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The Royal Navy North Sea War Plan 1907-1914

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Abstract:

On retiring in spring 1907, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson assisted his respected First Sea Lord, John Fisher, by consolidating their common ideas into a memorandum about how to defeat Germany quickly via the destruction of the High Seas Fleet in the North Sea, thereby creating an alternative to sending the army to the Continent. His memo mirrored the observational blockade concepts of Captain George Ballard and the work of Captain Henry Jackson on how to employ wireless telegraphy in fleet command and control. This article follows how these ideas in interplay with experience from the annual manoeuvres influenced the developing war planning up to the start of the war in summer 1914.

The Royal Navy North Sea War Plan 1907-1914

The article originated with a research project started a decade ago to provide an account of Denmark's strategic position from 1911 to 1920. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to gain a clear picture of the thinking and planning of the German Army and the Imperial German Navy. However, as the Germans only planned to react to British actions in the north, it was even more important to understand how the Royal Navy planned to conduct a naval war against Germany in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

It soon became clear that it would not be possible merely to refer to an existing consensus of Royal Navy historians. An independent narrative of what happened and the relationship between cause and effect had to be developed.¹ It could, however, be based on the work of others, such as Nicholas A. Lambert's discovery of the importance of the Admiralty "War Room";² Shawn T. Grimes's³ charting of the early war planning of the Naval Intelligence Department, Stephen Cobb's extraction of the character of Royal Navy elite networking during that period,⁴ and finally on Richard Dunley's incisive and thorough reconstruction of the controversial Royal Navy plans for the use of offensive mine fields in support of its North Sea operations.⁵

The critical reading also benefited from a career as a strategic level force and war planner and Joint Staff College lecturer, as well as from the opportunity to

1 The initial work on the subject was published in *Den lange vej mod 9. April. Historien om de fyrre år før den tyske operation mod Norge og Danmark i 1940* (Odense 2010) and in *Det lille land før den store krig. De danske farvande, stormagtsstrategier, efterretninger og forsvarsforberedelser omkring kriserne 1911-1913* (Odense 2012). A short English language article, *A Summary of the Royal Navy's Strategic Discourse* in the latter book presented the first outline of conclusions. A second development was presented to the 2012 Congress of the International Commission for Military History in Sofia and published in 2013 in the congress *Acta* as *The Fate of the Royal Navy's Network – Centric North Sea Operations Vision 1904-1916*. This final refinement of the conclusions took place after the spring 2014 Greenwich University Conference, *Naval and Maritime History in Two World Wars*.

2 Strategic Command and Control for Manoeuvre Warfare: Creation of the Royal Navy's "War Room" System 1905-1915, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Apr., 2005).

3 *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887-1918* (Woodbridge 2012).

4 *Preparing for Blockade 1885-1914. Naval Contingency for Economic Warfare* (Farnham 2013).

5 *The Offensive Mining Service: Mine Warfare and the Strategic Development in the Royal Navy 1900-1914*, (unpublished Ph.D.-thesis, King's College, London 2013) (Dunley (2013)).

experience the strategic management cultures of the 1960s and the 1990s, with their belief in the possibility and blessings of the management of military operations from the centre. In these later cases, as in 1905-16, the optimism was built on a combination of the promises or requirements of new technology, on a limited trust in distant subordinates and on our inherent Western belief in the virtues of scientific management.⁶

1905-1907: The initial studies

By 1905, when the Royal Navy had fully accepted the German High Seas Fleet as its chief opponent, it was already mastering and implementing reporting and control by wireless telegraphy. The Admiralty under its new First Sea Lord, Admiral John ('*Jacky*') Fisher, was determined to employ the new technology in support and control of operations, including those in the North Sea; now destined to become the main theatre of operations. It soon inspired him to believe that he could centralize operational control with himself in the Admiralty. The wireless telegraph communications and control system had been developed since 1899 by Captain, soon Rear-Admiral, Henry Jackson.

Using the new means of communications and intelligence Fisher would be able to orchestrate the destruction of the German High Seas Fleet. He could already assume that he would have the necessary basic intelligence from radio-equipped, cruiser-supported destroyer patrols off the German bases. They would operate in line with the concept of the observational blockade developed by Captain George Alexander Ballard in the 1890s.⁷ From such deployment the destroyer patrols would also reduce the risks of German landings and torpedo attacks on British bases that were discussed by policy makers such as Arthur Balfour from 1905 onwards.⁸ In his 1903 paper "*Wireless telegraphy as a means of signalling when scou-*

6 The article has not been through a traditional peer review. Instead it has been evaluated by Andrew Lambert, the Laughton Professor of Naval History in the Department of War Studies at King's College as well as by Dr David Morgan-Owen from the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, who is a specialist in the pre-First World War planning of the service. The latter noted in a 10 June 2014 comment that the article's content was "*extremely significant and has a large number of important implications*". Lambert noted on 8 June that the "*argument ... is entirely new, and based on an extensive study of the key archives. It renders coherent and logical a process that has long been misunderstood, and enhances our understanding of major figures in British strategic policy-making. In my opinion the paper should be published as a matter of urgency. This field of study is currently very active, with a wide ranging discussion ongoing among international scholars. Your paper would be a major contribution to the ongoing debate*." This made the decision to publish the full article here easy. It was also underlined that parts of the arguments should be repeated in relevant British academic journals.

7 Grimes, *War Planning*, pp. 35-50.

8 David Gethin Morgan-Owen, 'History is a Record of Exploded Ideas': Sir John Fisher and Home Defence, 1904-10, *The International History Review* (Published online: 07 Oct 2013), pp. 11ff.



Henry Jackson, a key person in the RN technological innovation in the years up to the war. Here in 1917. (Imperial War Museum)



Admiral John "Jacky" Fisher drove and guided his service 1904 until his retirement in 1910. (cimsec.org)

ting" Ballard, then the Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence, had demonstrated his awareness of the possibilities of the new technology.⁹

Richard Dunley has argued convincingly how the focus on the potential conflict with Germany deepened in summer 1905 roughly three months into the Moroccan Crisis, and how this was linked to the integration of offensive mining into the developing North Sea Strategy as well as the creation of the Offensive Mining Service that autumn.¹⁰ He also described how this British development was catalysed by actual Russian and Japanese employment for mines in the Far East. Starting the war with the torpedo boat raid on Port Arthur the Japanese had underlined the underwater threat against bases. The inspiration from the war in Asia came in other fields as well. In May the Japanese demonstrated the practical use of radio telegraphy for battle. During that spring Fisher had established the War Room, his joint intelligence and trade warfare situation and control centre.¹¹

⁹ The National Archives of United Kingdom [TNA], ADM 231/38, Admiralty, Intelligence Department (No. 701), February 1904. Papers on Naval Subjects, 1903, Volume II, Paper 2.

¹⁰ Dunley (2013), pp. 122-151.

¹¹ Nicholas A. Lambert, *War Room*; Norman Friedman, *Network-Centric Warfare. How Navies Learned to Fight Smarter Through Three World Wars* (Annapolis 2009), pp. 3-15, puts the centralized control into a historical framework, but misses the costs.

Fisher had the required superiority in battleships to divide the British force without the risk of one part being defeated by a larger fleet, and during these months he was in the process of revolutionising battleship construction and thus giving the Royal Navy fast and powerful battleship groups that would facilitate the out-maneuvring and destruction of the High Seas Fleet if it actually sallied from its North Sea bases. If not, the Royal Navy would have to enter the Baltic to defeat it. The fear of such an entry might actually deter war. In summer of 1905, Norway seceded from Sweden; Germany attempted to get Russian support for closing the Baltic to outsiders in July; and the Channel Fleet cruised in the Baltic in August.

Stephen Cobb has given us a perceptive insight into the small elite network available to Fisher which generated concepts for how a war against Germany might be fought and won.¹² It was actually an informal version of the similarly small group of creative officers that formed the centre of the Berlin part of the German Army General Staff. The key members of Fisher's small network – its individuals and their roles will be outlined later – contributed in different ways during the following months and years. The networking was not only essential in relation to North Sea and trade warfare strategy, but also in the fields of ship design and use of emerging technologies, education, fleet mobilisation, and the international legal framework for the application of sea-power.

Ballard's initial contribution to the planning for a German-British war was an attempt to develop a common strategic understanding with the British Army in a correspondence in autumn 1905 with two army general staff planners, including his fellow service intellectual, Colonel Charles Edward Callwell, part of whose work made him the first theorist on the interaction of naval and sea-landing operations. In 1905 the Colonel had just updated his 1897 work on the subject with the classic "*Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance: Their Relations and Interdependence*". Callwell was the Deputy Director of the Imperial General Staff Operations Division, and as the Admiralty Intelligence Division was still responsible for war planning he was Ballard's formal counterpart. The initiative to the dialogue probably came from the Admiralty. However, it started with a letter from Captain Grant Duff, Callwell's assistant. Ballard responded carefully, but in October Callwell's superiors apparently forced him to stop his end of the bridge-building, as the army leadership sought an independent continental role for the service.¹³

During the second quarter of that year Ballard was absent from the Admiralty to complete the War Course at the Naval War College.¹⁴ Thereafter he formally left the Admiralty to captain cruisers, from August to command the armoured cruiser HMS *Hampshire*.

¹² Stephen Cobb, pp. 12-55, Appendixes 1 & 2.

¹³ TNA, ADM 116/1043B2, pp. 210-213.

¹⁴ TNA, ADM 203/99, "*War with Germany*", 1 September 1906.

The naval intellectual, Captain George Ballard, played key roles twice in the period, up to spring 1907 and again from early 1912 to spring 1914. (National Portrait Gallery)



Another person in Fisher's policy network was Captain Edmond John Warre Slade, the College commandant. In September 1906 he contributed with a memorandum where he analysed a British-German war. He suggested operations to block German trade, offensive operations to capture an island off the German coast to force the German fleet to give battle and possibly to hinder German use of the Kiel Canal. Thereafter the Royal Navy could start operations into the Baltic.¹⁵ Fisher's network included the civilian naval historian, Julian Stafford Corbett, who lectured at the War Course. For use in that course he had developed a short compendium in 1906 which did much more than defining terms and definitions as the title promised. It actually outlined a new conceptual framework for the use of naval power.¹⁶

There were two other important contributors to the preparatory brainstorming about war with Germany. One was Ballard's superior officer, the Admiralty Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Charles Langdale Ottley, and his naval attaché in Berlin, Captain Phillip Dumas.

15 TNA, ADM 116/1036B.

16 War Course: Strategical Terms and Definitions used in Lectures on Naval History, Appendix "Green Pamphlet" in Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London 1911/Annapolis 1988 edition).

During the winter and early spring 1906-07 Fisher established a small “committee”, named after Ballard, to consolidate the different inputs about warfare against Germany into formal plan studies. The large report that was quickly drafted and printed had the character of a rather weakly edited anthology of independent papers. As Ballard wrote to Fisher in early May 1909, the committee brought together papers that had already been drafted by the Naval Intelligence Department with new contributions.¹⁷ However, it did describe some of the elements that remained parts of the North Sea operational concept that now developed. Ballard and his main assistant, Royal Marine Artillery Captain Maurice Hankey, presented the advantages of establishing effective trade blockade lines across the northern and southern entrances to the North Sea, thereby cutting access to international trade by German ships, and creating the basis for British control of any use of neutral shipping to evade the blockade.

The committee was supported by two experts, a gunnery specialist and a mining specialist. They remained anonymous. Richard Dunley argues convincingly that the mining specialist must have been the chief of the one year old Offensive Mining Service, Commander Herbert Orpen. He was close to Fisher, who created the committee, and few other mining experts existed.¹⁸ Due to the sensitive and secret character of any discussion of an employment of mines in support of naval strategy, it is logical that both the expert’s name and contributions were left out of the committee report.

Corbett contributed independently of the rest with a theoretical chapter on “*Some Principles of Naval Warfare*” based on his college hand-out. Slade repeated the idea of capturing the German North Frisian island of Borkum as a way to give support to Dutch will to resist German threats and to lure the High Seas Fleet out to its destruction. Where the effect of a trade war would only be felt after some time, the capture of Borkum was likely to provoke an early German reaction that could lead to a naval battle followed by a Baltic Sea operation. The report outlined in War Plans A and A1 (the latter in alliance with France) a combination of cruiser patrols between Norway and Scotland as well as the Dover Straits to cut off German trade, and observational blockades of the German coasts and Skagerrak maintained by cruisers and destroyers. The battle fleet should be concentrated off Hull to meet the German fleet if it came out.¹⁹ In February, when the committee was still working, Dumas contributed with a report from Berlin, where he underlined that the best way for the navy to damage Germany in a war would be to stop her seaborne trade. The German Navy would operate defensively and try to inflict losses on the Royal Navy by torpedo attack.²⁰ Dumas gave a number of proposals for British offensive action; several were rejected in the Admiralty’s

17 TNA, ADM 1/8997, G.A. Ballard, HMS Hampshire, Portsmouth, 3-5-1909 to Dear Sir John.

18 Dunley (2013), pp. 168f.

19 TNA, ADM 116/1043B, pp. 238-261.

20 Ibid., pp. 262-266.

staff comments to his report. The comments – unsigned, but probably written by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Charles Ottley – also doubted the British ability to stop German trade completely. It would be painful, but some imports would arrive via Dutch and Belgian ports. He disagreed that the Germans would stay on the defensive. They would probably make torpedo attacks against the British fleet and a raid on the coast. Therefore their bases had to be watched closely. These two observations would guide the following war planning.²¹

As Richard Dunley has argued, the discussion of the Danish Straits continued after the Ballard Committee had ended its work. It was a far too important issue to ignore, and in late summer 1907 the discussion became focused, probably on Callwell's initiative. The Admiralty's response was delayed until December that year by Slade's replacement of Ottley as Director of Naval Intelligence, but in spite of the lack of initial Admiralty encouragement, a series of meetings took place the following winter, and Callwell's assistant had a memo on "*War with Germany: The Entrances to the Baltic and the Position of Denmark*" ready in mid-June 1908. The possibility of operations were discussed during the following months, however under the impression of crises in both North Africa and the Balkans, the positive army views of operations in the Danish Islands had changed in the second half of December 1908 to a clearly negative one. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff considered that potential benefits did not justify the risks. Fisher then decided to stop the discussion. He did not want to reveal his war plans to the army, because it would be incapable of keeping the plan secret.²² This article will later address the substance of Fisher's planning and why he considered it necessary to keep it from the army – and everybody else.

1907-1908: The definition phase

From early 1908, the plan studies work started by the Ballard Committee continued into 1909. The framework became another new small, informal group, the "*Strategy Committee*", which could easily be monitored and inspired by Fisher via his naval assistant, Captain Herbert Richmond. As the gaming took place in the Naval War College, Slade's successors as President of the College had central roles: first Rear-Admiral Robert Swinburne Lowry and then Rear-Admiral Lewis Bayly. The key participant from Naval Intelligence was now Ballard's successor as Assistant Director, Captain Osmond De Beauvoir Brock. Brock seems to be the main writer during this second and final series of war plan studies.²³ Different scenarios (such as "*War Plans*" studies W1 and W3 for war against Germany and

21 Ibid., pp. 255-261. The format and substance is that of a superior officer's comments. It has an M branch number and is probably a typed copy of what was on the front of the original docket, which would have been the DNI's comments.

22 Richard Dunley: "The Danish Option: The Success and Failure of Inter-Service Planning against Germany 1907-08." *Mars & Clio* No. 36 (Spring 2013), pp. 59-66.

23 This is indicated in TNA, ADM 116/1043B, where files are named *Brock's War Plans*.

in 1909 W5 against a German-U.S. combination) and options (such as a military landing in Zealand to support the Danes) were developed, gamed and analysed.²⁴ The basic difference between the Ballard Committee's work and these follow-up war plans studies, and real war plans meant to guide naval action in war, was underlined by the planners.²⁵

However, even if the study work continued, a sketch of the later real war plan started to be developed immediately after the completion of the Ballard Committee report. The outline had the form of a memorandum by Admiral Arthur Wilson.

Wilson had just retired as Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, and the Admiral presented his "Remarks" after being acquainted with the Ballard Committee report. He started by noting that a German-British War was likely to be protracted because of the basic difficulties and constraints of a land power and a sea power fighting each other. He proposed that the British strategy in relation to the German Navy would be "*To tempt him out and to make the best arrangements to catch him at sea*". By aiming at placing one fleet on the enemy's routes back to his bases in the Bight or via the Kattegat to Kiel, the idea mirrored Wilson's insight and acceptance – like Corbett's – that naval warfare was about the sea lines of communications.²⁶

Wilson now repeated the view he had expressed in Spring 1906. Then he had rejected the idea that the trade blockade would be effective as German trade would just shift to neutral shipping and the use of harbours in neutral states bordering Germany.

