British admiral (shown as commodore), commander of the Grand Fleet at Jutland and First Sea Lord at the climax of the U-boat campaign, Sir John Jellicoe
Credit: HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

Jutland vs the U-boats: *JELLICOE'S* *greatest victory?*

Allan George sat down with Sir John Jellicoe's grandson, to ask whether Jutland or his counter U-boat efforts were his forebear's greatest success. He discovered that filial loyalty doesn't inhibit Nicholas Jellicoe's analysis or rigorous criticism of the Jutland admiral

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet was, according to Winston Churchill, "the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon."

This explains Jellicoe's policy of keeping the Grand Fleet together and avoiding the southern part of the North Sea, where it would have been exposed to U-boat attack or be drawn over minefields. The Grand Fleet's role was to maintain a slow stranglehold on the German economy, also preventing Germany from importing the raw materials essential for continuing its war effort.

But once the Battle of Jutland was over and Jellicoe was appointed First Sea Lord, he was confronted with the U-boat threat. This was a new and technologically advanced adversary, forcing the Royal Navy to develop equally novel responses to better protect the seaborne trade essential to keep Britain fighting.

These conflicting views are examined in considerable detail in Nicholas Jellicoe's meticulously researched book: *Jellicoe's War: The U-boat Threat in World War One and the Question of Convoy.*

In part, the answer lay in convoys. Their adoption demanded setting up complex arrangements and developing a doctrine to manage and protect them. Ships had to be assembled at various points off the Americas, Africa and in the Mediterranean, merchant crews needed to be trained to sail in close company and escorts had to be found. Furthermore, receiving ports had to be organised and be capable of handling large numbers of ships arriving simultaneously.

Initially, convoys were fiercely opposed by the naval staff, who saw them as defensive and running

The battleships of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet underway ULLSTEINBILD/GETTY

counter to the Navy's offensive culture. Instinctively, they wanted to hunt down U-boats and destroy them, but finding them was almost impossible. However, a convoy reaching port without encountering submarines was a victory in itself. The real objective was getting supplies to Britain without losses, not killing attackers.

BAW sat down with Nicholas for an informative conversation exploring his grandfather's career.

Britain at War: What characteristics did Sir John Jellicoe possess that marked him out for high command?

Nicholas Jellicoe: It was inevitable John Jellicoe would go into the Royal Navy; the sea was in his blood. Through his maternal great-grandfather he was related to Philip Patton, who'd fought the Dutch at La Hogue in 1692. His father's father, Captain Henry Jellicoe, went to sea aged 12, becoming captain of his ship at just 21. Eventually he became commodore and a director of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. So, the sea was never far from John's veins.

He shone academically, possessing an extremely bright and active mind. In training, he was number two among 39 pupils in his class, passing out with a first-class certificate in 1874. He was appointed midshipman in a wooden three-decker, HMS *Duke of Wellington*, which is curious as the Duke of Wellington was also known as the Iron Duke and Iron *Duke* was Jellicoe's flagship at Jutland.

He was very well connected and worked on his network of friends. From his China days, serving on the expedition to relieve the besieged legations in Peking during the Boxer Rebellion, he got to know Americans, Italians and Germans. These friendships made in 1900 reaped benefits for the British in World War One. In China, he met Commander Edward Taussig (later rear admiral and commander of the first American destroyers that came to Ireland in 1917). He was also great friends with William Sims, who led all US naval forces in Europe during the war.

BAW: What traits went against him when in senior positions?

NJ: While Jellicoe was extremely professional, clear minded and intellectually gifted, he had weaknesses. Sometimes personal loyalties got the better of him and he defended friends more than necessary.

Jellicoe has been accused of being too detailed and lacking powers of delegation. That's true. He always took way too much on his plate and should have learnt to use his staff more effectively, but he earned a lot of loyalty because of the way he behaved. A very modest man, he treated everybody in his ships with great respect.

He wasn't a political player, but in senior command, the political game is as important as being a good tactician or strategist. It's certainly the case that his instinct was to play a safe game, not an aggressive one. That may have been the correct characteristic, given Britain had overall supremacy on the sea. It's normally challengers who are aggressive and defenders who need to be more conservative.

Admiral of the Fleet John 'Jackie' Fisher, 1st Baron Fisher, was a naval innovator and maverick who essentially offered his patronage to the up-and-coming Jellicoe CORBIS/GETTY

One could say the inability to delegate well and his political weaknesses were probably the things that counted against him in high command.

