources as Marder, Lambert employs many others and casts a jaundiced eye over them all, taking full account of Jon Sumida's strictures that Admiralty policy in the Prewar Era was 'a multi-level process that was influenced heavily by budgetary pressure, technical uncertainty, flaws in bureaucratic organi[z]ation, and the vagaries of chance.'⁶ It is Nicholas Lambert's contention that the Home Fleet was proposed and created in response to the severe financial strictures enforced by the newly empowered Liberal government and was meant to shift Navy's primary weapon in the North Sea from the gun to the torpedo. The Home Fleet was so constituted that destroyer and submarine flotillas would be the true heart of the

⁵ Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-76.

⁶ Sumida, *IDNS*, p. xviii.

organization, not the heavy warships which ‘historians have assumed... formed the core of the Home Fleet—taking little notice of the first sea lord’s [sic] claims that things were not what they seemed.’⁷ The subsequent evolution of the Home Fleet is regarded as an aberration and is of little interest except as an illustration of how Fisher’s original intentions were abandoned or ignored.

On balance, the evidence supports Marder’s ‘traditionalist’ approach far more than Lambert’s with the exception of Marder’s lack of appropriate emphasis on the financial realities that spurred Sir John Fisher and his fellow members of the Board of Admiralty to propose and create the Home Fleet in the last half of 1906. The economies demanded by Chancellor Asquith and their broad support in Campbell-Bannerman’s Cabinet left the Admiralty, and especially First Lord Tweedmouth, with precious little room to manoeuvre. To safeguard what they could, with emphasis on the next year’s new construction programme, an offer was made that reduced the active fleets by eleven heavy warships—seven battleships and four armoured cruisers.

By the time orders were issued for this reorganization in late October the goals had changed. Instead of the withdrawn ships going into reserve they were to form the nucleus of an entirely new command, which would also absorb the reserve units at the three Home Ports. This new Home Fleet was similar in conception and execution to a pre-Fisher reform of the Navy’s reserve ships carried out in 1902-3, but was on a much greater scale.⁸ When complete, the general situation would be ‘the Channel Fleet, strongest of the British fleets... at Portland, with two fighting wings thrown out, as it were, to cover the exposed flanks, one at the Nore and the Other (Atlantic Fleet) at Berehaven.’⁹

But what of the multitude of torpedo-armed flotilla craft that would come under the command of the C.-in-C. Home Fleet in peacetime? The assumption that their assignment to the

⁷ Nicholas Lambert, *JFNR*, p. 162.

⁸ Seligmann, ‘Prelude’, pp. 506-519.

⁹ Marder, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

Home Fleet meant they were to be the main striking force of that organization is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the Admiralty's plans for the use of flotilla craft during wartime. These plans had been developed under the same pressures that had led to the creation of the destroyer in the 1890s,¹⁰ and involved the use of destroyers to watch the exits of German ports as a observational tripwire 'able to press home its investigations of enemy's ports fronting upon the *Narrow Seas* and *German Ocean*, with a well grounded confidence that, if chased, it may show a clean pair of heels to an enemy in superior force.'¹¹ The efforts undertaken to equip the destroyer flotillas with the best communications equipment available, first carrier pigeons and then wireless, confirms the importance of their reconnaissance capabilities.¹²

The importance of the destroyer-based observation blockade to the Royal Navy's strategic planning against Germany can be seen in the presence of observational patrols right off the Waddenzee coast from the 1907 War Plans through to the abrupt end of Sir Arthur Wilson's tenure as First Sea Lord post-Agadir. The 1907 war plans also established the principle of strangulating of German commerce via distant blockade based on patrols between the Shetlands and Norway and the Straits of Dover.¹³

The creation of the Home Fleet resulted in an awkward command situation: the new organization possessed the bulk of ships in home waters but was commanded by a flag officer junior to the C.-in-C. of the Channel Fleet. Had the Commander-in-Chief, Channel Fleet been anyone other than the obstreperous Lord Charles Beresford this would have probably been a minor matter. Indeed Beresford's own actions had suggested there might not have been an issue;

¹⁰ Grimes, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Ottley, 'The Strategic Aspects of Our Building Programme, 1907', 7 January 1907, p. 7, RIC/5, Richmond MSS.

¹² The equipping of large numbers of destroyers with wireless sets was the principal reason behind the abolition of the Naval Pigeon Service in 1908. Admiralty, 'Naval Pigeon Service abolished. Reduction of Complements.', 24 March 1908, ADM 1/7992. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 362, references this abolition but misses its significance.