He emphasized that it would be impossible to observe the German bases closely enough to avoid being bypassed by destroyers or minelayers at night; however, the immediate seizure of Borkum would ease observation of the mouth of River Ems. As the back-up to any observation of the German coast, the Straits of Dover should be effectively controlled by patrolling submarines and radio-equipped destroyers, supported by light cruisers. The active method for controlling the North Sea would be to conduct large-scale sweeps with the entire force available to the fleet Commander-in-Chief "*depending either on chance or on such scraps of information as can be obtained by the Commander-in-Chief*". A watch should be kept not only between the Skaw and the Swedish coast, but between the main sweeps a watch – a reduced observational blockade – should also be maintained at a distance from the mouth of the German rivers: one or two destroyers with a small light cruiser 40-50 miles further away from the coast, all backed-up by a larger, protected cruiser further out. This layered observational picket system should

24 TNA, ADM 116/1043B, pp. 349-394, 555-584, 653-676, 741-788; Grimes, p. 110.

25 Ibid., p. 331.

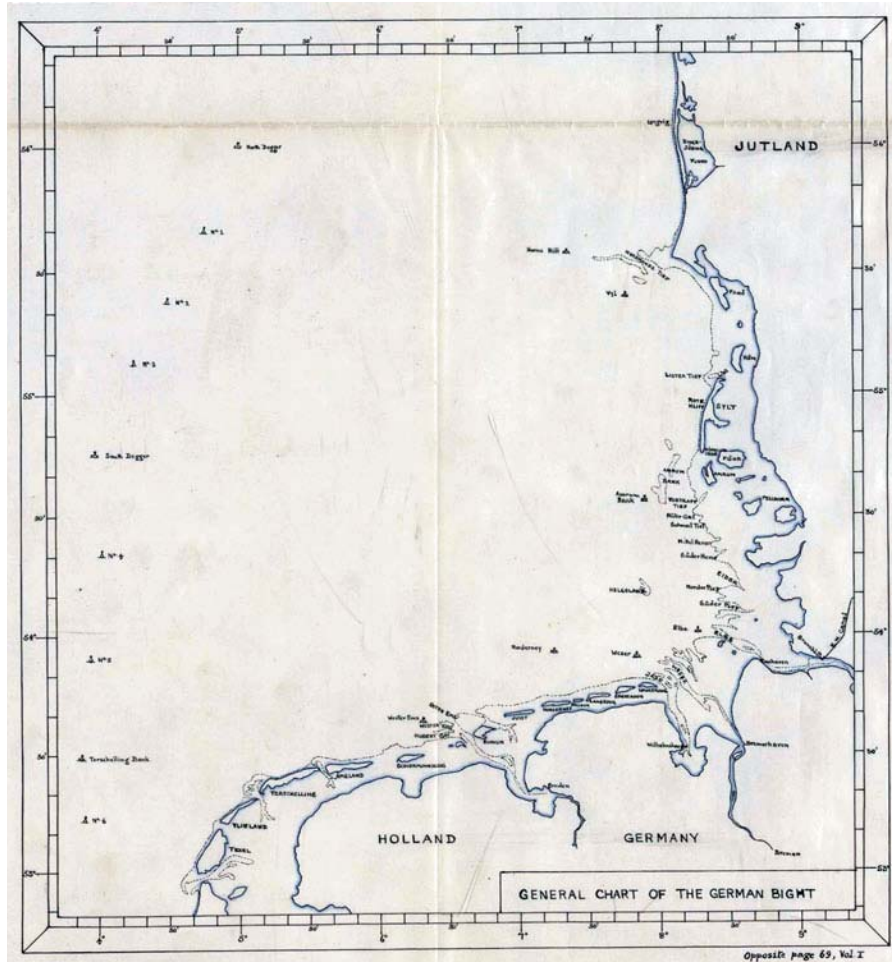
26 Corbett's relation to Wilson meant that the latter approved the text of the manuscript to "Some Principles of Maritime Strategy" before its publication in 1911. Andrew Lambert's reference to a correspondence between Troubridge and Corbett in July 1911 in his April 2014 lecture, *Sir Julian Corbett, Naval History and the Development of Sea Power Theory*.

Fisher convinced the retired Commander-in-Chief, Sir Arthur Wilson, that he should play the key role in developing the operational strategy for the North Sea. (From Marder. *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, Vol. I)



rely on radios for control and reporting. The main force should be organised in two fleets for the sweeps, “*either (of them) ... capable of engaging the whole German fleet on favourable terms*”. One of the fleets should operate from a northern port; the other should operate off the Danish coast, ready to cut off the German routes back through the Skagerrak or to the German Bight bases, “*according to the wireless information received*”. Wilson underlined that all information should be made available to the fleet Commander-in-Chief. The 1906 fleet manoeuvres had made clear that radio technology had now developed enough to support his direct control. It time of tension the battle fleets should be placed somewhere protected against German torpedo attacks, the northern fleet in Ireland or at least west of Scotland, and the southern one in the western part of the Channel. If Great Britain was alone against Germany, the British Army’s role should be limited to maintaining the threat of raids against the German coast.

Wilson considered that fighting a war against Germany in an alliance with France would be difficult because Britain would have to do as much as possible to prevent her ally from being defeated on land as she had been in 1870. Therefore the British Army should be used as a “*floating*” force conducting raids that forced the German Army to divert forces from the main front and maintain then deployed inactively to the north. At the end of the memo, Wilson outlined how the army and a large transport fleet could be used to best effect. He did not seem



The German Bight, where the High Seas Fleet would be caught and defeated.
 (The National Archives)

to understand that effective use of railways for troop movement meant that Germany did not have large forces deployed inactively in coastal and Danish Border defence to counter potential British landings. The German army could quickly respond with a massive reinforcement that could contain and thereafter destroy any force the British Army could make available for a landing.

What were the roots of Wilson's paper? He had given up command of the Channel Fleet at the end of February, and he would hardly have started preparing the memorandum on his own initiative. In all descriptions of Wilson one gets an impression of a very offensively, tactically and technically minded tough and taciturn naval officer. He was not a conceptual thinker. His service had made

him a highly proficient weapons specialist and capable tactical commander. Wilson's character was mirrored by his earlier ideas about how to fight a war against Germany. In a memorandum from June 1905 repeated in the above-mentioned letter to Fisher from March 1906, he had proposed ambitious landing operations in North Germany as well as collecting a specialised fleet of converted obsolete battleships for coastal fortress bombardment, and flat-bottomed vessels for operations in the shallow waters off the German North Sea littoral. The most likely inspiration to the paper would have been a wish from Fisher, and his work would have taken place during the next two months in the Admiralty, where he would have access to the final drafts of the committee report. Wilson's "Remarks", however, were rather different in character from his earlier ideas. They were dated "May" and printed early June, which makes it likely that they were completed in late May. Even if the memo did include some of his previously stated opinions, it was untypically balanced in relation to the risks of the observational blockade and included a flexible operational concept.

My thesis here is that the memo was developed in a discussion/brainstorming between Wilson and Fisher in April and May. The two old admirals respected each other and it would have been natural to Wilson, who otherwise was very difficult to advise, to take note of the opinions of his professional boss. The always sophisticated Fisher let Wilson get and feel the intellectual ownership of the result. The centralist element in the concept suited both Fisher's understanding of himself as the proven superior mind and Wilson, who like other artillery officers had become convinced of the need for scientific control of the use of power. In the development of the memo Fisher had in reality programmed the author and he could be certain that Wilson would agree with the concept, especially as the roots of the "Remarks" and its operational concept were secrets that only they had in common. As Grimes underlined, the First Sea Lord controlled the final phase and post-Ballard Committee planning closely, which makes it unlikely that he would have a memo published that he did not generally agree with. The fact that the Admiralty thereafter used the memo in printed form in its dispute with Admiral Beresford, Wilson's successor as Channel Fleet C-in-C, in reality confirms the thesis. There is one surviving source that directly illustrates the close interaction between the two admirals during Wilson's work with the "Remarks". On 14 May Wilson sent Fisher a letter asking the Admiralty to "*send me the NID work on German Coast Defences*". According to the note on the letter, Wilson was sent everything he asked for on the following day.²⁷

The Home Fleet had probably been established in autumn 1906 by Fisher to keep his new, powerful ships under his direct control. As David Morgan-Owen has underlined, the new, fast force could act as deterrence, as "*guard*" against

27 NMRN, MSS 253/117/3 Wilson of 14-5-1907 to Dear Fisher with note on reaction from 15-5-1907.

a German landing raid. Wilson's memorandum gave Fisher's creation the even more important role of one part of a decisive naval manoeuvre battle.

In the war plans studies of Spring 1908, the planners expressed agreement with Wilson's main assumptions, and in relation to the concept of battleship operations it stated that "As long as there is a Fleet in British Home Waters in full commission which is equal or superior to the German High Seas Fleet, and as long as we have a second Fleet in partial reserve which is so stationed as to be able to concentrate without being molested before the principal Fleet can support it, the defeat in detail of the main British forces is provided against". With the fast "guard" Home Fleet weak enough to tempt the Germans out, the trap would be set. The interaction of the two fleets could ensure German defeat.²⁸

During that spring the German Naval leadership recognised that the Royal Navy's North Sea strategy was being changed. Its reading of the British 1907 fleet manoeuvres led it to conclude that the British fleet would only operate lighter vessels, not battleships, in a blockade along the German coast.²⁹

In Summer 1908, Osmond Brock dealt with the operational concept for the North Sea in part of his memo "War with Germany". He noted that the basis of all Royal Navy "dispositions in peace or war is the attack of the German Fleet". It meant that the Royal Navy always should have a superior force available, and that this force should be "in such a position that if the German Fleet puts to sea it will be brought to action".

Echoing Wilson's remarks, Brock underlined that even if it was divided into divisions the fleet should be under the command of one Fleet Commander-in-Chief. It was important that the different parts were trained to cooperate and to operate from the places they were supposed to use in war. Where Wilson had recommended that the fleets were brought out of harm's way in time of tension ("strained relations"), Brock proposed a forward and visible deployment to signal resolve and thus deter, cruising in the North Sea 250-300 nautical miles off the German coast. As Andrew Lambert has emphasized, such visible deterrence mirrored Fisher's view of how the Navy should be used.³⁰ Where Wilson had suggested a physically divided fleet, Brock proposed a concentration of the fleet and the move

28 TNA. ADM 116/1043B 1 & 2, pp.280-292. *Most Secret. Remarks on War Plans by Admiral of the Fleet Sir A. K. Wilson, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.*, pp. 351- 393; Very Secret 19-5-1908 War Plan. Germany. W.I.; Grimes: *War Plans*, pp. 64 (and note 76), 99-100; for a good description of the Fisher-Wilson relationship, however without the benefit of the findings of Nicholas Lambert; Ruddock F. Mackay: *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Fisher), (Oxford 1973), pp. 367-371, 374. Otherwise: Arthur J. Marder: *British Naval Policy 1880-1905. The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, (London 1940), pp. 504-505; Morgan-Owen: *History*, pp. 14f.

29 P.M. Kennedy: The Development of German naval operations plans against England, 1896-1914, *English Historical Review*, (1989), pp. 64-66.

30 Andrew Lambert: 'The Possibility of Ultimate Action in the Baltic' *Die Royal Navy im Krieg, 1914-1916*, Michael Epkenhans, Jörg Hillman and Frank Nögler (eds.), *Skagerrakschlacht: Vorgeschichte - Ereignis - Verarbeitung* (Munich 2009); Andrew Lambert (2008); Dunley (2014).

Osmond de Brock in 1919.
As Ballard's replacement as Assistant
Director of Naval Intelligence
Brock played a key role in the
development and drafting of the
first comprehensive War Plan.
(National Portrait Gallery)



of its main base north to Rosyth in Scotland, which he considered better than the alternatives, Cromarty and Scapa Flow.

Brock thereafter described a basic fleet deployment in the planning memo "*Strained Relations. Scheme A*". It mirrored both the trap concept of Wilson's remarks and the now-decided operational centralization. The modern battleships (of the Home Fleet) cruised in the North Sea off North Lincolnshire to minimize vulnerability as a "*North Sea Guard*". The battleships of the Channel and Atlantic Fleets concentrated at Portland, and the Mediterranean Fleet moved to Gibraltar. The Straits of Dover would be patrolled by a combined force of small cruisers, destroyers and submarines. The main destroyer force was kept ready at Harwich "*ready for a dash at the Elbe*" and an armoured cruiser squadron cruised in the North Sea ready to establish a watch of the Skagerrak. Cruiser squadrons watched the German Bight. When war was declared a combined force of cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers would establish a night watch off the German river mouths somewhat closer than the one outlined by Wilson. A clear problem was that the requirement for destroyers in each night relay was half of the available number, leaving only enough for one replacement watch. In daylight the watch would be maintained by cruisers. No matter if the High Seas Fleet sallied north or



Lord Charles Beresford.
The Commander-in-Chief's
deepening conflict with Fisher
acted as a catalyst in centralising
operations to the Admiralty War
Room. (Library of Congress Image)

west, it would be observed and a battle fleet would be in position to move against its withdrawal route.³¹

By underlining unified fleet command, Brock may have been somewhat out of touch with Fisher's focus in summer 1908, a situation which may be related to Brock's past as Beresford's Flag Captain in the Mediterranean from 1904 to 1907. The previous year had increasingly been dominated by the struggle for control of war planning between the Admiralty and Channel Fleet Commander-in-Chief.

When taking over command of the Channel Fleet, Beresford had noted that his predecessors left no campaign plans that would enable his fleet "*to take instant action*" in war, and he asked the Admiralty to send him the result of their planning. The Board had already sent him a copy of the Ballard Committee Report in April, before he took over his new command. He considered the report "*An extremely clever paper*", but no basis for a "*practical Plan of Campaign*". Beresford insisted that he must be given a detailed list of his forces as the basis of any war planning, and that all types of ships and vessels and all fleets that would have to work together would have to be included. Two weeks later he made it clear that he would be perfectly able to make his fleet war plan the moment he got the required

31 TNA. ADM 116/1043B 1 & 2, pp.649-690, *War with Germany, etc.* Osmond De Beauvoir Brock, 10-6-1908.

information about the available forces, including from other Commanders-in-Chief who would come under his command in war, and he directed how the different forces should be trained. This demand contradicted directly the intentions of the Admiralty's orders from late 1906, when the Home Fleet had been created as an independent elite force under central control. In mid-June 1907 Beresford repeated his request, specifying that he needed information about the Home Fleet forces, and he concluded by underlining the "*totally unprepared state of the Home and Channel Fleets in regard to the preparations and organisation for War*." Now he was sent general Admiralty "War Orders" that simply made clear that "*The Fleet which will be placed under your command on the outbreak of war will be such as appears ... (to the Admiralty) ... most adequate to meet the situation...*" These orders simply specified that Beresford would get command of all fleets in home waters in a war with Germany. To inform Beresford of Wilson's analysis of his mission, the Admiralty included the "Remarks". It asked Beresford to forward his ideas about the use of destroyers and submarines in home waters, and noted that the fleets that would come under his command in war would periodically be exercised by him. These "War Orders" may be considered an outstretched hand to Beresford. If so it was rejected after just ten days, in late June 1907. The Commander-in-Chief insisted on a detailed list and full control, and considered Wilson's remarks to be irrelevant without a regularly updated list of his units.

The Fisher-Beresford dispute should not only be seen as a clash of personalities. The C-in-C insisted on a delegation of command authority that Fisher and the group around him considered less-than-ideal considering the new communications technology available.

In early July the Admiralty tried to appease Beresford by adding two armoured cruisers and two complete destroyer flotillas to his fleet, and it asked the admiral to give a full list of his requirements. In mid-July Beresford sent the required list, and on 18 July he communicated his satisfaction that the Admiralty seemed to accept his requests, but at the same time he underlined that he still lacked two battleships and that he needed to have full and exclusive control of destroyer force training. Beresford accepted that he now had a balanced force and thus the information necessary to make a "*Plan of Campaign*". On 30 July the Admiralty confirmed the transfer of the destroyer force, but it rejected both changing the command and exercise structure and giving him control of all destroyer flotilla training. In mid-August 1907 Beresford's pressure led the Admiralty to clarify its position in relation to all Commanders-in-Chief. The Admiralty was "*solely responsible for all matters of policy, such as the number and type of ships built, their manning and equipment, as well as their distribution into separate commands, and they alone have the responsibility of the strategic distribution of the Fleet in war, and of the general plan of operations to be followed on its outbreak*". Thereafter Beresford kept quiet until he was ready to comment on the results of the annual fleet manoeuvres, where the scenario had been a German-British naval war in the southern half of the North Sea. In the comments to the exercises from early

December, he correctly underlined that the Royal Navy lacked the large destroyers and modern cruisers necessary to maintain a close blockade of German light forces that was essential to averting threats to larger British units operating in the North Sea. The Admiralty replied in mid-December – in a week – that it was already addressing the lack of light units, and it made clear that it found Beresford's language unacceptably alarmist and pessimistic. Beresford's comments were actually considered so offensive that they caused the Admiralty to give up appeasing the Commander-in-Chief. The C-in-C had in reality ruptured the relations to the Admiralty. Fisher now considered him a "*dangerous lunatic*". Beresford and his ideas could be ignored thereafter.