BAW: When were his characteristics first noticed and by whom, and what experiences developed them?

NJ: Jellicoe was very close to Jackie Fisher, who was effectively his patron, whereas Churchill was effectively Beatty's patron, having come across him at the Battle of Omdurman. There is the famous, but probably apocryphal, story of Beatty throwing a bottle of champagne from his gunboat down to Churchill, who was on the bank of the Nile. Eventually Beatty became his Naval Secretary.

I think, though, Fisher's outlook on the Navy was to tear down a lot of the tradition and go back to a meritocratic, professional basis. He was interested in new technologies, whereas a lot of those in the Navy at the time looked down on things like submarines, torpedo boats or even torpedoes – these were Fisher's toys.

He knew innovation would be extraordinarily important – and driving towards that culminated in the building of *Dreadnought*, which was a phenomenal naval innovation. Once it was put out there it would be copied, levelling the playing field. At the same time Tirpitz was very busy rationalising the German shipyards. In many ways, German yards were more efficient at turning out submarines and battleships than the British were. We'd let a lot of things run down.

The danger for those who are in the lead is that they become cocky and overconfident. They don't have a bent for aggressive approaches or innovative approaches. They're just trying to defend and rest on their laurels. The Navy hadn't been challenged much in more than 100 years. Nothing had really happened in the mid-19th Century to test them; everything was over by 1805. There was Pax Britannica because nobody else could support it. The American and Japanese navies hadn't emerged. The French Navy was in decline and the German Navy didn't take hold until 1897.

Vice-Admiral David Beatty, future First Sea Lord, commanded the British battlecruisers at Jutland HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

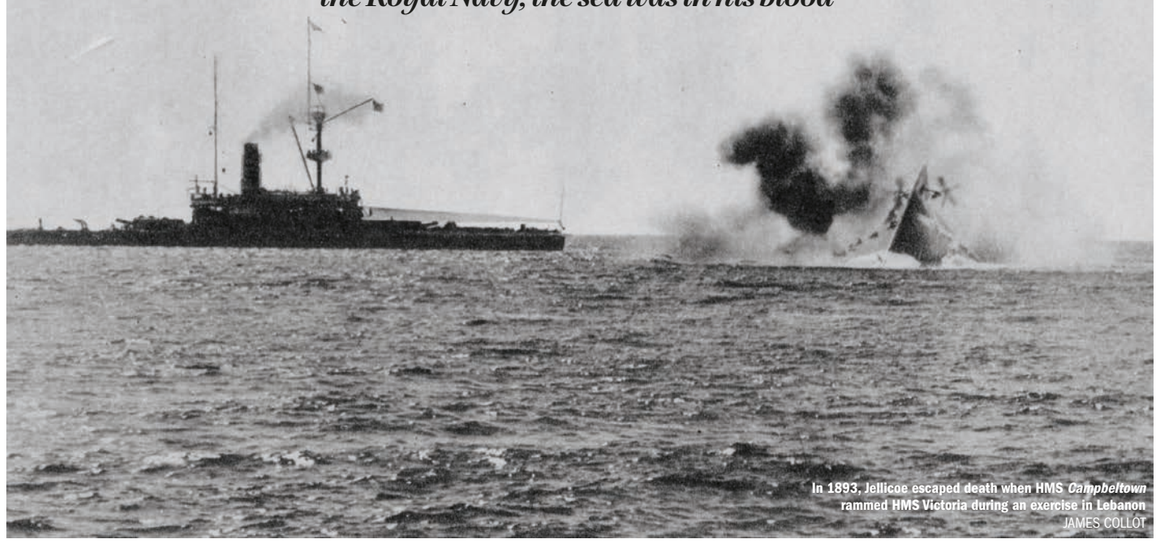
Fisher noticed Jellicoe when he commanded Excellent, the gunnery ship. Because of the mathematical bent of Jellicoe's mind, gunnery was an obvious choice for him. Jellicoe worked on the quick-firing guns and showed his metal to Fisher. From then on Fisher allowed him to ride on his coattails in future appointments, such as Director of Naval Ordnance and later as a Sea Lord. Fisher's patronage doubtless advanced Jellicoe's path, and he swam in the 'Fish Pond', a group of forward-thinking officers minded to support Fisher in dragging the Senior Service into a new century. However, the association sowed the seeds of later conflict with Lloyd George, particularly the 1909 fight over the Dreadnought budgets. Lloyd George never forgave Fisher or Jellicoe for scuttling his liberal welfare plan.