¹³ Nicholas Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*.

he had previously written that Home Fleet C.-in-C. Sir Francis Bridgeman was eminently worthy of a fleet command.¹⁴

The tragicomic farce that followed has to be rated amongst the most embarrassing episodes in the long history of the Royal Navy. If Fisher's methods often seemed to lack tact as is sometimes claimed, Beresford's lacked in both proportionality and simple shame. In the final analysis it is amazing Beresford held his command as long as he did. A less socially-connected officer would have been sacked after a fraction of Beresford's insubordination, and indeed Beresford came within an ace of this fate numerous times, only to escape deserved punishment. Rarely has the malign influence of aristocratic politics on the functioning of an armed service been demonstrated so theatrically. Yet for all his defiance and troublemaking, Beresford was not an incompetent leading a group of useless sycophants: the subsequent service records of the Channel Fleet's officers prove that.

Nevertheless Beresford's rebellion ended in his command being wiped out, albeit through administrative reorganization, not enemy action.¹⁵ The Channel Fleet ceased to be and was absorbed into the very organization Beresford and his acolytes had done their best to discredit: the Home Fleet. It was an undignified for an important command with a high public reputation, and not for nothing did some mourn its passing.¹⁶

Dramatic as the Channel Fleet's immolation at Beresford's hands was, it was on a strategical level meaningless. It had long been decided the Home and Channel Fleets would be unified in wartime, rendering their peacetime nomenclature an irrelevancy. And for all his interference with the Admiralty, Beresford had little effect on the trajectory of their strategic planning for war with Germany. His muddled protests against the commercial blockade strategy

¹⁴ Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁵ Though Beresford himself would probably disagree!

¹⁶ Battenberg to McKenna, 13 March 1909, f. 23, MCKN 3/9, McKenna MSS.

codified in the 1907 War Plans were by and large ignored. His major lasting contribution to the Navy's warfighting repertoire was the experimental work the Channel Fleet did to equip fishing trawlers as minesweepers.¹⁷

For all the impugning the Admiralty's war plans of 1907-1911 have come in for, a careful analysis shows a consistent overall strategic conception and utilization of resources. What appeared to be a backwards close blockade of the German coast was in fact consistent effort to clear the way the major obstacle preventing Britain bringing what Colin Gray called 'the leverage of sea power' against Germany.¹⁸ There is no great mystery why war plans of the Prewar Era dealt with the preliminary phase of the war almost exclusively: until the German fleet was swept aside the exploitation of maritime dominance was theoretical. Whether the destroyer-based observational patrols from advanced bases (either seized from Germany or built at sea from scuttled hulks and obsolete ironclads) would have been successful is an open and unanswerable question. What is not questionable is that the observational blockade plans show that the Prewar Era Admiralty had a consistent strategic vision which historians have rarely appreciated.¹⁹

That the observational blockade paradigm died with Sir Arthur Wilson's First Sea Lordship is symptomatic of another trait of the Prewar Navy. Since the advent of Fisher the service had become increasingly secretive and uncooperative with the outside world, as can be seen in the great decline in contributions by senior naval officers to, for instance, the Royal United Services Institution. For all the success the Admiralty had in protecting their finances—and especially the funding of new construction—they consistently lost ground to the Army in

¹⁷ Frank C. Bowen, *History of the Royal Naval Reserve* (London: The Corporation of Lloyd's, 1926), p. 94. The original file survives as Admiralty, 'Proposed use of Trawlers for Mine Sweeping.', 1908, D.306/1908, ADM 1/7981.

¹⁸ Colin S. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Grimes, *op. cit.*

what discussions the generally apathetic Liberal governments occasionally held regarding Britain's grand strategic plans. That the 'Continental Commitment' trumpeted by those like General Sir Henry Wilson was largely a bill of goods misses the fact it was still more substantial in the eyes of the Cabinet than the vague and often mysterious plans the Navy deemed to share with the Government, especially as the Anglo-French *entente* grew stronger. Bluntly, the War Office simply played the game better. That it took a belligerent outsider like Winston Churchill to bring the Navy back into competition on a grand strategic level says much.

For all the good that Churchill did at the Admiralty—and much of what he did was good, at least prior to August 1914—his methods, like Fisher, often needlessly salted wounds instead of soothing them. The case of Sir Francis Bridgeman is the clearest example. Though never comfortable as an administrator, Bridgeman's common sense, unrivalled sea command experience, and popularity within the naval officer corps made him an invaluable asset to the new First Lord. Unfortunately in temperament Bridgeman and Churchill were oil and water, a conflict only exacerbated by the young minister's domineering manner and carelessness in observing the types of social niceties and peculiarities that the Prewar Navy had in droves. That the uneasy Bridgeman-Churchill partnership ended in a catastrophe may have been inevitable. What was not nearly so sure was that Churchill would escape the maelstrom as he did, more or less intact. In no small part this can be attributed to Bridgeman's acceptance of the situation out of a desire to safeguard the service he loved.