The fact that Beresford was still unsatisfied was underlined on 1 June 1908, when he complained that his ability to train the other fleets remained wholly insufficient. He attached a new "*Second Plan of Action for British Fleet*" to his letter. This plan meant that both the Home and Atlantic Fleets would be abolished as independent fleets and become reduced to battleship squadrons under Beresford. All three battleship squadrons would evacuate the southern part of the North Sea and operate from the north. The southern part would be left to destroyer flotillas and some cruisers which would depart every afternoon to spend the night off the German coast. The Admiralty replied in a short letter one month later that it was always happy to receive new alternatives which would be considered together with other ideas, and thereafter proceeded to give him his new "*War Orders*" dated 1 July 1908.

These orders cancelled all other directives. They started by repeating the statement from August 1907 of the Admiralty's responsibilities. They then underlined that in a war against Germany, the North Sea would be the main scene of operations and Beresford would become the "*senior officer afloat in that sea ... in charge of active operations against the enemy's fleet*". The orders also underlined that the actual conditions could vary, "*and accordingly no single plan of action, however perfected, can be accepted as final*". The orders made clear that "*The principal object is to bring the main German fleet to decisive action and all other operations are subsidiary to this end*". Beresford would have no planning authority delegated in peace-time. A letter from Reginald McKenna, the First Lord, reinforced the message to the Commander-in-Chief that he should stop making trouble. This letter did not stop Beresford's communications which together amounted "*to a demonstration of antagonism to the Board's orders*", and Fisher suggested that best way of responding thereafter would be by a "*curt reply*" to each letter. All fleets received their "*War Orders*" on 4 August 1908.³²

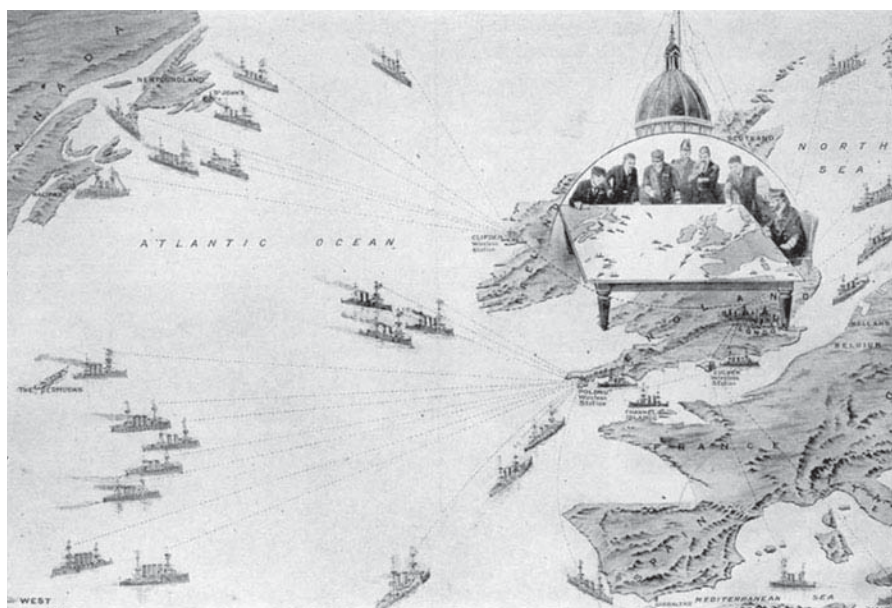
32 TNA. ADM 116/1037. C-in-C Channel No. 355/015 of 8-5-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 433/015 of 18-5-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 435/015 of 18-5-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 457/015 of 21-5-1907; Admiralty M-011566 of 22-12-1906 to Rear Admiral F. C. B. Bridgeman, M.V.O. Admiralty M.01314 of 23-10-1906 to the Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet. C-in-C Channel No. 601/015 of 14-6-1907; Admiralty Draft War Orders dated 11-6-1907; Admiralty M.0636 *War Orders* of 14-6-1907 to the Commander-in-Chief, H.M. Ships and Vessels,

The dispute with Beresford is described in some detail because it must have hardened the Admiralty's resolve to centralise operational control to the Admiralty War Room, removing any real command and control authority from the main fleet Commander-in-Chief. The necessary policy was explained and justified in the printed memo "*Wireless Telegraphy in War*" from 1908. It argued that the development of the wireless made operational delegation to a Commander-in-Chief afloat a mistake. "*The advance of wireless telegraphy has been so great and so rapid that an entirely new development of strategic organization becomes imperative. With the present installation it is possible to receive information and to transmit orders over a large area from the Admiralty with certainty*". At the same time orders were transmitted to a fleet in the North Sea, they would also be received in the Channel. All fleets – and every ship of those fleets – would know what the other fleets were doing. With the new technical possibilities, the fleet Commanders-in-Chief should only have command of units that were close enough to the "*scene of action in time to take part in the battle*". Thus the different fleets and all cruiser squadrons and destroyer flotillas in the North Sea not screening the fleets, could and should be controlled directly from the Admiralty. Only the Admiralty would possess the full and updated political, intelligence and operational picture. "*The recent installation of wireless telegraphy ... (will now mean that) ... messages can be sent directly from the Admiralty*". During the recent manoeuvres (must have been the July 1908 Manoeuvres) the Admiralty had been able to trace all operations in home waters "*most accurately and almost hourly*" directly and by interception of signals. The memo concluded that the Admiralty would be able to guide the fleet Commander-in-Chief "*to a situation where he can strike, and he is then given a free hand to do the best he can*".³³ Thus the trap would be set centrally, and only the final phase of local execution left to the admirals. This centralisation may have been directed first and foremost against Beresford, but its logic limited the authority of any North Sea main fleet Commanders-in-Chief.

It is important to understand that the memorandum described what might be technically possible in the future, not the situation in 1908 and in the next many years. The Royal Navy lacked the trained personnel to operate and manage the fast increasing number of radios. The number of available frequencies was very small, and the problem of mutual interference between the equipment of the dif-

Channel Fleet. C-in-C Channel No. 668/015 of 27-6-1907; Admiralty M. 0731 of 3-7-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 801/015 of 16-7-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 802/015 of 18-7-1907 Admiralty M.0900 of 30-7-1907; Secret and Personal Letter (to the C-in-Cs) August 1907; C-in-C Channel No. 1826/015 of 9-12-1907; Admiralty M.01646 of 16-12-1907; C-in-C Channel No. 1051/015 of 1-6-1908 with enclosure *Second Plan of Action for British Fleet*; Admiralty Secret and personal. *War Orders* 1-7-1908; First Sea Lord *Letters from Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet*, October 1908 of 16-10-1908; C-in-C Channel No. 599/015 of 21-3-1909; Grimes: *War Plans*, p. 116. For a short overview of this and other elements of the Beresford-Fisher Dispute, Marder: *FDSE, Volume I*, pp.92-104.

33 TNA. ADM 116/1043B 1 & 2, pp.270-274 *Wireless Telegraphy in War*.



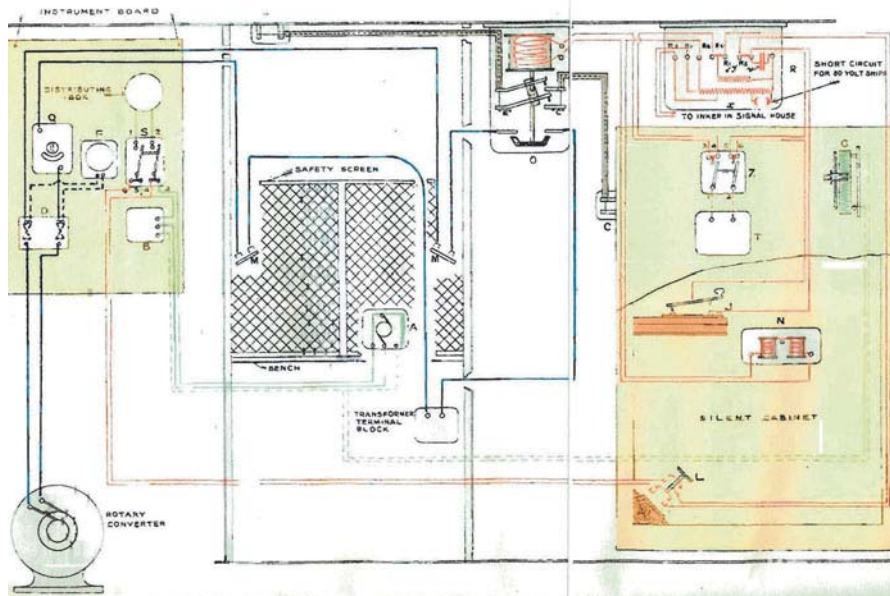
An image of War Room controlled operations. Here control by the global range high power radio stations. Deployment for battle in the North Sea would be controlled by the medium power stations and the 50 nautical miles range low power stations. (net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/warbook/images)

ferent ships was a fast worsening problem. Tuning the radio to a frequency took up to an hour where the ship heard nothing. Reception and decoding messages took a long time, and the completed message thereafter had to be sent on to the cramped bridge.³⁴

Richard Dunley has described how the 1908 fleet manoeuvres were organised to test the offensive mining part of the developing war planning. To have the mines available immediately at the outbreak of a war the Admiralty had chosen to convert old cruisers to mine-layers rather than reconstructing otherwise more suitable fast merchant ships on mobilisation. As the mine-layers were to follow the fleet, it was initially decided to remove both armaments and wireless equipment to maximise the mine load. Later the Admiralty changed its mind about the wireless, because the fleet commander needed effective communication to coordinate the use of his fleet units with the timing of mine-laying. The Home Fleet C-in-C, Francis Bridgeman, asked for the wireless installation in both 1908 and 1909, and his successor, William May, partly succeeded before the fleet ma-

34 Mike A. Farquharson-Robert: *Grand Fleet Communications up to Jutland*, Unpublished notes for the NMRN Conference 16-18 JUL 2014 plus the various information and publications on: www.rnmuseumradarandcommunications2006.org.uk/pre_ww1_wireless_telegraphy%20BANNER.htm (accessed 19-7-2014)

SERVICE MARK I^a WIRELESS INSTALLATION.
DIAGRAM OF NEW WIRING.



In reality the radio equipment was still basic and unstable, not fully integrated in ship architecture, operation complex and specialists lacking. Here a diagram of a 1909 Royal Navy wireless installation. (National Museum of the Royal Navy)

noeuvres in 1910. The offensive use of mines was to be tested in the 1908 manoeuvres where Beresford in command of the “Blue” (German) party was given two mine-layers and “Red” under Bridgeman was given one. Beresford was given the chief of the mining service as an advisor and asked gain experience both with placing and removing mines near coasts and harbours and with dropping mines in front of an advancing fleet. However, neither Beresford nor Bridgeman did as required. Beresford’s actions may have been motivated by spite, but Bridgeman’s “Red” party was also averting risks and did “nothing at all except making useless promenade and burning coal”.

The discussion of mining operations was given a formal framework immediately after the manoeuvres, when Fisher created another committee, this time under Rear-Admiral George Callaghan, who was then commanding one of Bridgeman’s cruiser squadrons. The focus was on sweeping German mines dropped outside British bases, but it also considered the requirements linked to offensive mining. Both Captain Osmond de Brock and Richmond’s replacement as Fisher’s Naval Assistant, Captain Gordon Moore, were committee members. Moore would later serve a few months in 1909 as Flag Captain of the Home Fleet and thereafter as Director of Torpedoes and Ordnance and thus become involved in both the tactical and technical aspects of offensive mining. The committee’s

final report from 16 November 1908 noted that the converted cruisers were less than perfect as mine-layers. The ideal vessel was robust and had high speed and seaworthiness as well as shallow draft. The last quality would be relevant in the inner German Bight, and high speed would be required when escaping during independent operations.³⁵

This late summer 1908 correspondence with Beresford must be seen as the start of the process that led to a formal war plan half a year later. From 9 October all focus moved to the Home Fleet. On that day its C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Francis Bridgeman, asked for war orders giving the general intentions of the Admiralty in a war with Germany. It was three days after Austria-Hungary had announced the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and thus launched the European great powers into a general crisis. The admiral complained that the existing orders were less than clear in many respects, and he complained that all his destroyers had been “*appropriated for special duties*” and that both cruisers and battleships were left without any light craft or destroyers for screening. “*Is this their Lordships’ intention?*”

On the same day, 9 October, the destroyer commander, Commodore (T) Lewis Bayly, had sent a report to Bridgeman about a blockading exercise where destroyers of an observation force had failed to prevent the break-out of a “*German*” destroyer force. One problem had been imprecise wording of signals. Bridgeman emphasised the problems in his forwarding note of 31 October. His whole October correspondence indicates scepticism of Admiralty centralisation. It therefore seems logical that Bridgeman was replaced as C-in-C before the Home Fleet replaced the Channel Fleet as the main fleet in spring 1909. Bridgeman’s passivity during the 1908 manoeuvres may also have reduced his chances. Sir William May’s (C-in-C, Atlantic Fleet) two years’ additional seniority may thus not have been the only reason.

Bridgeman’s criticism of direct Admiralty control makes it natural that the re-delegation of authority to the Commanders-in-Chief started when Bridgeman took over from Wilson as First Sea Lord three years later.

Early in November 1908, Beresford complained a final time. He underlined correctly that his War Orders gave detailed instructions for the use of the light forces, but little information about what bases would be used and “*the manner in which the North Sea is to be held*”. Two weeks later the Admiralty responded that the use of these forces would depend on the circumstances. There was no intention to delegate. Detailed instructions would follow in time of tension.³⁶

At the end of this phase of development in the war plan all elements were in

35 Dunley (2013), pp. 176-184

36 TNA. ADM 116/1037, C-in-C Home Fleet, Secret, 267A/015 of 9-10-1908 *War Orders* for the Home Fleet; With Extract from *Disposition of Fleet on Mobilization* of 14-8-1908; Commodore (T), HMS TOPAZE, Confidential 00127 of 9-10-1908 to C-in-C Home Fleet; C-in-C Home Fleet, Secret No.2560/030 of 31-10-1908 *Destroyers Watching Mouths of Rivers. Exercise Carried Out by Eastern Group* to Admiralty; C-in-C Channel No. 2396/015 of 6-11-1908; Admiralty M-01298 of 18-11-1908 to The C-in-C, Channel Fleet.

place which would thereafter define the discourse: *First* the trade warfare patrol lines at the access routes to and from the North Sea, *second* the Admiralty War Room radio control, *third* the trap concept of operations, *fourth* the observation blockade line to monitor the German bases and *fifth* the notion of offensive operations against the enemy coast to bait the German Navy into accepting the early decisive battle that the slow-working trade blockade was unlikely to provoke.

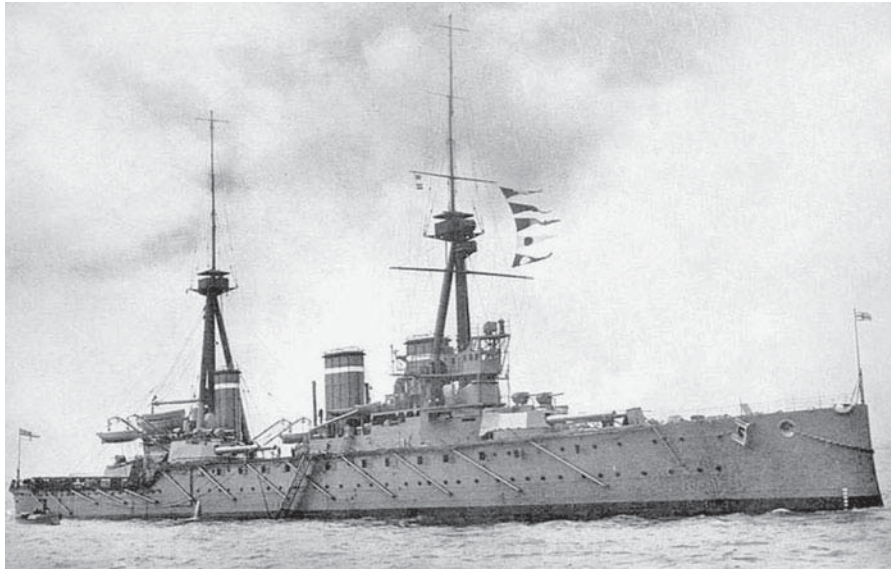
1909-1911: The first War Plan

After four years' development, the results of the studies were summarized by Fisher in his late 1908 memo "*War Plans and The Distribution of the Fleet*". It was written after the Casablanca and Bosnian crises that had brought a risk of war and made it unacceptable to keep a Commander-in-Chief who was not trusted by the service leadership. Even Francis Bridgeman, who might have provoked Fisher's memo by his October request, was probably too independent-minded. For the very good reasons already noted, the memorandum quoted Wilson's remarks extensively, including that the purpose of dividing the battleships between two fleets "*should be to get one of these Fleets between the German Fleet and their ports if they once come out so as to prevent their return*". In brackets it noted: "*This will be the objective in the Grand Manoeuvres of next summer*";³⁷ which would mean the 1909 Manoeuvres, where Wilson would be appointed to act as Umpire-in-Chief. It was possible now to test the concept of centralised control because it would be the flexible gentleman Admiral Sir William May, rather than Beresford, who commanded the Red – British – side.