BAW: Was Jellicoe the right man to command the Grand Fleet?

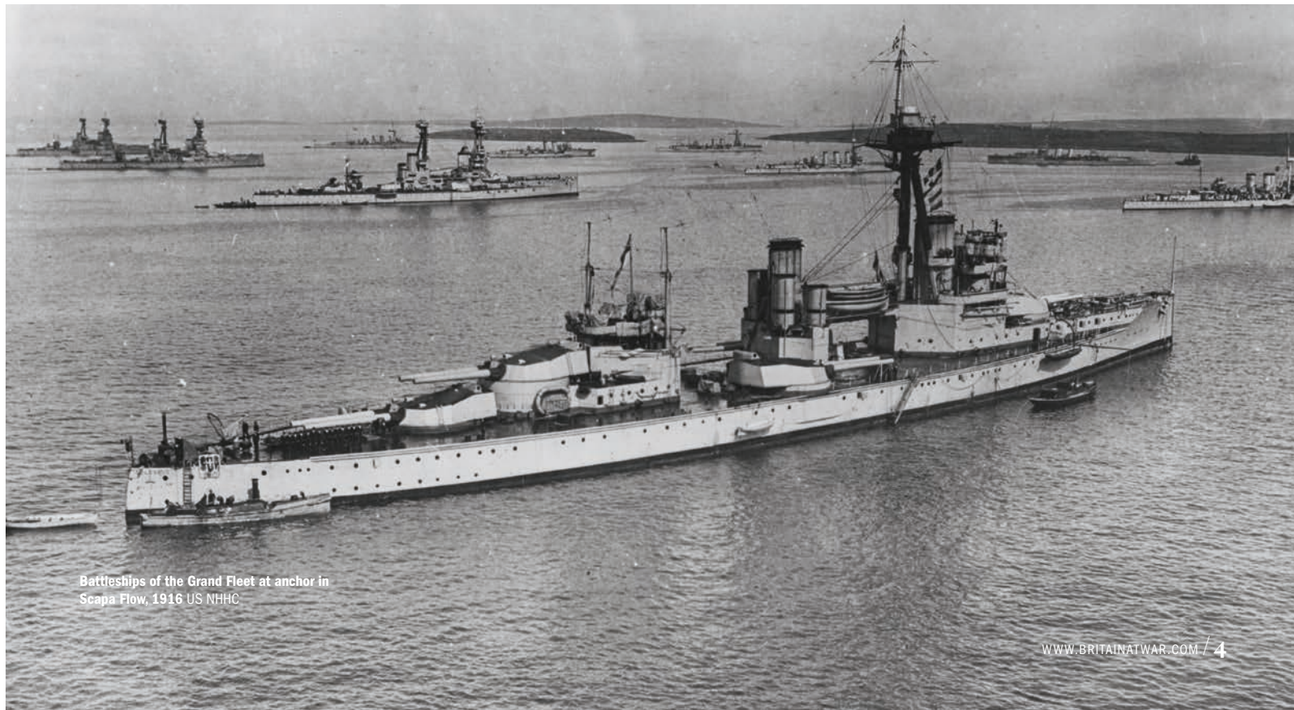
NJ: There were few other choices. Jellicoe had been nurtured by Fisher as a future Nelson and was regarded as a gifted naval leader. He'd come out of the 1912 war games, where he showed extreme brilliance defending the northeast coast against invasion. He had rounded experience, academic and intellectual capacity, a professional career track and detailed knowledge of how ships were built and armed. He was well versed in strategy, having commanded the Atlantic fleet in 1912 and had staff experience at the Admiralty. He also had a pretty deep knowledge of who his opponent would be. He knew Admiral Holtzendorf (Head of the German Admiralty) and Tirpitz, and had been introduced to the Kaiser. He kept his eyes open and had a very wide personal intelligence network on German shipbuilding.

