

Foreword: the First World War at Sea

Jutland is the most studied of all naval battles, but the results have, until recently, been less impressive than their bulk might imply. Too many authors have tried to decide who 'won' a tactical stalemate that did not change the strategic situation. Although Sir Julian Corbett made these points in the 1923 Official History *Naval Operations: Volume III*, his successors lost sight of the bigger picture, and approached the action with partisan agendas. For two decades Jutland was studied as a Staff College exercise, by navies anxious to learn lessons, and by participants and contemporaries, seeking to apportion blame, or claim credit. Everything hinged on a few key moments, decisions made by four Admirals, and the brief encounters of capital ships. The place of the battle in the wider war was lost amidst the controversy and the fine grained focus. In Britain, America and Japan the battle was replayed, key lessons included the Royal Navy's mastery of night fighting and the recovery of initiative led tactics. While Churchill coined the memorable phrase that Jellicoe could have lost the war in an afternoon in his *The World Crisis*, recognising the larger context, his account of the battle was deeply flawed, based on a discredited account the Dewar brothers produced to serve David Beatty's agenda. After 1945 Jutland moved into history, as big gun capital ships passed out of service. But the battle over Jutland remained fierce, and narrowly focused. The historical giants of the 1950s and 1960s, Arthur J. Marder and Stephen Roskill went to war over authority and interpretation on this subject. Marder rewrote his account, Roskill disagreed. Yet beyond the heavy gun exchanges little new work was done. There were other questions to answer: were the cruiser and destroyer forces integrated into the tactical concept, why were the fleets at sea on that day, how did their movements fit into the wider war in mid-1916, and what was British strategy in the theatre on the eve of the battle? The centenary provided an opportunity to revisit the battle, engage with wider perspectives and challenge the historiographical dominance of the Western Front.

The essays in this issue, which were delivered at the BCMH Centenary Conference in June 2016, demonstrate the strength and variety of current scholarship on the wider naval war. The subjects include the development of American naval power as a counter-weight to British dominance, leading to a naval build up top-heavy with Dreadnought battleships, the ultimate symbol of national power, a detailed re-examination of the destroyer combat that shaped the final outcome of the action, the development of economic warfare, the nature of naval power before the war, shaped by the Arms Race into fleets designed for naval combat, not power projection, to the problems of allied co-operation in the wider conflict beyond Europe, where power projection was attempted with unfortunate results, in part from a lack of suitable assets. The centenary has rescued Jutland from inter-war Staff College exercises and

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personal battles, the 'great men of history' fixations of the fiftieth anniversary, and the apparent isolation of the event from the rest of the war. The centenary conference demonstrated how far naval history has advanced in the recent years, providing the First World War global setting and economic edge. No longer a unique, isolated event, Jutland can be seen as the confirmation of Allied sea control, the basis of economic warfare, and the guarantor of oceanic transport for men, munitions, food and raw materials. Jellico could not win the war in an afternoon, but by not losing he made a massive contribution to the final outcome.

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