The first formal War Plan that was to be exercised during the Manoeuvres was developed during the next couple of months, so it was ready for William May when he took over on 24 March. The plan was marked "*G.U.*". Fisher prepared the plan logistically in February, on 10 March the document was ready, and on 13 March it had been read by Admiral May. The plan included general instructions and fleet organisation as well as distribution of units and their use and evolution from peace-time to war.

It is not clear who drafted the plan, but a reference to the possibility that the United States might join Germany makes Brock a likely candidate. He had been writing key papers since he took over as Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence and the notion of the U.S. as a German ally mirrors the War Plan W5 option that he was analysing at the time. The general instructions emphasised Admiralty control and that the southern part of the North Sea should be "*kept clear*" of major British vessels initially. The fleet would be divided into the "*Main Fleet*" in the North Sea that included the new battleships, most cruisers and the newest destroyers. The coastal defence destroyers and submarines remained directly under the Admiralty, as would the "*Second Fleet*" in the Channel. It included older

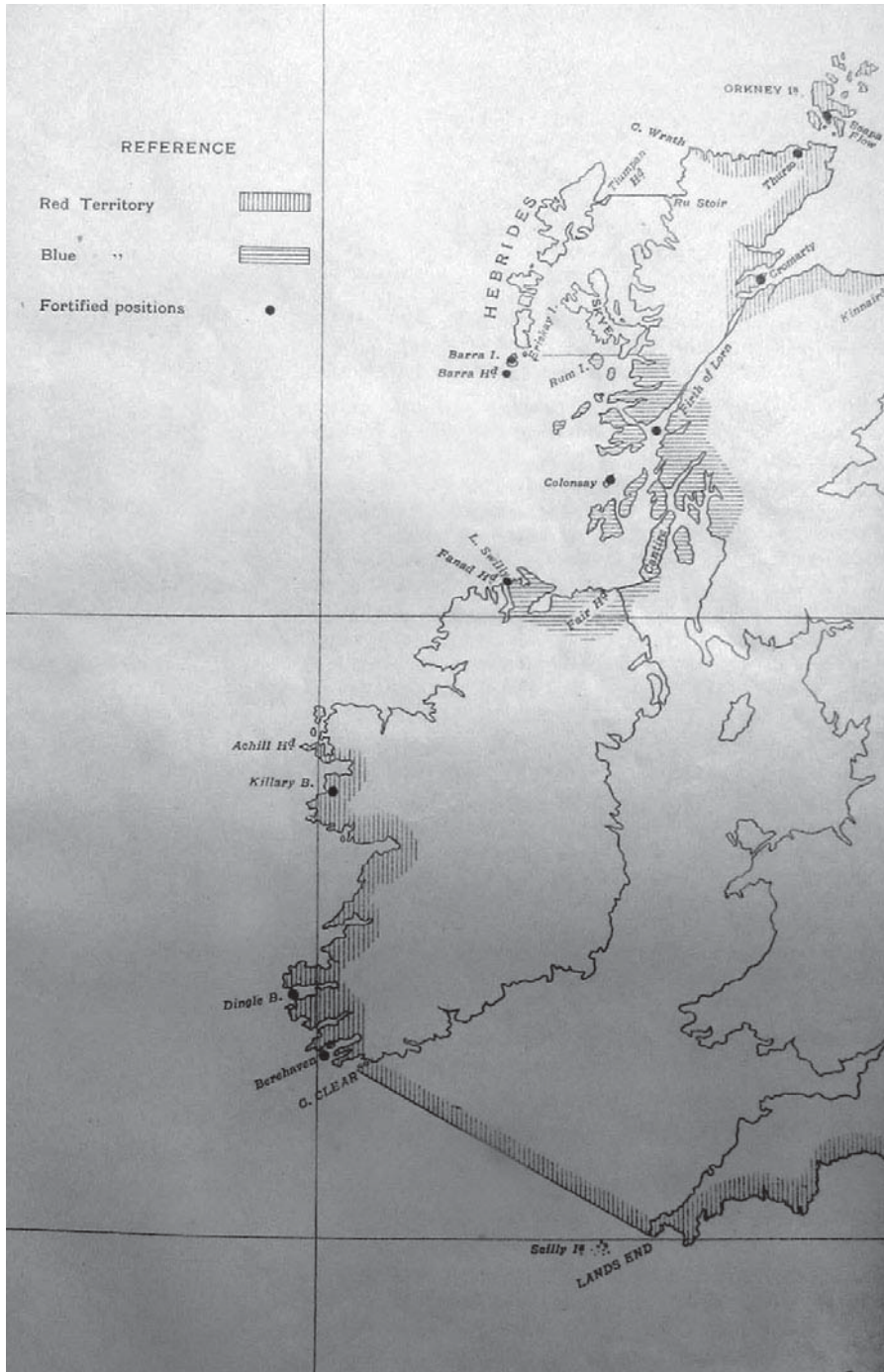
³⁷ TNA. ADM 116/1043B1, pp. 1-11.



The new battlecruisers such as HMS *Invincible* were used in Plan G.U. to reinforce the distant back-up cruiser patrol line. (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

battleships and would come under May's command if ordered into the North Sea. If deployed off Dover with "*special instructions ... issued by the Admiralty*" (here understood as deployed in readiness for the trap), May would be informed.

After mobilisation the Main Fleet was to cruise between its rendezvous off the east coast and the Firth of Forth or Scapa Flow, maintaining a cruiser screen towards the east, and it would be joined by torpedo gunboats employed as mine sweepers. The orders were extremely detailed in directing how May was to organise his force and operate. At the outbreak of war the main fleet would move to a position indicated by the Admiralty, deploy a cruiser squadron to intercept German trade passing between Scotland and Norway, and destroyers on patrol north of Scotland. May was instructed to deploy destroyers – 83 such vessels – into close observation of the German coast and the Skagerrak, with the northern half of the flotillas of destroyers and submarines supported from a forward improvised base off Horns Reef with sunken hulls as protection against the sea. The Horns Reef base was to be supported from the old battleship HMS *Trafalgar* and the cruiser HMS *Blenheim*. Another similar improvised base for the southern part of the flotillas might be created off Texel. The destroyers should be backed by a powerful force of cruisers. The order outlined in detail how this should be achieved. The main mission of the Home Fleet was to bring the German fleet to decisive action,



The 1909 Fleet Manoeuvre area, where Plan G.U. for the North Sea could be exercised far away from easy German observation. (The National Archives)

but May was not told how. All movements of the main fleet should be reported to the Admiralty “*instantly*”. His secondary task was to destroy German trade.³⁸

In May, Fisher briefed the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, about the substance of the plan: in daylight a line of (radio-equipped) armoured cruisers would patrol off the German coast; at night destroyers backed by light cruisers would be deployed in front of the armoured cruisers.³⁹ The Horn’s Reef anchorage for the northern flotillas was surveyed in June that year. It was fully usable in normal weather.⁴⁰ During the same months the Admiralty studied whether it would be possible to block the main channel of the Elbe.⁴¹ Another short memo that Bayly may have authored arrived at a somewhat different distribution of forces than the formal War Plan. It moved one battle division from the Second Fleet to make the Main Fleet strong enough to meet the German Fleet on its own.⁴²

The 1909 manoeuvres took place off Scotland with Western Scotland acting as the German North Sea Coast. The exercise played a situation of “*strained relations*” and the first days of war. The mission of the *Red* fleet was to destroy the enemy *Blue* and *White* fleets, the latter being the part of the High Seas Fleet that had to use the Skagerrak to make a junction with the Blue due to the reconstruction of the Kiel Canal, which had started in 1907 and would continue until 1914. *Red* was to observe the strongly fortified *Blue* coast closely; if possible prevent the junction of the two enemy fleets (i.e. if this had not been accomplished before the outbreak of the war). If the junction had been affected, the combined enemy fleets should be brought to action. The general idea for the manoeuvres does not describe how this would be achieved. The exercise would last a full week.⁴³

Captain Herbert Richmond, now May’s Flag Captain on HMS *Dreadnought* commented critically about the quality of command during the exercises in his diary entries on 8 and 14 July. The notes also mirrored the character of the manoeuvres. In the first he noted that the fleet did not use its cruisers and destroyers properly. The mission of the British side was to prevent “*the escape*” of the *Blue* fleet. However, faulty screening and bad weather meant that “*the enemy forced a clear passage through our line ... & drove his Battle Fleet through the gap, unseen in the thick weather*”. In the second entry he complained about the detailed control of the fleet: “*... instead of signalling, as I had wished, the bare news that the Fleet*

38 National Museum of the Royal Navy [NMRN], Crease Papers, MSS 252/84/3, Very Secret. *War Plan G.U. War Orders for the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet*; Morgan-Owen: *History*, p. 17.

39 Morgan-Owen, *History*, p. 18.

40 TNA, ADM 116/866B, O.C HMS HALCYON *Anchorage in vicinity of Esbjerg* of 24-6-1909.

41 TNA, ADM 116/1043B, pp. 953-960.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 159-164, *Sketch of the action necessary for War with German alone*.

43 ADM 116/1109, Secret. Naval Manoeuvres, 1909. (For issue to all fleets); General Idea in Grimes, *War Plans*, p. 126; Edward Eden Bradford & Arthur Knyvet Wilson: *Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson*, (London 1923), pp. 124-125.

*was at sea, we signalled instead elaborate courses for our cruisers to steer. This I do not think possible in war. ...*⁴⁴

The weather during the crucial attempt to trap the *Blue* fleet had been extremely foggy and thus potentially risky for the massive fleets with a total of 374 vessels. May had requested that the *Blue* fleet was “*detained*” for 48 hours. It would “*have given the cruisers and destroyers plenty of work*”. Fisher had rejected the request, because, as he wrote to McKenna on 13 July: “*Fancy asking the German Fleet to hold on a few hours till you were quite ready!*”⁴⁵

During autumn 1909 Fisher successfully blocked the creation of an operational war planning staff at the Admiralty. He was certain how the trap-battle should be conducted with minimum friction and delay and maximum flexibility. An operational planning function would only be urgently required for general evaluation of defensive or offensive mining operations and coastal operations, especially in cooperation with the army. Such contingencies were being developed and tested in the War College games. A formal staff could only lead to bureaucratic friction, the need to argue before implementing decisions and thereby unacceptable delay. Fisher knew that he – or his chosen successor Wilson – could control the operations in the best way directly from the plotting table in the War Room. There was no requirement for the proposed Staff to orchestrate and manage the expected battle, and after the destruction of the High Seas Fleet, everything would become simple.⁴⁶ What Fisher really needed to support the proper management of the foreseen North Sea theatre operation was not a planning staff, but the development of the War Room staff to keep the plot updated and ensure effective communication of decisions that followed during the war.

Late December 1909 Fisher described his and Wilson’s co-operation and their attitude to the war plan as follows: “*We have talked a lot about the War Plan for the Navy... he told ... that only he and I knew of the War Plan, which is quite true... He would sooner die than disclose it*”⁴⁷ It meant that the two admirals agreed that only the Admiralty leadership could have a full basis for employing the two battle fleets based on the east coast and Channel bases in a way so that one fleet met and engaged the German fleet while the other moved to a position between that fleet and its bases. The authority and responsibility could and should not be delegated. As underlined in the Wireless Telegraphy memo, only the centre with the

44 Arthur J. Marder: *Portrait of an Admiral. The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London 1952), (Richmond) pp. 55-56, 59.

45 Arthur J. Marder (ed.): *Fear God and Dread Nought. The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone. Volume II. Years of Power 1904-1914* (London 1956), Letters to Reginald McKenna of 13-7-1909 and to Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Ottley of 29-8-1909, pp. 256, 262-263. The word *detained* like Richmond’s *escape* could also mean breaking out through the blockade, however due to the exercise context of Fisher’s late 1908 memorandum, it is assumed that the *Blue* fleet escaped back to bases.

46 For a short and clear description of Fisher’s successful resistance to the creation of a “Naval General Staff” see: Grimes, *War Plans*, pp. 154-157.

47 Quoted by Grimes p. 158; also also Marder, *FDSF I*, pp. 198, 244, 247.

Naval Intelligence Division and the developing facility to intercept wireless could combine updated knowledge about the international situation and the intentions of the Cabinet, with signals intelligence and reports from the radio- equipped patrolling cruisers off the German bases. The observational forces that included any new patrol submarines and most of the flotillas of modern destroyers were kept under central control, as the Admiralty was considered to have a far better picture of the situation than the fleets' Commanders-in-Chiefs. All radio-equipped units could and would benefit from the Admiralty information and orders broadcast. The admirals could and should only control the ships and vessels of their own formation. In a situation where the enemy intention was unknown, central control could ensure maximum flexibility of response, and it would be counter-productive to produce War Plans or War Orders that did more than inform the subordinate commanders of which units they were responsible for training. Only the small submarines plus some torpedo boats and first generation destroyers were placed under the direct command of the "Admiral of Patrols" responsible for coastal and forward base defence.

The new war plan was followed by orders to the now five mine-layers. All were to assemble in Sheerness, which was as close as possible to the German Bight. Three of the five were to operate under the orders of the Home Fleet C-in-C, meaning that they would have to operate from the north conducting "*minelaying work on the German coast in connection with the operations of the fleets in German waters*". This part of the mining force would also have two "mine carriers" with additional mines. The two remaining mine-layers supported by a third "mine carrier" would await orders from the Admiralty, with one likely mission being to follow the Channel Fleet if it was launched into the German Bight if the High Seas Fleet sallied north and the "Second Fleet" would be needed to block or rather delay its return to bases.⁴⁸

During Fisher's first term as First Sea Lord he had emphasized long-range heavy, scientifically controlled gunnery, and he had been close to fanatical in his demand for battleship speed. Superior speed and long-range hitting power would make it theoretically possible to develop any engagement of the British and German battle fleets brought about by war room control into a situation where the Germans were out-maneuvred, cut off and destroyed. Wilson, who had taken a key role in supporting the development of fire control systems, could be trusted to understand this.⁴⁹ The same was true of John Jellicoe, who had managed that development, and whom Fisher successfully lobbied to have appointed fleet Commander-in-Chief in the coming war.

In the first – spring – part of the exercises of the combined Home and Atlantic

48 Dunley (2013), pp. 199-202.

49 For the most thorough and complete description of the development of the Royal Navy long range artillery fire control system see: John Brooks: *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland. The Question of Fire Control* (London 2005).

Fleets in 1910 after Wilson's succession, the planned observational blockade of destroyers supported by cruisers off the German coast was tested and found to be too close and risky, and the method was thereafter adjusted to the looser form already outlined by Wilson in his 1907 "Remarks". The second part tested fleet offensive operations.⁵⁰ On 29 May 1910, after the combined exercises, Captain Herbert Richmond had a conversation with McKenna. He noted in his diary that the talk had been free and wide-ranging. It had also covered the fleet war plan. Fisher and Wilson had apparently convinced McKenna that their war plan was perfect, the Germans were checkmated from the outset: "*The Fleet would be placed in such & such a place & would not move from it & the enemy could do nothing... Nothing could pass out of the Skagerrack without our knowing – and so on.*"⁵¹

The main fleet manoeuvres took place in July 1910 in approximately the same waters off Western Scotland as in the previous year and can thus be seen as a direct follow-up to the 1909 test of the war plan. This manoeuvre also played the first week of a naval war against Germany. However, the scenario had been developed. The "Blue" – enemy – fleet was ordered to act offensively against the Red (English West and Irish) coast and trade, thereby exposing it to higher risk of losses. The main fleet that consisted of the Commander-in-Chief's flagship HMS *Dreadnought* and all the "Red" Pre-Dreadnoughts cruised out of harm's way off southwest Ireland. Admiral Sir William May's second-in-command, Vice-Admiral Berkeley Milne's Second Battleship Division, was part of this main fleet. Cruiser squadrons were detached to the waters that acted as the Straits of Dover (northern entry to the Irish Sea) and Skagerrak (North Minch). A very strong squadron that included the *Invincible*-class ships cruised covering the area that acted as the southern part of the North Sea (between Dubh Artach and Rathlin Island off the Irish North Coast), backing-up the destroyer-light cruiser force in the observation blockade, ready as the two other squadrons to report and follow Blue battle fleet forces and destroy lighter units. The Mull Sound substituted for the Kiel Canal and was used for sending Blue Sixth Cruiser Squadron on raiding operations. The six new *Dreadnoughts* were formed into two three ship detached fast battle squadrons; one further west in "*the Channel*" (south in the Irish Sea), the other off "*the Humber*" (north-west coast of Ireland). If the Blue battle fleet sallied in their direction, they would support the cruiser forces in front of them and engage the enemy fleet until the main fleet could be brought into action. Not keeping the *Dreadnoughts* together with their superior speed and combat power advantage undermined any chance of outmanoeuvring and cutting off the enemy battle fleet. Wilson (or May with Wilson's approval) simply preferred to use their superior speed in the role that would later be given to the *Invincibles* and the later purpose-built battle-cruisers. One of the objects of the exercise was to test "*the practical utility of the various methods of communication employed in*

50 Grimes: *War Plans*, pp. 163-164.

51 Marder: *Richmond*, p.70.

the service". Blue should try to disturb Red wireless communications by jamming. Probably for that reason the wireless experimental vessel, the cruiser HMS *Furious*, received special instructions and was placed close to the Scottish coast off Gigha Island.