One issue that Jellicoe faced as C-in-C of the Grand Fleet was the obsession that Beatty, commander of the fleet's battlecruisers, had with rates of gun fire rather than accuracy. This was not made easier as Jellicoe and Beatty faced communication problems: one of them was stuck up in Scapa Flow and the other in Rosyth. For them to argue issues by letter was difficult. It would have been

"It was inevitable John Jellicoe would go into the Royal Navy; the sea was in his blood"



In 1893, Jellicoe escaped death when HMS *Camperdown* rammed HMS Victoria during an exercise in Lebanon JAMES COLLOT



Battleships of the Grand Fleet at anchor in Scapa Flow, 1916 US NHHC

Jellicoe's flagship at the Battle of Jutland, HMS *Iron Duke* US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

better to discuss them over dinner or a drink or around a table. But trying to argue iteratively, by post, was almost impossible.

One problem the Navy faced was fire control. The British Dreyer table had limitations, whereas the German fire control approach was more sensible. They purposely shot short, watched the fall of fire and walked their gunnery up to the target. Whereas the opening salvoes from Beatty's flagship, Lion, at Jutland had shells landing a mile beyond their target – really appalling.

The Grand Fleet had the advantage of the Pentland Firth as its firing range in its backyard, an advantage Beatty did not have at Rosyth. As a result, the Grand Fleet's gunnery was extremely good. There was no comparison between *Lion*'s shooting with that of *Iron Duke*.

BAW: How was Jellicoe's relationship with Beatty?

NJ: It has been said that Beatty not inviting Jellicoe to the surrender of the Hochseeflotte was mean and small-minded. But neither did he invite Fisher, nor Mountbatten [Louis Alexander Mountbatten, formerly Prince Louis Alexander of Battenberg, First Sea Lord 1912-1914]. It was a sort of slap in the face for them all.

The surrender was a misnomer. It was a stage-managed necessity so the Royal Navy would feel it had won something, as it hadn't won in the traditional way – in battle. Its actual role during the war was to maintain a slow stranglehold on the German economy.

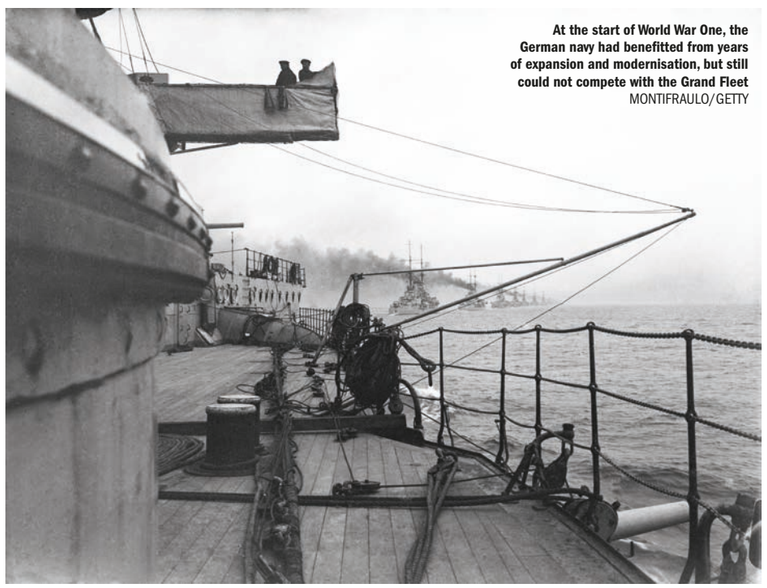
Jellicoe and Beatty were not close, although Beatty was responsible for pretty well saving Jellicoe's life when he was wounded in China. Beatty had defended the column bringing survivors from the disastrous attempt to reach Peking by rail, in which Jellicoe was almost mortally wounded.

The problems between them were partly caused by Beatty's wife, Ethel, who was always stirring – as were Beatty and Jellicoe's staunch supporters, who conducted an ideological policy war following Jutland. Dewer and Chatfield on Beatty's side, Harper and Bacon on Jellicoe's; all were equally vitriolic. They pushed both admirals, and a perception of them, in a direction neither wanted.

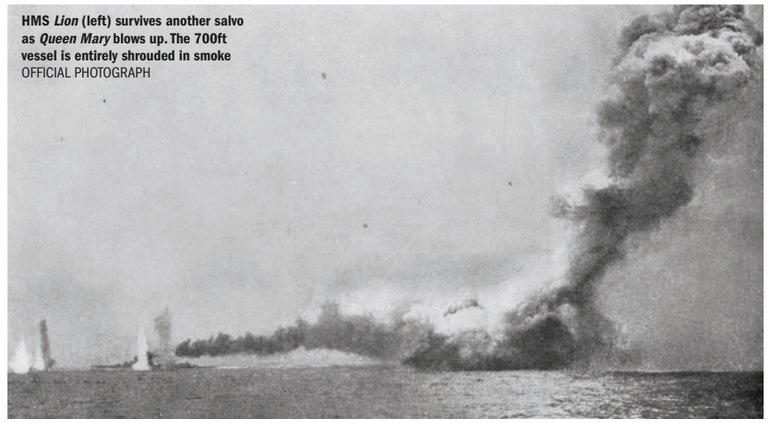
"It was war on an industrial scale and was a lot more than just manoeuvring... Maintaining the status quo or avoiding defeat was the wiser strategic option for Britain"