That Prince Louis of Battenberg, a serenely smooth and intelligent natural-born courtier should succeed Bridgeman comes as no shock—indeed simple prejudice had prevented him succeeding Wilson instead of Bridgeman. Battenberg was able to build on Bridgeman's accomplishments—and these were not few in number—and keep the excitable First Lord on the

rails well enough (for the most part!) to complete a thorough transformation of the Admiralty's strategic direction. In place of the now-unworkable observational blockade, the flotillas were joined with the battlefleet in a single combined unit of naval force unparalleled in strength. The proto-Grand Fleet's great strengths have been often overlooked on account of its uninspiring wartime performance. That it never achieved the great and crushing victory it was created for should not detract from the achievement of its creation.

No small part in that creation was played by its final prewar Commander-in-Chief, Sir George Callaghan. One of the original 1907 Home Fleet flag officers, Callaghan's promotion upon Bridgeman's recall to the Admiralty ushered in a transformatory period in the Royal Navy's tactical operation. Having impressed the First Lord, Callaghan was able to exercise a wide influence over all aspects of the Home Fleet's strategy and operations that rivalled those of the Admirals of the age of sail. From 1911 to 1914 Callaghan and his subordinates—including the much-maligned Sir David Beatty and his staff—synthesized a system of tactics and a command structure that, when war came, proved remarkably resilient under combat conditions. When Admiralty-mandated functions and missions proved unworkable, such as the experimental 'intermediate blockade' dispositions of 1912 or the system of coastal defence patrols that failed in two successive Grand Manoeuvres, Callaghan with the assistance of an able staff organization, was able to force the Admiralty to change things to what was considered in the Fleet to be more effective arrangements. To a remarkable extent, the spear was giving orders to the spearman. The Grand Fleet that went to war in 1914 was as much Sir George Callaghan's as it was Lord Fisher's or anyone else's. That he was sacked for Sir John Jellicoe on the very precipice of war has left him an undeservedly obscure figure. It is a full measure of Jellicoe's own genius for command that he fought so hard to avoid taking the purple from the man who had done so much

to forge the weapon now being torn from his grasp. Had war not come, it is tempting to think Callaghan would have been a leading candidate to take Battenberg's place at the Admiralty's venerable top table.

The fleet that Callaghan presided over was dominated by the heavy gun. Despite this pre-eminence, the heavy gun was not the sole weapon Callaghan's ships could bring to bear. The torpedo had almost as great an influence on the Home Fleet's development. The long effort beginning with Sir William May to develop a system of tactics for the operation of destroyers together with the battlefleet was as integral to the development of the Home Fleet as the development and refinement of the dreadnoughts that formed the fleet's core, or the work of men like Sir Percy Scott, Arthur Pollen, and Frederic Dreyer to optimize the capabilities of those dreadnoughts' main batteries. The fleet submarine programme, which was pursued so doggedly immediately prior to the outbreak of war, is perhaps the ultimate example of how much the torpedo mattered to the battle fleet.

Having established the torpedo's crucial importance, it is well to warn against carrying that importance too far. Despite Sir Percy Scott's mid-1914 admonition in *The Times* that the era of the dreadnought was approaching its eclipse,²⁰ or Sir John Fisher's longstanding and ardent advocacy of the submarine, there is no sign that the dreadnought would be replaced as the pith and marrow of Britain's naval supremacy any time soon if the records of the Admiralty are any guide. For all the efforts Winston Churchill exerted to promote the substitution of torpedo craft of all sorts for the annual dreadnought order in 1914, at the end of the day the battleship held the field. The never-implemented July 1914 scheme for the future organization of the Navy's battleship and cruiser squadrons proves this. On the same day he was supposed to have put into

²⁰ Sir Percy Scott, 'Large Ships or Small? The Needs of Great Britain at Sea.', *The Times*, 5 June 1914, no. 40542, pp. 9-10.

practice a revolution in the Navy's force structure, Winston Churchill in fact minuted his approval of the old battleship orthodoxy.²¹ He did not do so out of surrender to a stale and conservative 'gun club'. Rather, his reasons had everything to do with the unceasing issues of financial optimization, strategic calculus, and simple manning requirements.²² In the First Lord's final analysis of July 15th, 1914, the rewards for throwing over the dreadnought standard were simply too marginal. Whatever the Navy's plans for the torpedo-armed flotilla craft were in 1914, they would supplement the battleship in the Home Fleets, not replace it.

²¹ Churchill minute, 15 July 1914, on 'Cruiser Squadron and Battle Squadron Programme', O.D. 132/1914, 8 July 1914, ADM 1/8383/179.

²² The latter was especially important, since building large numbers of additional small craft required a larger proportion of junior officers. This was, as has been shown, the exact group that was in shortest supply in 1914.

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