During the manoeuvres, Sir Arthur Wilson, now First Sea Lord, exercised command in the way outlined by the Wireless Telegraphy memo. It was his first chance to do so, and he used the opportunity fully. Apparently he did not trust assistants to act in his spirit and moved a bed into his room in the Admiralty, where he commanded the fleet units directly by wireless. The manoeuvres ended with a Blue battle fleet sally into "*the Channel*", which must have ended with an engagement between the main fleets. Here Wilson gave orders about the ship's formation, course, speed and expected navigational problems directly to Vice-Admiral Milne's Second Division, bypassing Admiral May. This may have nourished the critical attitude that surfaced in May's 1912 and 1913 Chief Umpire reports, described below. The direct orders from the Admiralty to his ships may have triggered Milne's cynical note that "*They pay me to be an admiral; they don't pay me to think!*"⁵² As with all centralized operational or tactical management, a very serious weakness is the risk of castration of initiative among subordinates and loss of ability to adjust to unforeseeable developments.

It seems clear from the First Sea Lord's actions during the manoeuvres that even if the operational idea called for cutting off the enemy fleet, for Wilson the central part of the "*plan*" was the centralized control by radio that in theory gave the shortest possible reaction time and the maximum flexibility to adjust to actual German actions.

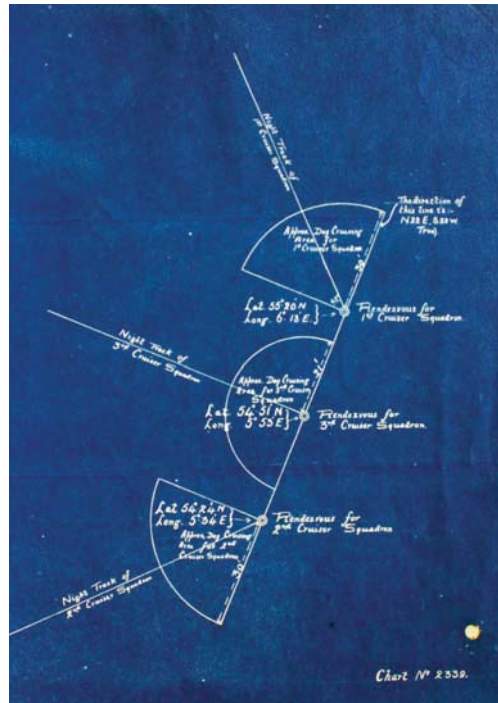
In 1910 Sir Arthur Wilson did not have to explain his ideas to his subordinates, he just gave orders. It is understandable that he was reluctant to explain his War Plans during the Agadir Crisis meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Until then, the existing war plan was updated. The last version of a key part of the Fisher-Wilson war plan with its detailed focus on the observational blockade of the German Coast was issued by William May on 23 January 1911 for that year in his "*Heligoland Bight Blockade Squadron. Preliminary war orders for Commodore T. in command*". During the spring and summer it was only followed by very detailed orders for the use of old submarines in harbour defence.⁵³

52 TNA, ADM 144/32, *Naval Manoeuvres, 1910*; Stewart Ross, *Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman. The Life and Times of an Officer and a Gentleman* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 152; Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game. Jutland and British Command* (London 1996), p. 369. It should be noted that Milne was a highly competent and sophisticated Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean during the Balkan Crises 1912-13, so he could think when he was not explicitly expected not to do so. The impression of Milne's competence is built on a reading of the files ADM 116/1189-1197, especially about the Scutari blockade and the international humanitarian and state-building operations.

53 TNA, ADM 116/3096.

Detail from William May's 23 January
1911 War Plan update.
(The National Archives)



23 August 1911

Sir Arthur Wilson was reluctant to explain his War Plans during the 23 August 1911 Agadir Crisis meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence and during the following weeks. He knew that he could not trust all politicians – or the Army – to keep the British capabilities in radio control and plan secret, and confirming German knowledge of the Royal Navy’s formal plans would make it even less likely that their fleet would expose itself to be cut off and destroyed. Another likely reason was that it would be very difficult to present the maintenance of centralized control for maximum flexibility as a “*plan*”.

Corbett might have been able to present convincingly, but Wilson was neither a conceptual thinker nor a great communicator. Nobody involved then and later seemed to grasp the fundamental, but natural, difference between mass army and naval theatre campaign planning, and nobody seemed to understand the true essence of an effective general staff working process. It was not a matter of organisation, but of substance, and the 1906-1910 Fisher-Wilson planning had actually been a model of a fast and effective campaign plan development that mirrored the requirements.

Wilson’s choice and lack of ability to argue and explain was not only critical for the Service, it might influence what happened in Europe in a crisis. As the First Lord, Reginald McKenna, told the Prime Minister two months later, his

(and Fisher's plus Wilson's) resistance to the Army's wish to deploy the British Expeditionary Force to France at the start of a war was based on a fear that a commitment to do so might only encourage the French to provoke Germany.⁵⁴ If Britain considered it necessary to encourage French resolve by the likelihood of a commitment of the British Army to the Continent, the Admiralty leadership should be replaced.

Until that happened, the existing war plan was updated. The last version of a key part of the Fisher-Wilson war plan with its detailed focus on the observational blockade of the German Coast was issued by William May on 23 January 1911 for that year in his "*Heligoland Bight Blockade Squadron. Preliminary war orders for Commodore T. in command*". During the spring and summer it was only followed by very detailed orders for the use of old submarines in harbour defence.⁵⁵

1912: The Callaghan-Ballard plan adjustments

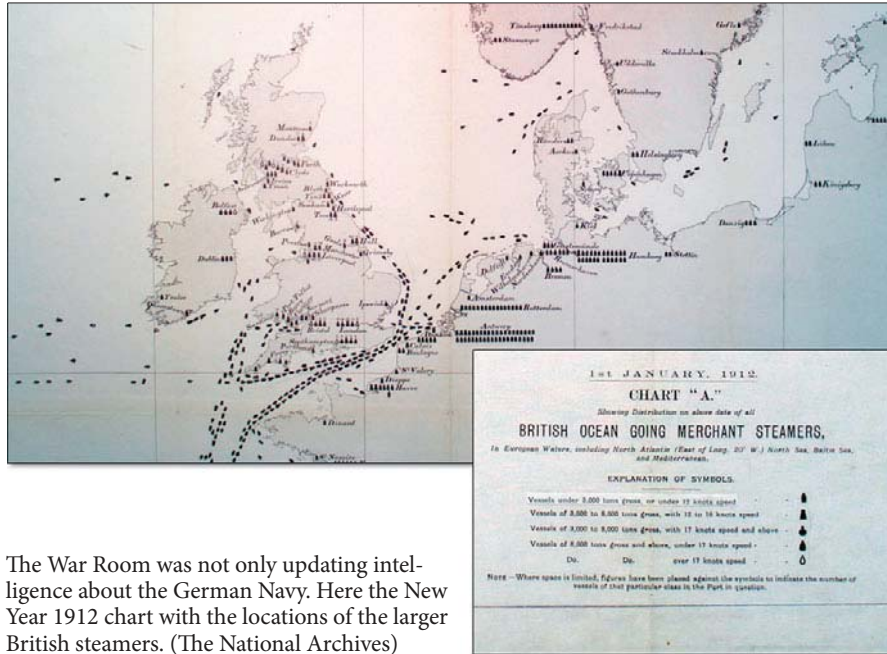
After New Year 1912 Wilson had been replaced as First Sea Lord by Admiral Francis Bridgeman. Vice-Admiral George Callaghan, Milne's replacement as Second Battle Division Commander and Home Fleet deputy, had been appointed to Commander-in-Chief. The leading admirals could now look at the assumptions of the Fisher-Wilson War Planning with open minds nourished by updated practical experience. With the naval intellectual, Captain Ballard, directing the new War Staff Operations Division, the scene was set for change. He had fathered the observational blockade 15 years earlier and contributed to its later revision by his committee's Winter 1907 studies. To a significant degree the need for change was driven by the then extremely fast development in key fields of naval technology, but it was also made necessary by the inherent weaknesses and ambiguity of the War Plan in the changing strategic framework.

On 9 January 1912 Callaghan dealt with the destroyer issue in response to an Admiralty request on 2 December for comments to the War Plan; on the same day he asked that a revision of the plan was postponed until his comments had been considered. The Admiralty request had been sent a couple of days prior to Wilson's replacement by Bridgeman, but it is most likely to have been made by Churchill. During summer 1911 Bridgeman and Callaghan had become increasingly unhappy with the risks and problems of the close observational blockade and Wilson's wish to capture a German island to support it; at the end of August they had raised their concerns in a critical memorandum.⁵⁶ With Bridgeman as First Sea Lord, reforms were on the way.

54 Arthur J. Marder: *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*. I, pp. 250-251; Mackay: Fisher, pp. 429-431.

55 TNA, ADM 116/3096, *Heligoland Bight Blockade Squadron. Preliminary War Orders for Commodore T. in Command*. (Signed W.H. May 23-1-1911); (Secret) *Revision of War Orders for Submarine Flotillas* (documents from April 1911).

56 Grimes: *War Plans*, p.169; Nicholas Lambert: *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, p. 209.



The War Room was not only updating intelligence about the German Navy. Here the New Year 1912 chart with the locations of the larger British steamers. (The National Archives)

George Callaghan's January remarks focused on the problems in sustaining the destroyers in the close observation line. He supported a report from 18 December by the Commodore (T), Robert Arbuthnot, which William May had requested in late November. Harwich was too weakly developed and defended to be an effective support base. It was not certain that a sufficient number of destroyers would be there to sustain the blockade, and supporting cruisers were unavailable. Callaghan therefore proposed a review of the whole issue of the blockade of the Heligoland Bight. The Admiralty request had included notes on operations in the North Sea that were later to be developed by the new War Staff, notes that Callaghan had only been permitted to discuss with his Chief of Staff. He underlined that he needed to include his subordinate commanders in the discussion. These notes had mentioned that parts of the main fleet might be used against land defences and that an effort could be made to block the German rivers by mining. This he rejected, and he repeated that he lacked the destroyers necessary to sustain the blockade.

On 8 March the Chief of the War Staff, Rear-Admiral Ernest Troubridge, informed Bridgeman that most of the matters raised by Callaghan would be addressed in the new war plans that were about to be issued, and the First Sea Lord informed the C-in-C about their progress on the same day. Early in April the Admiralty informed Callaghan that both the blockade and the note on operations in the North Sea had been cancelled. This led the Director of Operation Division



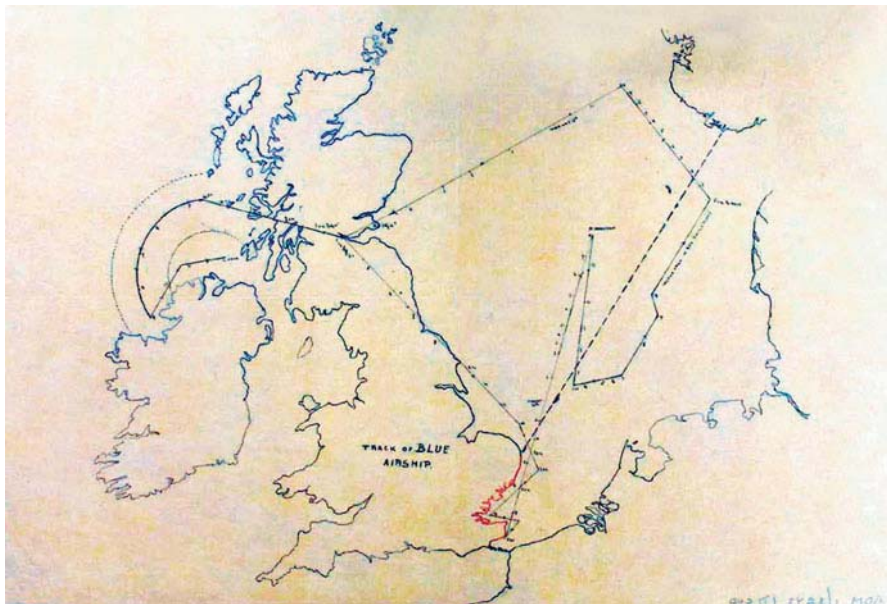
Sir George Callaghan, the Home Fleets' new Commander-in-Chief, who became Ballard's close partner in the War Plans development during the more than 27 months the Captain served as War Staff Operations Director. (Imperial War Museum)

(D.O.D.), George Ballard, to remind the Chief of Staff on 9 April that this left the Home Fleet without instructions for the use of its cruisers, and he immediately developed an "*Explanatory Memorandum*" to fill the gap. It was approved by Churchill on 14 April.

The memorandum underlined that in a period of tension preceding a war between Great Britain and Germany, the navy should be kept off the west and south coasts of the British Isles, beyond the reach of a surprise attack.

At the same time the Shetland Islands should be developed into the western end of the trade blockade line established by a cruiser squadron, later to be reinforced by merchant cruisers. The eastern end at the Norwegian coast should – if possible – also be anchored to the "*suitable base*" at Stavanger.

If war broke out after a mobilisation that allowed the Royal Navy to form two strong fleets, a "*Northern Fleet*" would cruise east of Scotland with Rosyth as the main base. The older battleships of a "*Southern Fleet*" would assemble in the Channel at Portland or Spithead. The fleets would be covered by "*an arc*" of destroyers and cruisers that would rest on the Norwegian coast – at Stavanger – and on the Dutch coast – at the Hook of Holland. If the German fleet responded to the blockade by a sally into the North Sea, "*it is their Lordships' intention to allow him to reach a point that will render his return to his own ports without fighting a battle an impossibility...*". No matter if the German turned north or south the in-



Trace of British (“Blue”) Airship during the 1912 manoeuvres to reinforce the cruiser picket line between the British coast and Stavanger. The manoeuvres gave indication of the weakness of the theoretically ideal centralized War Room operational control. (The National Archives)

tention was “to place one of the British fleets across his line of retreat and to engage him simultaneously with the other”. Thus the Fisher-Wilson concept of the “trap” had not been abandoned, even if it had to work without the forward warning line.

The southern end of the cruiser-destroyer arc in the middle of the North Sea might be supported from a Dutch coastal base at the Hook of Holland. It would consist of five cruiser squadrons and four destroyer flotillas. The coastal defence flotillas of the Admiral of Patrols might reinforce the arc that would in reality have to replace the cancelled close observational blockade that Ballard had designed as a young naval intellectual two decades earlier.⁵⁷

During the 1912 fleet manoeuvres this concept was tested and failed. The Umpire-in-Chief, Sir William May, underlined in his report on 5 August that the observation line was far too long and thus open to give the necessary warning, and the cruiser patrols in the line had been too stationary. The German party (“Red”)

57 TNA, ADM 116/3096, The C-in-C Home Fleet to The Secretary, Admiralty of 9-1-1912 *War Plans. Remarks on certain points in*; C-in-C Home Fleet, No. 2s to the Admiralty; Commodore (T) HMS BLENHEIM, No. 05c of 18-12-1911 to C-in-C Home Fleet; Note M001 Chief of Staff to First Sea Lord of 8-3-1912; Draft. Secret & Personal. M-001/12 Admiralty to Callaghan; *Orders to Flag Officers with an Explanatory Memorandum* marked WC on 14-4-1912; Grimes: *War Plans* p.176; Nicholas Lambert: *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution*, (Columbia 1999), pp.262-264.

fleet had passed it once without being detected and another time without the British (“*Blue*”) fleet having had time to counter it before it reached the British coast. The trade blockade line in the north had failed to detect German raiders on the way to the Atlantic. With Bridgeman in Wilson’s chair May also felt free to counter the direct Admiralty control of the forces. He noted that the “*control of Blue’s entire forces by the Admiralty, after they were at their war stations, marks a new epoch in naval strategy*”, and he was highly critical. The fleet commander could not respond to an unexpected development or a change in the weather. He could not coordinate the operations of fleet units in the same area of the sea. He had to wait for orders. The distance to the enemy fleet could be very roughly evaluated on the basis of the strength of his radio signal. Wireless equipment may fail. “... *these matters cannot be reported in sufficient length in war time to enable a distant Board of officers to ... give orders in time*”. The centralist control combined with the weakness of the Mid-North Sea line were given as the reasons for Blue fleet failures. May also noted weakness in the drafting of wireless signals. Every flagship should have a professional signals officer. The ships should have extra short-distance radio sets with signals personnel for in-fleet communication.⁵⁸ The next day Beresford echoed May’s criticism of centralised Admiralty control with glee in a question to Churchill in Parliament.⁵⁹

Ballard reacted quickly to May’s report. By mid-September he had drafted his own conclusions in relation to the coming version of the War Plan. He underlined the desirability of detecting the enemy fleet on leaving harbour. Under the actual conditions this would be impossible “*unless by a very large force of submarines able to keep the sea for at least ten days in any weather*”. Therefore the force of new patrol submarines (the D and E classes) should be thus deployed. Another possibility was to meet the enemy just off the British coast. This would mean an unacceptable dispersion of the battle fleet, so a middle solution had to be developed to give warning of the approaching enemy fleet. The Mid-North Sea line tested in the manoeuvres had not worked as intended. The necessary number of suitable cruisers was simply not available until the arrival of a large number of new light cruisers. At the same time, however, there was no real alternative to such mid-North Sea patrols. The only possibility of reducing the requirement would be to conduct a massive mining of the German Bight so that the observation line could be made shorter. However, this could only be done after the necessary mine-layers had become available. Until such a time Ballard considered that the War Plan which included the observation patrol line should remain in force, but with the practical solution of the warning problem left to the commanding

58 TNA, ADM 1/8273, Admiralty 5-8-1912, Confidential. *Naval Manoeuvres 1912. Remarks by umpire in chief*; Confidential, Miscellaneous Notes; David Morgan-Owen has made a full and convincing discussion of the mid-North Sea cruiser patrols in An ‘Intermediate Blockade’? British North Sea Strategy, 1912-1914, *War in History*, 1-25 (2014).