BAW: Was Jellicoe really the man who could have lost the war in an afternoon?

NJ: Churchill's statement is exaggerated and reflects Mahanian views arguing that the 'decisive battle' is what will win the war. Alfred Mahan was a US naval officer and historian who advocated doctrines for decisive battles and naval blockades.



At the start of World War One, the German navy had benefitted from years of expansion and modernisation, but still could not compete with the Grand Fleet MONTIFRAULO/GETTY



HMS *Lion* (left) survives another salvo as *Queen Mary* blows up. The 700ft vessel is entirely shrouded in smoke OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

Where it would become difficult for the Germans or the British was if their armaments industries were curtailed by limited access to materials they needed. Germany was weak at sea, but its imports were vital for its economy. It was easier for Britain and its greater control of the sea. Another key issue was maintaining the civilian population's morale and willingness to support the war. It was war on an industrial scale and was a lot more than just manoeuvring, it was all about industrial strength.

Maintaining the status quo or avoiding defeat was the wiser strategic option for Britain, particularly in the long term, as sea power enabled it to constrict Germany's economy. Britain had access to resources from all over the world – Germany's access to resources was very limited.

BAW: Was the policy of distant blockade the right one for Britain?

NJ: The alternative – traditional close blockade – was almost impossible because submarines, torpedo boats and mines ensured it would be a dangerous affair. As a result, the Grand Fleet fell back to Scapa Flow, blocking the northern cork of the North Sea bottle, while the southern exit – the narrow Dover Strait – was also blocked.

After Jutland, Jellicoe and Beatty lost confidence in the output of Room 40, the Admiralty's cryptanalysis section. It took time for intelligence from it to reach the operational commanders, infuriating Jellicoe. For example, he was informed that Admiral Reinhard Scheer's flagship, *Friedrich der Grosse*, was still at anchor, then suddenly, five hours later, it appeared in front of the Grand Fleet.

BAW: Could Jutland have been fought differently and, if so, how?

NJ: There might have been many things that could have been done to have fought Jutland a different way. But, let's ask: would independent squadron actions have been practical? What might have happened had the scouting capacity and capability of the battlecruiser force been better used and it had been better trained?

Vizeadmiral Franz von Hipper commanded the battlecruisers of the 1st Scouting group at Jutland FERDINAND URBAHNS

It is clear that Franz von Hipper [commander of the German battlecruisers] and Scheer worked very closely, so really fought as one unit, whereas Beatty was vanity-driven – his calling the battlecruiser force a battlecruiser fleet, shows he felt he had an independent command.

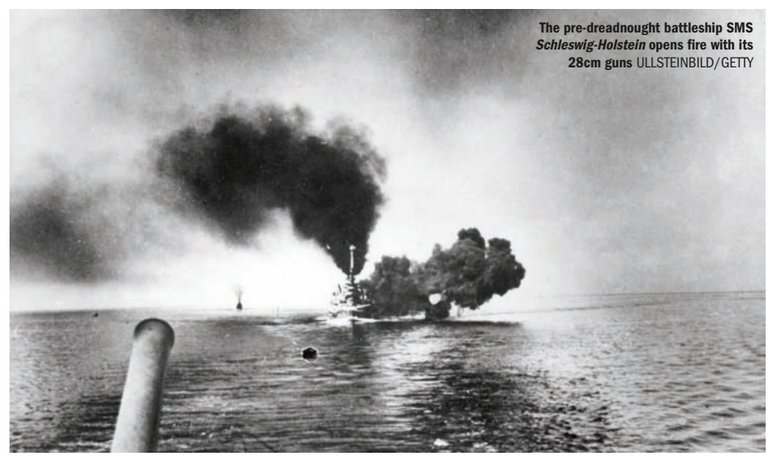
It's extraordinary that Scheer was informed about some of the British sinkings before Jellicoe was even aware of them. For Jellicoe to be left out of out of contact for up to 90 minutes as the Hochseeflotte steamed towards him, without information coming to him to prepare the battle line, was lamentable.