59 Beresford’s question and Churchill’s reply in: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1912/aug/06/naval-manoevres (accessed 1-5-2014).

admirals: “Unless the officers in command of squadrons are allowed to station individual ships as they may think best to carry out their orders, they will cease to have any freedom of action and cannot reasonably be held responsible for failure or success”. Thus Ballard recommended a significant delegation to the C-in-C: “Admiralty control should only extend to general movements on a large scale and not to details”. A change in the concept of the war plan was the new emphasis on the forward deployment of the patrol submarines supported by a pair of powerful destroyers.⁶⁰ This part of the plan was implemented at the start of the war with the submarine commodore, Keyes, on board one of the destroyers.

The Admiralty’s intention to keep the War Plans unchanged was apparently undermined when the Balkan War led to seriously strained relations with Germany in late November 1912. The risk of war created an urgent need for clarity.⁶¹ On the 25th of that month Callaghan was sent new “provisional” war plans. If war broke out, these would be supplemented with telegraphic instructions. The general part of the plans underlined that they only covered the opening phases of a war in the North Sea and that the Admiralty would decide on the “initial strategic disposition”. Both the Shetland-Norway gap and the south-western entrance to the Channel should be closed to all shipping under German flag by lines of unarmoured cruisers. The Straits of Dover would be controlled by destroyers and submarines.

The “Grand Fleet” would cruise off Scotland and the “Channel Fleet” in the English Channel, so the deployment for the trap remained in place. Callaghan was responsible for “frustrating the efforts of the enemy” to land an invasion force or attack the distant blockading forces and for “bringing the enemy to battle on a good occasion”. Callaghan was given detailed instructions about what he should do and how. His cruisers should initially “be deployed as an observation force to sweep and patrol the North Sea” without getting close to the German bases. Thus Ballard kept the Mid-North Sea warning mission for the fleet in the plan, but he allowed Callaghan freedom of action in how to do so in practice. The plans might be revised at the end of every month. On 16 December basically the same text was issued as the actual war plan, and on that same day he received the “War Orders – Home Fleets”. The war orders included a very clear mission text: “... the general idea of these Plans is to exercise economic pressure upon Germany by cutting off German shipping from oceanic trade through the action of patrolling cruisers on lines drawn across the approaches to the North Sea, and supporting these cruisers and covering the British coasts by two Battle Fleets stationed so as to be in a position

60 TNA, ADM 116/866B, *Observation Force in North Sea. Remarks on War for, in connection with lessons of 1912 manoeuvres*, Capt GABallard D.O.D. of 16-9-1912.

61 For the crisis reactions see also my: Not Just a Prelude. The First Balkan War Crisis as the Catalyst of Final European War Preparations, in Katrin Boeckh, Mehmet Hacisalihoglu, Heike Karge, Sabine Rutar (eds.): *The Balkan Wars 1912/13. Perceptions, Remembrance, Historiography* (Awaiting publication 2014 or 2015)

*to bring the enemy's fleet to action should it proceed to sea ... these two battle fleets will be moved or concentrated by direct Admiralty orders.*⁶²

The remaining elements of the Fisher-Wilson plan combination remained in place: the distant blockade, the trap battle and the Admiralty radio control. Only the close observation and the aggressive operations against the enemy coast had been dropped as unrealistic.

1913: The stalled traditionalist challenge

In February 1913 the war plans and order complex went through a minor revision and was supplemented, and from April onwards it was complemented by a War Plan No. 2, which assumed an alliance with France. All these documents were basically in line with what had been achieved in late 1912.⁶³

The 1913 manoeuvres – again with Sir William May as Umpire-in-Chief – highlighted once more the limits of centralised command. The scenario for the fleet manoeuvres of August 1913 was similar to that of the previous year. Again the British party failed to find the enemy fleet or prevent a raid landing on the east coast. Once more extreme centralisation of operational control brought friction, confusion and inefficiency. As Umpire May limited himself to a simple narrative of events, but senior observers from the Army reported the unfortunate results of the centralization and the Navy staff personnel's lack of skill in drafting orders. William May did, however, repeat the requirement for better and more precise drafting of radio messages, and he indicated that Churchill should maintain radio security and not mix code with clear text when he involved himself from the Admiralty Yacht, *Enchantress*. May also emphasized the need for clear rules for the dissemination of intelligence, and in the general part of his report he considered that it was a mistake to give Callaghan responsibility for the coastal patrol forces under the Admiral of Patrols. It distracted the C-in-C from his main object "*the enemy's battle fleet*". The Admiral of Patrols had apparently been ineffective because he depended on intelligence from the Admiralty instead of establishing local coastal observation posts.⁶⁴ The command relationship thus criticised had been recommended to Churchill in winter 1913 by his Naval Assistant, Rear-Admiral David Beatty.⁶⁵

In his 28 August comments to the Manoeuvres, Callaghan criticized the anti-invasion scenarios now used in two successive years as it gave the impression that the main purpose of the fleet was to defend the country against enemy lan-

62 TNA, ADM 116/3412, Secret & Personal, M-0020/12 *Proposed War Plans* of 25-11-1912 to Sir George A. Callaghan; M-0020/12 Admiralty of 16-12-1912 to Callaghan and his squadrons; Secret, War Orders, The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleets of 16-12-1912.

63 TNA, ADM 116/3412, pp. 147-185, 243-444.

64 National Maritime Museum [NMM], MAY/10, Secret, Naval Manoeuvres 1913, Report of Admiral of the Fleet Sir William May: Initial pages and "W.T. Communications".

65 TNA, ADM 116/3412, pp. 190f.

As retired from Home Fleet command and now Umpire-in-Chief during the 1912 and 1913 Fleet manoeuvres, Sir William May felt free to point out the negative effects of War Room centralisation that he had experienced under first Fisher's and then Arthur Wilson's leadership. (Imperial War Museum)



dings. The chief mission of the fleet in the North Sea was not to counter a minor invasion attempt or raid. It was to destroy the enemy's main fleet. He repeated and deepened the argument why a close observation was too risky and could not be sustained. He argued that his battle fleet should stay off the British coast to avoid a high risk of submarine attacks and should avoid action close to the German coast. The two exercises had made clear that the only effective response to the raids were better fixed defences of the ports. The Admiral underlined that a German fleet operating close to the British coast was likely to have its retreat cut off if the weather was reasonably clear. The danger of interception was probably also clear to the Germans, and therefore they were unlikely to take the risk if the mission was not a full invasion. He went on to assert that his cruiser force was far too small to cover the exits from German ports. The force might not even be able to accomplish the remaining tasks such as covering the battle fleet. It did not help that all cruisers except the battle cruisers and new light cruisers were fast becoming obsolete. Therefore the light cruiser construction programme should be expanded and the number of battle cruisers should be twice that of the Germans. He also criticised the deployment of cruisers during the exercise in constant sweeps. It was too risky, because the cruisers would operate without support from heavy ships. The older cruisers were especially vulnerable. Callaghan suggested that cruiser observation lines were dropped and the vessels employed in front

of and with the support of the battle fleet. Light cruisers should also be attached to the battle cruiser squadrons so that they could work as a team supplementing each other. The submarines in the manoeuvres had proven to be “*a far greater menace to ships than the fleet generally gave them credit for*”.

The Admiralty War Staff agreed with Callaghan in a late-September comment that the situation was critical because of this requirement for a large number of modern light cruisers. This was especially a problem until patrol submarines would be available in a number that would “*enable us to revert to the old policy of close observation of the enemy’s ports*”. Compared with the earlier plans submarines with more endurance on patrol would replace more vulnerable destroyers and cruisers. Until then it was also necessary to put “*the military defences of the country on a proper footing*”. Captain Herbert Richmond, now Ballard’s assistant director, supported the C-in-C in a staff paper. Raids would not decide anything. In the covering letter Callaghan suggested that a conference should be held in the Admiralty between the War Staff, himself and his key subordinate Flag Officers to discuss “*the North Sea Problem*” and review the War Plan, especially in relation to the stationing of cruisers “*across the North Sea*”. The War Staff accepted the conference.⁶⁶

The problem was that the deliberate avoidance of the risk of attrition of British destroyers and cruisers left the Germans with the initiative to carry out their offensive operations such as raids on the British coast.

With the replacement of Bridgeman as First Sea Lord in December 1912 with the more flexible – i.e. weaker – Prince Louis of Battenberg, Churchill’s direct influence on the work of the War Staff grew. In mid-October the First Lord had concluded on the basis of the result of the annual manoeuvres that a way would have to be found to re-establish a close observational blockade.⁶⁷ On 21 January 1913 he noted that he had asked Beatty “*some time ago*”, to give the comments to the new war plan that he had now received. Beatty had apparently been unaware that the Admiralty planned to control the fleets from the War Room and noted that he missed an evaluation of German intent and a concept of operation. Otherwise he missed offensive action, especially of the destroyers that he con-

66 TNA, ADM 116/1169, Remarks by A.D.O.D.; Confidential. *Naval Manoeuvres, 1913. General Scheme*; ADM 116/1176C, *Naval Manoeuvres, 1913, Report by Umpire-in-Chief*; ADM 116/1169, Draft. Criticisms of the 1913 Manoeuvres. Notes from Military Reports on the 1913 Manoeuvres. C.O.S. short memo 20-9-1913 to First Sea Lord and First Lord ‘Reports of Military Officers ...’; ADM 116/1214. No. 1266/ H.F. 7 S. Secret of 28-8-1913 “NEPTUNE” at Portsmouth to the Secretary of the Admiralty. ‘Remarks on Comments by the Commander-in-Chief on the 1913 Manoeuvres (M. 0045)’ of 29-9-1913; 1472/ H.F. 7 S. Secret of 2-10-1913 “NEPTUNE” at Cromarty to The Secretary of the Admiralty; Brig. Gen. Henderson. 29-8-1913. “Report on Naval Manoeuvres 1913”; Report by Major F.J. Marshall of 11-7-1913; Report by (name unclear) Staff Captain, Eastern Command, Horse Guard of 10-8-1913; ADM 116/3130, The Commander-in-Chief Home Fleets, No. 1266/H.F. of 28-8-1913 to The Secretary, Admiralty, *Naval Manoeuvres, 1913. Remarks on North Sea Strategy*.

67 Morgan-Owen: *An ‘Intermediate Blockade’?*, p. 7.

Churchill's replacement of Francis Bridgeman with Prince Louis of Battenberg meant that resistance to his activist's strategies soon became limited to the War Staff. (iseehistory.com)



sidered unsuited to any other task. As already noted Beatty also suggested that the operations of the old submarines and destroyers of the Admiral of Patrols should be closely integrated with those of the main fleet. Churchill used Beatty's comments in a letter to Battenberg on 17 February. He saw the plan as too passive. The Germans should be put on the defensive by British offensive operations such as blocking the Elbe and by massive destroyer sweeps up to the German coast immediately at the start of the war. This would ensure moral dominance. Churchill also emphasized that he wanted Bayly to conduct a study concerning the capture of overseas bases. Bayly had been recruited for the task and given his instructions during the First Lord's dramatic inspection visit to Cromarty on 31 January, and he would start his work in the Admiralty early March, after having handed over command of his battle-cruiser squadron to Beatty. On 11 March both Ballard and Jackson, the Chief of War Staff, countered the Beatty-Churchill ideas and criticism as risky and unsound. Operations in the Heligoland Bight had to be left to the submarines. Ballard noted that the 1912 exercises had led to the War Plans delegating control of all battle-cruisers, cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers in the North Sea to Callaghan, and it was therefore the C-in-C who should plan for their use. However, Churchill did not give up. On 14 April he wanted to have the coming 1913 manoeuvres changed as they seemed to give all initiative to the party representing the Germans ("Red"), and on 23 June 1913

Churchill asked for a direct discussion with Ballard of the issue.⁶⁸ This was three days before Bayly formally submitted his report.

Jackson had asked Bayly for an interim report when he started his work. It was ready on 17 March. The document asserted that any close blockade depended on the capture of “*a convenient base*”. Its capture would also be likely to draw the German fleet out to battle, be a morale booster for the Royal Navy and the nation, and reduce the German inclination to land in England. The best option seemed to be Borkum. He concluded with asking the question “*why are we to fear a German raid or invasion, if we, with a superior Navy, are afraid to do the same?*” In his covering letter the Chief of Staff wrote that a landing at the outbreak of the war would have more moral effect than a later operation, and that the losses involved in taking the base would probably be greater than the losses resulting from a close blockade without one.

Bayly’s final report followed on 30 June and discussed the advantages and possibilities of bases off Holland, in the Kattegat, at Borkum, at Lister Deep off Sylt, in Esbjerg and at Heligoland. As was customary then, the report included outlines of historical expeditions. Each option included a sketch plan and an estimate of requirements for support ships, transports, landing craft and troops. -Within two weeks Jackson and Ballard had countered all the proposals. Ballard had staffed the different options and compared them with his Division’s own work. He proposed that the report should be filed for reference if the issue were to become relevant “*not necessarily as a guide for a plan, but as a report embodying much useful information in matters of detail*”. This seems to have blocked Churchill’s immediate progress towards a more aggressive war plan posture.⁶⁹

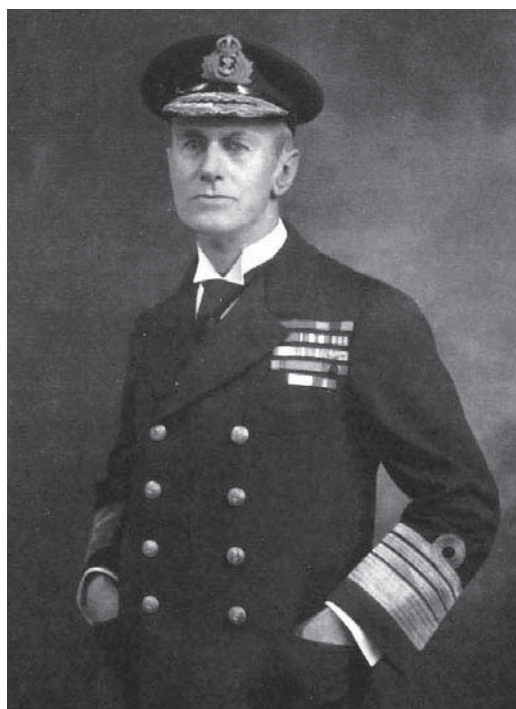
However, The First Lord could draw on other like-minded naval officers. The Admiralty had asked the recently retired Admiral Sir Reginald Neville Custance to comment on the recent manoeuvres. He noted that the exercise did not mirror war, “*in so much as the Admiralty took no part in its direction, nor did it act as the centre of distribution of intelligence*”. The comment makes clear that Custance knew about the plans for War Room control. He noted – as others – that the orders were too long and unclear, giving detailed instructions rather than general directives. He repeated what Churchill had noted before the manoeuvres, that the initiative had been given to the Germans, and only their side had troops and transports available. He considered that too little emphasis had been placed on seeking battle in the instructions to the British side. The War Staff considered the retired Admiral’s views inaccurate and unfair.⁷⁰ In his comments to the 1913

68 TNA, ADM 116/3412, pp. 187-213; Clemmesen (2012), pp. 248-250, 261-267; ADM 137/452, M-0180/13 Admiralty, Secret and Personal, to Rear-Admiral Lewis Bayly, HMS LION; ADM 116/1176C, Winston Churchill, Secret, of 14-4-1913 to First Sea Lord.