Then there were limitations. The Admiralty was conservative and meddled with what either admiral could or could not do, what ships they were to have in the line, which officers they had under their command and so on. Further, both British admirals were acutely aware that the public was expecting a Trafalgar and was restive because of Germany's coastal raids.

BAW: When he was First Sea Lord, what was Jellicoe's approach to defeating the U-boats?

NJ: From a very early stage, Jellicoe gave credence to the submarine as a dangerous weapon. But probably he was steeped in traditional naval thinking, being what the Americans would call a 'battleship admiral'.

He was a follower of Mahan, but to develop anti-submarine warfare you have to approach it through the mindset of a submariner. Some of the best anti-submarine tactics of World War Two came from that understanding: submariners, who'd done so well in the first war, became part of the countereffort in the next one. Yet the overall philosophy remained Mahanian: the meeting of battle fleets. It certainly was not seen as the defence of trade. The very words 'defence of trade' struck at the heart of Royal Navy mentality.



The pre-dreadnought battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* opens fire with its 28cm guns ULLSTEINBILD/GETTY

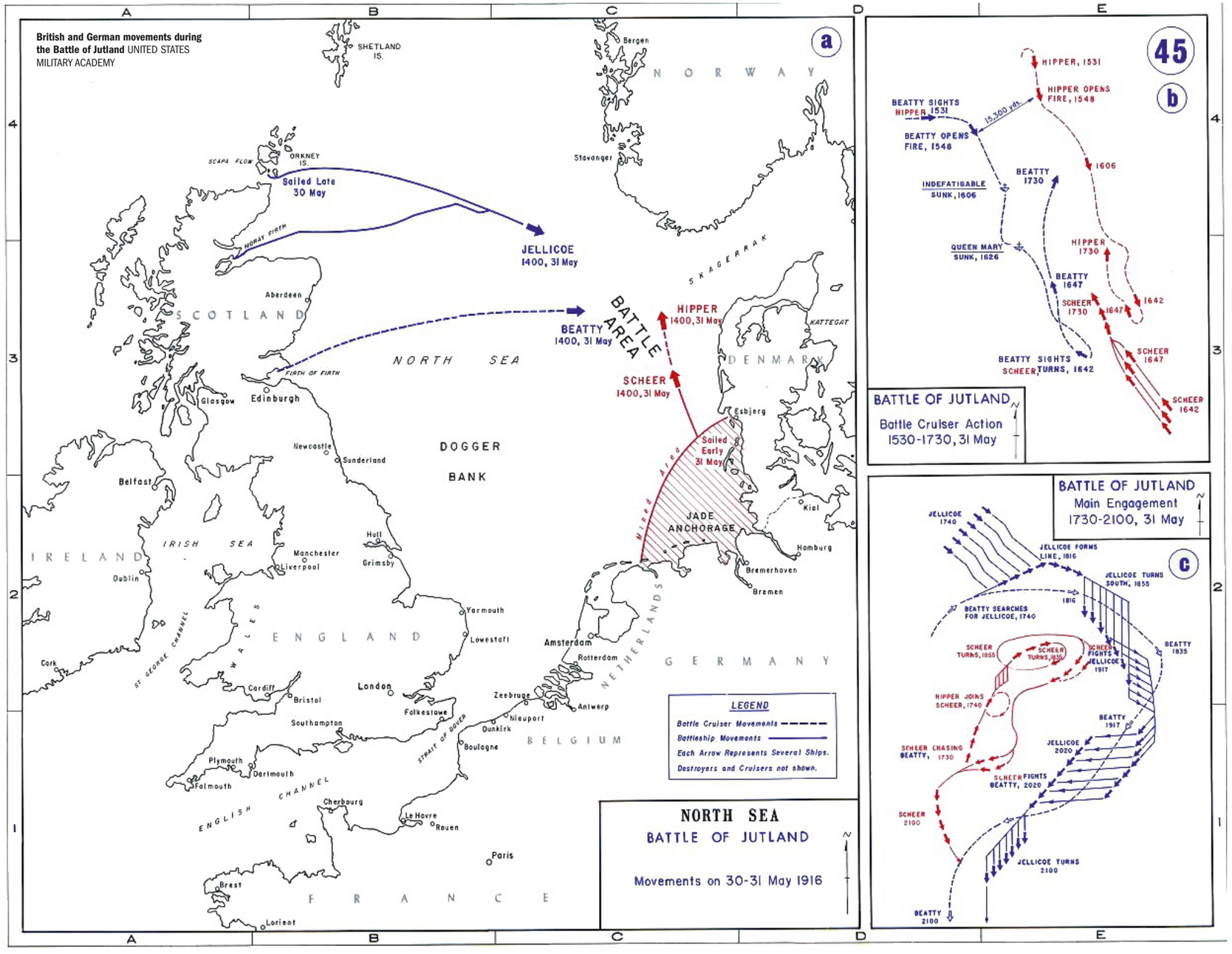
The belief that taking offensive action can never be wrong, is wrong in itself. Nelson said: "No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of the enemy." However, one can quote examples from Jutland and the U-boat war to demonstrate that this obsession blinkered much of the approach, which otherwise might have hastened the implementation of convoys.