69 TNA, ADM 137/452, pp. 3-136.

70 TNA, ADM 116/1169, *Criticisms on the 1913 Manoeuvres*.

The aggressive traditionalist Lewis Bayly had contained the move towards a mainly trade blockading strategy during his time as Naval War College Commandant. In spring 1913 he agreed to lead Churchill's alternative operational planning cell in the Admiralty. (From his auto-biography: Pull Together)



manoeuvres, David Beatty repeated what had been his winter criticism of the War Plan. The scenario had left all the initiative on the enemy side, which was basically unsound.⁷¹

The conference to discuss the North Sea problem in the light of the 1912 and 1913 manoeuvres took place at Cromarty in early October 1913. It inspired the War Plan revision that took place in the Operations Division from later that month. Having received the comments to the manoeuvres, Ballard started a thorough revision of all the war plans and war orders documents. The aim was to shorten and focus them by removing all non-essential text. The first principle of the revision was that “*A plan should be as simple as possible providing that it is not too obvious to an enemy*”. Another principle was based on the observation that “*Excessive caution never leads to decisive results*”. The Admiralty should give the mission and leave the C-in-C freedom to execute.

The text in the War Plan and War Orders that had described how Callaghan was to use his cruisers was removed, as were similar paragraphs, which led to far shorter and clearer orders. Ballard indirectly accepted Callaghan's criticism by noting that all plans accepted risks, but to minimise these risks, the planning

71 NMM, MAY/10, Secret, Naval Manoeuvres 1913, Report of Admiral of the Fleet Sir William May: *Rear Admiral Beatty Reports*.

should be based on a full understanding of the enemy's situation and limitations.⁷² Jackson approved the revised and shortened new War Order draft on 31 December and forwarded it to Callaghan for comments. The C-in-C had no immediate significant remarks, and Ballard could respond 20 January 1914.⁷³

Ballard still worked with the possibility of using offensive mining to support the North Sea strategy. On 10 December 1913 he had drafted a "*Proposal regarding the use of mines in support of an offensive strategic plan*". Britain should act on the defensive against invasion or attacks on trade, but it should also assume the offensive against the trade of the enemy. To make trade war effective in spite of the neutrals Britain should resort to the use of mines. It was free to do so under international law if mines were not used with the "*sole*" purpose of blocking commercial navigation. Mines meant risks to one's own ships, and this should be considered when placing the actual mines. It was possible to pretend that the minefields were far more extensive than the actual ones. Declared minefields should limit the use of Dutch and Belgian ports. Roughly 25 % of the British mine stocks were required for what he proposed.⁷⁴ Ballard probably did not fully realise that offensive mining was not really a relevant response to his colleagues' and the First Lord's quest for visible and dramatic action.

1914: Traditionalist renaissance interrupted

The strained relations during the 1912-13 winter months had ended in German-British co-operation to end the Balkan War Crisis diplomatically and in the Scutari naval blockade. In early spring 1914 there was apparently no urgency to update the plans for war on the basis of Ballard's work. After his editing of the War Plans and War Orders after the Cromarty Conference, and his correspondence with Callaghan just after New Year, nothing further had happened.⁷⁵

Winston Churchill and several of his chosen professional advisors found the planned reactive strategy unacceptable from both the First Lord's political ambitions and service profile points of view. Ballard had been unwilling to show the necessary flexibility, and he had been backed up by Jackson. To get progress Ballard would have to be replaced with somebody who was in line with the First Lord, or at least less persistent. Churchill had discussed his replacement with Battenberg for some months. The 52 years old Operations Director was due for promotion to Rear-Admiral within a year.⁷⁶ Churchill recognised Ballard's qualities, but he did

72 TNA, ADM 137/818, pp.9-44.

73 TNA, ADM 137/818, pp. pp. 45-81.

74 TNA, ADM 137/818, pp. pp. 450-462.

75 That nothing formal had happened on the basis of the Cromarty discussions was underlined by Callaghan on 4 May: TNA, ADM 137/1939, "IRON DUKE" at Lamlash, Secret NO. 630/H.F. 0313 of 4-5-1914 to the Secretary of the Admiralty.

76 Churchill's opinion of Ballard is covered by Nicholas Lambert: *Revolution*, p. 266; Grimes: *War Plans*, pp.186f. However, originally Churchill had been convinced by Fisher that Ballard



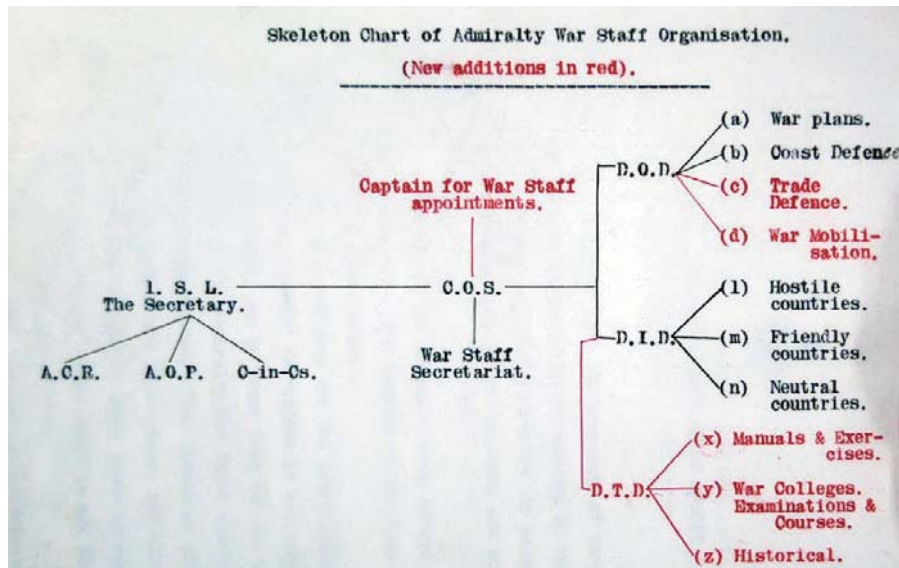
Churchill in 1914-15. In spring 1914 he purged the Admiralty War Staff to gain effective control.
(from Asquith: *The Genesis of the War*)

not consider him suitable for a normal tactical flag officer command, and during the spring he seemed to have found a solution that was attractive to both himself and to Ballard.⁷⁷ On one hand Churchill presented his plans for the development of the War Staff, where the Operations Division's responsibilities would be reduced by moving the responsibility for training and exercises to a new Training Division, actually breaking the link between developing strategic concepts and testing the ideas in Manoeuvres. This reduction in responsibilities would probably mean a reduction in salary.⁷⁸ On the other hand Ballard was offered the post of Admiral of Patrols which had proven so difficult and important in the 1912 and

should be a key member of his staff, and that he should be appointed Director of Naval Intelligence, see letters to and from Churchill in: Randolph S. Churchill: *Winston S Churchill, Companion Volume II, Part 2, 1907-1911* (London 1969), pp. 1298-1300, 1316-1317, 1320-1321, 1338-1339.

⁷⁷ Ballard's diary and correspondence give no signs that he bore any grudges against Churchill as the result of his transfer to Admiral of Patrols on 1 May 1914. He launched himself into the new job with all his usual intellectual focus and diligence; see NMM, MS 80/200 Adm G A Ballard.

⁷⁸ TNA, ADM 1/8377/118, *War Staff Training of Naval Officers. Memorandum by the First Lord, Mr Winston Churchill, in April 1914* of 12-4-1914; In First Lord's Minute on Development of Admiralty War Staff from 28-4-1914 Churchill noted that it would be difficult to convince the Treasury that Ballard's salary level could be maintained for his successor.



The innocently looking chart of Churchill's proposed War Staff organisation that would undermine Ballard's key influence, but it was balanced with the offer of an interesting job. (The National Archives)

1913 manoeuvres. Churchill probably realised that this position fitted Ballard's planning and management skills far better than the tactical command of a cruiser squadron or battleship division.

There are clear indications that this reading is the correct one. Just after New Year 1913, during the peak of the Balkan Crisis tension, Ballard had produced a secret memorandum on "*Defence of the Home Ports*" on which Churchill noted on 8 February: "*This is a vy (very) good paper*" and released it to the Flag Officers three days later.⁷⁹ 12 February 1914 followed a report of joint Admiralty and General Staff committee established 16 December the previous year to analyse the threat to the British bases and the east coast from enemy navy units, air attack and army raids. It was a natural outcome of the critical results of the 1912 and 1913 fleet manoeuvres. The general part had the form of an appendix with Admiralty War Staff memorandum signed by the Chief of Staff. It discussed the interaction between fixed coastal defences and naval units. The report divided the responsibility for observing and patrolling the coast between the navy, army and civilian authorities such as police and customs officials.⁸⁰ At approximately

⁷⁹ TNA. ADM 116/3412, pp. 105-133.

⁸⁰ Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Battenberg, MB1/T33, Secret "Draft Report of a Committee Appointed to Consider the Coast Defences of the United Kingdom and the Question of a Coast Watch" printed 12-2-1914.

Ballard's less independent-minded replacement as Operations Director, Rear-Admiral Arthur Leveson. (Imperial War Museum)



the same time Ballard had completed his “Notes” defining the different roles of fleet, patrol and local flotillas in defence of the coast and bases as well as giving a summary of the functions of the Dover Patrol. The observations were then developed into his 3 April 1914 memo outlining the “*Organisation of Patrol Flotillas and Coast Watching*”. The document marks a willingness to compensate for a temporary weakness in coastal defences with aggressive use of the available destroyers against a military raiding force. It indicates an understanding of the need to ensure high readiness and repeats the willingness to use aviation.⁸¹ The memo may actually be read as an indirect application for the patrol admiral’s post. Ballard was likely to have his ideas tested that summer. On 5 May Churchill and Battenberg agreed that the scenario of the 1914 manoeuvres would be an attempted raid as in 1912 and 1913,⁸² and two months later Ballard corresponded with the Admiralty about how additional destroyers for his command should be organised and trained.⁸³

Churchill’s memorandum outlining the War Staff changes also described how

81 Ibid. Battenberg, MB1/T32. “Notes” of 5-9th Feb 14 and O.D. 64/14 “Organisation of Patrol Flotillas and Coast Watching” of 3-4-1914.

82 Ibid. First Lord, Re. Manoeuvres with WC’s comment on 5-5-1914.

83 Ibid. Battenberg, MB1/T37, Office of Admiral of Patrols, Confidential, No. 1743 of 14-7-1914 to The Secretary of the Admiralty.

he had absorbed the lessons of the manoeuvres in relation to the Cs-in-C. Their possibilities for command of their forces should be enhanced, partly by creating a small administrative cell that could absorb the administrative burden, partly by establishing fleet staffs responsible for operations, intelligence and communications. Such a small tactical staff should have five officers in peacetime and nine in war.⁸⁴ This part of the staff reform memorandum illustrates the extent to which Churchill had taken control of professional-organisational matters that would normally be the responsibilities of other Board members, and as soon as Ballard had left, the final drafting of plans and orders – another activity normally driven and directed by the admirals – was accelerated.

On 29 April, even before Ballard had been replaced, Churchill took steps to increase his direct control over his Service. He invited the flag officers to a conference to be held when the fleet assembled at Spithead in July. It should continue what had been started in Cromarty.

A week after Callaghan had replied on 4 May, Jackson presented the draft War Plan and War Order revisions prepared by Ballard and commented on by Callaghan in early January. At that time Ballard's replacement as Director of Operations, Rear-Admiral Arthur Leveson, had taken over. Leveson had been Bayly's assistant a year earlier and was not likely to disagree with the First Lord's wishes to develop a more aggressive posture. The Chief of War Staff was now instructed to redraft the War Orders in light of the decision at the Cromarty meeting, and the new orders asserted that it was "*essential that immediately on the outbreak of hostilities the combined force of battleships, battle + other cruisers + flotillas ... should make a forward movement towards the enemy coast, then returning by another route ... to the station of the main fleet when not at anchor*". This "*reconnaissance-in-force*" should reach the enemy coast in the early morning and be repeated at random intervals using different routes "*to bring home to the enemy how hazardous it would be for him to despatch any raiding expedition*". The cruisers and destroyers should follow on a broad front to pick up any hostile vessels in the area. These offensive sweeps should deprive the enemy of his initiative. It is clear that this directive considered a war of weeks rather than of years. The Northern Patrol between Scotland and Norway should intercept both German trade and cruisers on the way out of the North Sea.⁸⁵

One month later, on 11 June, Churchill informed Battenberg that he was ready to discuss the draft plans with him and at the same time the First Sea Lord was asked to instruct Callaghan and his Second-in-Command, Jellicoe, "*both*" and "*separately*" to make plans that would supplement the main war plans. A "*Plan M*" would be for a "*general drive*" a couple of days after the start of the

84 TNA, ADM 1/8377/118, *The Operations Staff Afloat*.

85 TNA, ADM 116/3096, The reference mentioned in: IRON DUKE, Secret, No. 630/H.F. of 4-5-1914 to the Secretary of the Admiralty plus the different notes by Jackson, Leveson and Battenberg (his hand writing) dated 11-5-1914.

Churchill wanted offensive action. It was expected by this winter 1912-13 threat study by a young Swedish General Staff officer. The potential places for violation of Swedish neutrality by bases are marked. (Swedish War Archive)



war, probably something similar to what had been outlined on 11 May. A second plan should establish a close blockade of the Heligoland Bight. It should be maintained for four or five days and include a total blocking of the Elbe. It should have two varieties: “*L.a.*” without an overseas base, and “*L.b.*” with a base as outlined by Bayly. A third “*Plan T*” should establish a cruiser and flotilla base “*in the neighbourhood of Stavanger.*” Battenberg immediately asked Jackson to forward the order to Callaghan and via him to Jellicoe, and he informed the Chief of Staff that he would “*settle*” the war orders with Churchill the next morning.

Four days later, on 15 June, Jackson sent the draft War Plans and Orders to Callaghan for comments together with the request for Plans M, L.a., L.b. and T. The C-in-C was informed that the requests for the new plans should not delay his response to the draft plans and orders. The new plans “*can be completed later at your convenience.*” That last addition probably did not mirror Churchill’s views. Callaghan returned the draft War Plan and Orders a week later. He had only relatively minor comments. Inside the Admiralty the Naval Intelligence Director was asked by Jackson to supply the intelligence necessary to develop plans “*L.*”⁸⁶

86 TNA, ADM 116/3096, First Lord hand-written directive to the First Sea Lord *War Plans* of 11-6-1914; Chief of the War Staff, Admiralty of 15-6-1914 to the C-in-C Home Fleets; The C-in-C Home Fleets of 23-6-1914 to the Chief of War Staff. *Remarks of the Commander-in-*

In July 1914 the Admiralty issued the revised War Plans. They generally kept the shorter and more focused format that Ballard had developed since October 1913, and emphasized that they referred to the opening phases of a war with Germany in the North Sea. The main difference was in the “*general idea*” of the plan, it was now: “*primarily to ensure the destruction of the enemy’s naval forces and obtain command of the North Sea and Channel with the object of preventing the enemy from making any serious attack upon British territory or trade or interfering with the transport of British troops to France ...*”

When Ballard had worked on the planning late 1913 the general idea had still been that inspired by Corbett: “*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 military enterprise and incidentally but effectually to cover the transport across the Channel of an Expeditionary Force to France...*” At New Year the draft war orders had indicated that the purpose was to exercise economic pressure on Germany by the distant blockade covered “*by two Battle Fleets stationed so as to be in a position to bring the enemy’s fleet to action should it proceed to sea with the object of driving the (blockading cruisers) off or undertaking other aggressive action*”.

The Fisher-Wilson legacy of maintaining a radio-controlled trap had formally remained in place. If the enemy fleet was sighted by the patrolling cruiser squadrons “*or otherwise ascertained*” (sighted by submarines or plotted by signals intelligence) “*these two battle fleets will be moved or concentrated by direct Admiralty orders*”. In principle it was up to the C-in-C to decide how “*to frustrate the efforts of the enemy*” against the blockade lines or the British coast “*and for bringing the enemy to battle on a good occasion*”. If the German Fleet sailed northwards, the Channel Fleet would probably be moved into the North Sea “*with directions either to reinforce your command or cut off the enemy’s retreat as the situation requires*”. If the enemy sailed southwards, “*the converse movements will take place*”. It was “*imperative that the Admiralty should control the strategic situation*”.

The new July 1914 War Plan directed that until the enemy fleet had been destroyed, “*the continual movement in the North Sea of a fleet superior in all classes of vessels ... will ... as time passes inflict a steadily increasing degree of injury on German interest and credit*”. Thus Callaghan was obliged to conduct the massive sweeps that he and Ballard saw as a useless waste of resources. The Admiralty accepted that “*wide powers of discretion must remain with the Commander-in-Chief*”, it would supply him with all available information, but it would keep control of the Channel Fleet itself “*in readiness to move to meet North Sea emergencies*”.

The new War Orders for the “*Vice Admiral Commanding 2nd & 3rd Fleets*” who would form and command the Channel Fleet kept Ballard’s text. It gave a clear directive for this Fleet’s role in meeting or cutting off the High Seas Fleet from its bases and reflected the operational thinking of the Admiralty:

Chief, Home Fleets, on the Draft of the proposed new War Plans and Orders...; C.O.S. request for information from D.I.D. of 29-6-1914.

“... Should a hostile battle fleet break out standing to the southward you may expect to receive orders from the Admiralty to proceed to sea with all the force at your command, either to reinforce the Grand Fleet or to observe, check, weaken, or delay the enemy according to circumstances so as to assist the Northern Fleet to cut him off from home and bring him to action under the most favourable circumstances.

... Simultaneously, the Grand Fleet will probably move south either to engage him or cut off his retreat as circumstances dictate.

... Should the enemy be reported as steaming to the northward, converse movements may be expected to take place, and you may receive orders to move into the North Sea with directions either to reinforce the Grand Fleet or to cut off the enemy's retreat as the situation requires.”

The Orders also underlined that the Admiral should maintain direct wireless communications with the Admiralty “*at all times*” in addition to special telegraph communications when in harbour.

Where Ballard's draft revision had removed text directing how the C-in-C should see the situation and do his job, Churchill now included new text instructing Callaghan as to how he should operate against an invasion fleet.⁸⁷ To what degree operational disagreement influenced Churchill's decision to replace Callaghan with Jellicoe is unclear. Fisher had constantly recommended that if war came, Jellicoe should be the C-in-C, as he “*is as great as Nelson*”.⁸⁸

As noted above, Churchill had invited his admirals to join him for a follow-up conference on 18 July when the fleet would be assembled off Spithead. With Bridgeman, Ballard, Jackson, and soon Callaghan out of the way, he was gaining full control of his Service and had started the process of re-energising the war planning in the offensive and active direction he considered both necessary and correct. The conference must be considered a planned confirmation of his position as the head of the Service, not only politically, but also *de facto* - professionally. During May and June the conference agenda was developed. It included discussion on such issues as the use and defence of fleet bases, new design of ships to create room for the flag officers' staffs, decentralisation of command, roles of naval aviation, mine warfare, use of submarines, employment of battle, light and other cruisers, modes of blockade as well as different logistics and construction problems.

87 TNA, ADM 137/818, pp. 9-75, 96-169, 317-321; ADM 116/3096, M-0053. Secret. War Plans (War with Germany), Admiralty, July 1914.

88 Letter Lord Fisher to WSC on 26-10-1911, printed in Randolph S. Churchill: *Winston S Churchill, Companion Volume II, Part 2, 1907-1911* (London 1969), pp. 1298-1300



The North Sea 1914 with naval bases, etc., marked.
 (www.probertencyclopaedia.comphotolib)

The conference was delayed, and on 22 July it was moved from Callaghan's flagship to the First Lord's yacht, – *Enchantress*, and re-scheduled for 24-25 July with a new organisation of the agenda. This indicates that the First Lord wanted to make certain that he would dominate the proceedings. However, the worsening crisis meant that the conference was cancelled, and Churchill lost an important opportunity to influence all his key admirals with his views and priorities.⁸⁹

From 1912 to summer 1914 there had been a clear delegation of operational authority to the C-in-C from the War Room. This was logical for two reasons. The southern end of the trap, the Channel Fleet, was no longer able to fight the enemy battle fleet because the quickly increasing gap in combat power between its Pre-Dreadnoughts and the German Dreadnoughts. Co-operation between the two British fleets was further undermined by the new main fleet bases which meant that the northern part of the trap now had to reach the battle area from a cruising area off Scotland rather than off the Humber. The only available way to block the German retreat would now be to have the Grand Fleet C-in-C divide his forces into a fast force – the Battle Cruiser Fleet – and his main force, and to achieve the trap by the way he approached the southern part of the North Sea. The possibilities would be greatly improved with the arrival of the *Queen Elizabeths*.

89 TNA, ADM 137/1939, pp.8-98

Later the prospect of catching the Germans would be enhanced if some new “*Second Fleet*” was created which had been designed for operations in the shallow waters off the German bases. Making the return of the German fleet to its bases more difficult from these waters could be another possible task for the monitors, additional patrol submarines and specialised landing craft of Fisher’s “*Armada*” which was quickly constructed from winter 1915. These expendable units might achieve such a decisive delay if they were operating from bases in the eastern end of the Channel, or on the south-east coast within easy reach of the North Frisian Islands. Churchill proved that he was aware of the potential of monitors close to the German bases, when he noted on a page of Bayly’s Summer 1913 reports that three Brazilian river monitors being completed in Britain should be taken over and used for operations close to these Frisian Islands.⁹⁰

1914-16: Effects

When war broke out, Churchill harnessed like-minded allies in the Service to drive and realise his active strategy: old professionals like Sir Arthur Wilson, mature ones like Sir Lewis Bayly and young ones like Roger Keyes.⁹¹ However, his newly-appointed – and therefore untouchable – C-in-C, John Jellicoe, was unwilling to accept the risks, and the only offensive operation approved by the 17 September 1914 Conference on the Admiral’s flagship was a submarine reconnaissance of the Kattegat.⁹² The First Lord thereafter sought other outlets for his vision and energy in Flanders, and when he returned to the Admiralty he soon brought Jacky Fisher back in harness, expecting him to drive for early offensive action. When the old admiral hesitated and came up with a Baltic Project that would take many months to mature, he was easily bypassed. Fisher’s own views and the First Lord’s recent efforts had deprived him of the effective Admiralty planning and operations staff that might have strengthened his hand.

At the end of this narrative of the birth and development of the Royal Navy’s North Sea operational strategy in the years before the war, the author would suggest that the reader considers how the concept of the radio-controlled trap worked during the two first years of the war up to and including the Battle of Jutland. The first half year has been brilliantly narrated and analysed by James Goldrick, and Arthur Marder’s description of the rest up to Jutland 1914-1916 still gives a good outline. Most aspects of Jutland have probably been identified in the vast literature about the battle.⁹³

90 TNA, ADM 137/452, p.42, 142.

91 Ibid., pp. 137-206.

92 TNA, ADM 137/1939, pp. 103- 112.

93 James Goldrick, *The King’s Ships Were at Sea. The War in The North Sea August 1914-February 1915* (Annapolis 1984); Marder: *FDSF II* . (London 1965); One excellent recent addition is Epkenhans, Hillmann and Nägler, *Skagerrakschlacht*, listed in the literature under Andrew Lambert.

The logical effects of the centralist control dogma would be that flag officers would wait for orders instead of showing initiative and moral courage by independent action. There would also be a lack of urgency to develop clear and effective staff and communications procedures on flagships, as directions would come from the War Room. There would be no pressure to ensure immediate delegation of intelligence to all tactical-operational commanders.⁹⁴ There would be little urgency to improve and man low-power radio systems for flag officers' tactical coordination of fleets and squadrons operating beyond visual distance of each other, partly because visual in-fleet communications were essential for the stealth of the "trap". Finally central control was likely to bring increased risks of tactical misunderstanding, friction and engagements between one's own units.

The final part of the article has described how some delegation did take place in the wording of the War Plan and Orders from late 1912 onwards. Sir William May and others had described the problems clearly after the 1912 and 1913 fleet Manoeuvres. In Spring 1914 Churchill indicated that flagship staff should support command at sea, and the requirement to design the ships to accommodate such a novelty had been identified. However, changes take time, and the feeling that central control is better than losing control through delegation is very strong in Western culture. Some days after the Battle of Jutland, Fisher noted in a letter that "*Admiralty work the strategy, Jellicoe works the tactics. That's a great principle and the justification for the wireless on the roof of the Admiralty*".

Fisher never seemed to acknowledge the local friction and lack of initiative that is nourished by centralist control.⁹⁵ His limited and early practical service was probably insufficient to make him see that other relevant side of the coin.

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Resumé

Efter at den tyske generalstabschef, Alfred von Schlieffen, i februar 1905 havde fremprovokeret sin kejsers beslutning om, at tysk krigsplanlægning som udgangspunkt skulle respektere dansk neutralitet, var Danmarks skæbne i en eventuel krig helt bestemt af, hvilken optræden Storbritannien planlagde mod Skandinavien, dvs. om briterne ville gennemføre operationer, der ville tvinge tyskerne til at reagere på trods af de manglende formelle krigsplaner og derigennem fremkalde besættelse af dele af landet. Den danske flådeledelse forstod, at risikoen ville blive dramatisk øget, hvis den tyske Højsøflåde led et større nederlag i Nord-søen, men uanset, at Flådens Stab fulgte situationen i den britiske flåde så tæt, som dens meget lille bemanning tillod, kunne man ikke følge udviklingen af den

britiske flådestrategi fra 1905 til 1914. Det skyldtes, at udviklingen af en egentlig krigsplan først blev afsluttet i foråret 1909. For det andet betød denne krigsplans karakter, at elementer blev holdt hemmelige for alle andre end de to admiraler, der som flådechefer kunne kontrollere iværksættelsen. For det tredje betød de voksende problemer med denne krigsplan, at den fra foråret 1911 indtil krigen brød ud var under stadig udvikling.

Fra sommeren 1905 og tre år frem arbejdede flådechefen, admiral John Fisher, med at nå til en klar opfattelse af, hvordan sømagten Storbritannien mest effektivt kunne føre krig mod landmagten Tyskland, dels hvis Storbritannien var alene, dels hvis landet var allieret med Frankrig. Det sidste var kompliceret, for hvad skulle man gøre for at hindre, at den franske hær hurtigt led nederlag, som det var sket i 1870-71, og hvad skulle man gøre, hvis dette alligevel skete?

Det blev hurtigt klart, at et centralt element skulle være en handelskrig, der blokerede for tysk import. For at denne blokade skulle blive effektiv og i overensstemmelse med internationale konventioner, skulle den også blokere de tyske Østersøhavne, hvilket kun var muligt med base i Danmark. Operationer med den britiske hovedflåde i Østersøen forudsatte imidlertid, at man lukkede Kielerkanalen, så den tyske flåde ikke samtidig kunne operere i Nordsøen mod forbindelseslinjerne og den britiske kyst. Det andet problem, der måtte afklares, var, hvordan man rimeligt hurtigt kunne få en klar afgørelse. Det var ikke mindst var nødvendigt, hvis man var i alliance med det nederlagstruede Frankrig. Et effektivt bidrag krævede, at man fik tilføjet den tyske slagflåde et klart nederlag. Hvordan kunne man lokke den ud fra sine nordsøbaser, så man kunne opnå dette?

I 1907 og igen i begyndelsen af 1908 lod Fisher først en lille gruppe og så en anden gruppe studere og afprøve forskellige muligheder ved krigsspil. Allerede efter afslutningen af det første af disse studiefaser gik Fisher dog i et samarbejde med den lige pensionerede chef for Kanalflåden, hovedflåden, Arthur Wilson, om at udvikle skitsen til, hvad der to år senere fik form af den første formelle krigsplan. Wilsons konklusion blev trykt som et notat i begyndelsen af juni 1907.

I Den Engelske Kanal og farvandet mellem Skotland og Norge skulle britiske flådestyrker opfange tyske handelsskibe og krydsere på vej mod de britiske handelslinjer. Om dagen holdtes den tyske Nordsøkyst under tæt observation af destroyerflotiller, der blev støttet af små "Scout"-krydsere. Flotillerne var på større afstand af kysten støttet af pansrede krydsere, der var i sikker radiotelegrafiforbindelse med Admiralitetet. Ved handelsblokaden og aggressiv optræden mod tyske øer skulle man lokke den tyske hovedflåde ud til nederlag. Nederlaget skulle sikres ved, at den britiske flåde blev delt i to, den ene i østenden af Kanalen, den anden krydsende ud for den engelske østkyst. Når Admiralitetets nye situations- og operationsrum, "War Room", fik melding om, at den tyske flåde var ude, og om den sejlede vest eller nord, blev de to slagflåder indsat ved radiotelegrafisk ordre, således at den ikke truede flåde placerede sig mellem den tyske flåde og dennes havne.

I løbet af det efterfølgende år søgte Wilsons afløser i Kanalflåden, Lord Charles Beresford, forgæves at få delegeret planlægningen og ledelsen af en indsats mod Tyskland i Nordsøen, men forsøget endte i en pinlig offentlig konflikt mellem ham og Fisher, der blot fastlåste Admiralitetets beslutning om at placere den operative kontrol i situationsrummet. Den nye type slagskibe, der indgik i flåden med HMS Dreadnought som det første, blev samlet i en nyoprettet "Hjemme-flåde", og årets flådemanoøvers afprøvning af offensiv minering – et nyt element i afskæringen af den tyske flåde fra sine baser – syntes at bekræfte, at man måtte centralisere kontrollen med Nordsøoperationerne, og fra eftersommeren 1908 til forår 1909 udvikledes den formelle krigsplan, "G.U." i forlængelse af Wilsons 1907-notat. Det eneste væsentlige supplement var, at observationsblokadelinjen mod nord blev "forankret" til en offshore-base ved Horns Rev ved Esbjerg uden for dansk territorialfarvand. Samtidig med Fishers udsendelse af den formelle krigsplan blev Beresfords Kanalflåde opløst, og Hjemmeflåden under William May overtog ansvaret som hovedflåde.

Horns Rev-basen blev diskret opmålt i sommeren 1909. Den skulle sikres mod vejret ved sænkning af skibe som bølgebrydere og blev støttet ved placeringen af det gamle slagskib HMS Trafalgar i basen. Den sydlige ende af observationsblokaden kunne eventuelt støttes af en tilsvarende offshore-base ud for den hollandske kyst. Baserne kunne støtte destroyer- og undervandsbådsflotiller. Det er usandsynligt, at Tyskland ville have tolereret en Horns Rev-base uden videre. I slutningen af 1910 blev ideen om de to baser imidlertid opgivet, så den daværende danske radikale regering slap for det dilemma, som en tysk besættelse af Esbjerg, Blåvands Huk og Fanø med anlæg af tunge kystartillerianlæg ville have betydet.

Opgivelsen af offshore-basen betød dog ikke, at man ikke i 1910 som i 1909 øvede at fange den tyske flåde mellem to britiske flådeafdelinger. Det er uklart, om grunden var, at man havde besluttet at skrotte de to gamle slagskibe, eller at skrotningen blev besluttet, fordi baserne blev opgivet, og i januar 1911 udgav William May en opdateret version af observationsdelen af planen. Opgivelsen af de fremskudte baser gjorde det snart klart, at hverken antallet af destroyere eller størrelsen af deres baser gjorde det realistisk at opretholde den fremskudte destroyerobservation, og da Arthur Wilson i vinteren 1911-12 var blevet afløst af den kritiske Francis Bridgeman, der selv var blevet afløst som Hjemmeflådechef af den ligeledes skeptiske George Callaghan, blev den krævende og også risikable observationsblokade afløst. Et element i plan "G.U." havde været en linje af støttende panserkrydsere midt i Nordsøen, en linje, der også omfattede de nye slagkrydsere. I april 1912 havde man fået den idé, at denne linje, nu udstrakt fra Norge til Holland, skulle opbygges til at blive en tæt patruljeskærm, der skulle give den varsling og det beslutningsgrundlag, der tidligere skulle skaffes af observationsblokaden. Muligheden blev prøvet under flådemanoøven i 1912 og igen, i justeret form, i 1913. I begge manøvrer viste ideen sig som utilstrækkelig. Det parti, der repræsenterede tyskerne, slap igennem og sendte landgangsstyrker i

land på den britiske kyst. De to øvelser demonstrerede, at den centraliserede kontrol fra Admiralitetets situationsrum ikke var hensigtsmæssig.

Plan "G.U." fik en udbygget afløser i den plan, som kommandør George Ballard, operationschefen i den "Krigsstab", der var etableret i begyndelsen af 1912, fik godkendt af hjemmeflådechefen Callaghan i november-december 1912. Krigsplanen blev suppleret med en version for en alliance med Frankrig i foråret 1913 og var i vinteren 1913-14 under revision under indtryk af erfaringerne fra de to flådemanoeverer.

Den revision, der rent faktisk fandt sted i sommeren 1914, blev imidlertid ikke kun styret af Ballards notater. Marineministeren, Winston Churchill, var stærkt utilfreds med, hvad han opfattede som krigsplanens passive koncentration om fjernblokaden og handelskrig. Man skulle gennem aggressiv optræden tvinge tyskerne til at optræde defensivt. I foråret 1913 havde han fået etableret en studiegruppe under meningsfællen, kontreadmiral Lewis Bayly, der skulle undersøge offensive muligheder i Kattegatområdet og Tyskebugten, hvor man ikke skulle udelukke krænkelse af neutralt territorium. Imidlertid var både Baylys foreløbige og endelige resultater blevet effektivt afvist af Ballard. I begyndelsen af maj 1914 var operationsafdelingschefen imidlertid blevet afløst og placeret som chef for det maritime forsvar af Storbritanniens østkyst. Det betød ikke alene, at flådens krigsplan fik formuleringer, der lagde vægt på offensiv handling. Han gav også ordre til, at der skulle udarbejdes alternative krigsplaner, hvor én genetablerede den tætte observationsblokade, herunder en mulighed, der indebar erobringen af en fremskudt base. En anden alternativ plan skulle forudsætte etableringen af en krydserbase ved Stavanger i det neutrale Norge.

Imidlertid hindrede det uventede krigsudbrud og John Jellicoes – Churchills nyudnævnte Hjemmeflådechefs – totale afvisning af risikable operationer i sit ansvarsområde, at marineministeren kunne få sit ønske om strategisk aktivisme opfyldt i de hjemlige farvande.