The perceived ways of dealing with U-boats were surface-oriented: ramming, gunfire, mines and anti-torpedo nets. Where Jellicoe differed was that he was not going to be pushed into fast decisions. He argued that to develop a strategy that held water, first he had to examine the problem. That pointed to how the Admiralty had so far approached it: no statistics were being collected and little was put together on how to deal with U-boats.

Jellicoe looked at the portfolio of products, weapons and tactics, air, surface and subsurface-based. At that time the Navy faced some difficult problems – such as mines that didn't explode in 30% of cases. Even in 1917, something like 90% of the mine stock was unusable, making minefields and barrages ineffective.

BAW: Could Jellicoe have implemented convoys sooner?

NJ: Probably not. Jellicoe came into an Admiralty that, in 1917, hadn't yet seen the worst of the underwater war and had not advanced its thinking about it. Indeed, it was strongly anti-convoy because it saw convoys as lumbering targets.



Reinhard Scheer was the main German commander at Jutland and later added his voice to those calling for an expansion of the U-boat campaign THE EUROPEAN LIBRARY

Much of the debate has been around why the British were so blinkered. Convoys had been used successfully from Henry VIII through to the Napoleonic wars. But the nature of attacks on convoys changed – it went from a surface threat, which could be seen and managed at distance, to a hidden threat that no-one knew how or where to manage. How could an unseen attacker be intercepted, even if it was just 1,000 yards away? It was an entirely different proposition.

Scheer realised after Jutland that the Germans were not going to defeat the British in a naval engagement. Britain's major weakness was its trade arteries. If they could be severed, maybe Britain could be brought to its knees. Increasingly, the German Army supported this view. And when the Army started to shift its position, the Kaiser moved over as well.

The second issue was that some approaches, such as Q-ships, worked incredibly well, luring U-boats in before revealing their true nature and opening fire. But the problem was that the element of surprise only lasted a short time, so Q-ship effectiveness not only declined as the war went on, but it changed the nature of the German submarine attack. Traps on the surface like Q-ships made U-boat commanders leery, and they tended to forego closing and sending over a scuttling party. Instead, they crept up underwater and used torpedoes. Sinkings without warning increased from something like 20% in 1915 to 29% in 1916 and, by 1917, some 65% of sinkings were sub-surface.

BAW: What else was being done to counter U-boats?

NJ: The next big question was how to destroy submerged U-boats. Could they be pinned underwater until their oxygen or battery power was exhausted, forcing them to surface and be destroyed? Would it be better to develop the means to harm them while submerged?

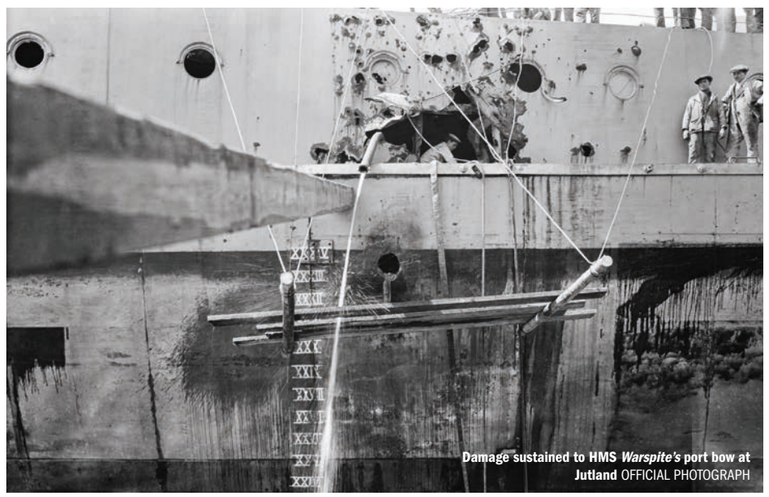
Early attempts to develop depth charges or bombs were hopeless. They put the attacking escort at risk because of an inability to throw the bomb far enough. Additionally, the principles of hydrostatic pistols and depths at which to explode had yet to be worked out. The lack of a decent underwater bomb was exacerbated by not having any means of identifying the location or direction of travel of a U-boat. The inklings of a solution did not emerge

The German battlecruiser *Seydlitz* firing on the British at Jutland. While Beatty's battlecruisers sustained terrible losses, *Seydlitz* was incredibly fortunate to make it back to port ULLSTEINBILD/GETTY

BOY SAILOR TO GRAND FLEET COMMANDER

1872 Joins the Royal Navy as a cadet at HMS *Britannia*
September 1874 Posted to the frigate *Newcastle* as a midshipman
July 1877 Transfers to the ironclad *Agincourt*.
December 1878 Promoted to sub-lieutenant
1880 Transfers to HMS *Alexandra*, flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet
September 1880 Promoted to lieutenant
1882 Leads a rifle company in Ismailia during the Egyptian War
1883 Qualifies as a gunnery officer
May 1884 Joins the staff of the gunnery school HMS *Excellent*
May 1886 Awarded the Board of Trade Silver Medal for lifesaving at sea
September 1899 Appointed assistant to the Director of Naval Ordnance
June 1891 Promoted to commander
March 1892 Joins the battleship *Sans Pareil*
June 1893 Survives the accidental sinking of Victoria, flagship of the C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet, Vice-Admiral Tryon, by the battleship *Camperdown*
January 1897 Promoted to captain and appointed to command the battleship *Centurion*, flagship of Vice-Admiral Seymour, C-in-C China Station
August 1900 Shot in the lung at Beicang in the effort to relieve the besieged Peking legations
February 1902 Appointed assistant to the Third Naval Lord and Controller of the Navy, responsible for ship design and construction
1902 Marries Gwendoline Cayzer, daughter of shipping magnate Sir Charles Cayzer
August 1903 Transfers to command the cruiser *Drake*
1905 Recalled by First Sea Lord Jackie Fisher as Director of Naval Ordnance, where he is one of the select team designing warships such as *Dreadnought*
August 1907 Promoted to rear-admiral and second-in-command of the Atlantic Fleet
August 1907 Appointed Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order
October 1908 Appointed Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy, with a hand in a major shipbuilding programme designed to maintain maritime supremacy
May 1910 Participates in the funeral of King Edward VII
December 1910 Returns to sea as the C-in-C Atlantic Fleet
June 1911 Made Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath
October 1911 Promoted to vice-admiral, made second-in-command of the Home Fleet
December 1912 Appointed Second Sea Lord
August 1914 Promoted to admiral and to command of the Grand Fleet

German destroyers dodge shellfire to launch a torpedo attack against the British battle line ULLSTEINBILD/GETTY



Damage sustained to HMS *Warspite's* port bow at Jutland OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

until late 1917, but it was never really solved until ASDIC, an early form of sonar, was developed in later years.

There were other influences, too. The offensive spirit of the Navy desired hunting groups to search for U-boats, whereas the place to hunt them would actually be at a convoy. In a sense, the convoy was a tethered goat, so was not necessarily just defensive. That was one of the things the US Navy's William Sims really brought out. The key was that sight of a convoy would lure the U-boat for escort ships to attack it. He came to the conclusion the real issue was location, location, location – you couldn't do anything without location finding as the primary tool.

There was another factor: if a convoy completed its voyage unscathed, it was actually a battle won, but this didn't fit the Navy's offensive spirit. This is important, as it is a starting point for the discussion about how well Jellicoe did. One could argue you can only tell how well or badly somebody has done if you agree on the metrics by which you're going to judge them – in this case either hunting U-boats aggressively or the defence of trade via convoying.

One measure was between the number of U-boats sunk or put out of action, and replacing merchant ships faster than they were destroyed. Another critical factor was rationalising trade to a point where you import what you really need, rather than following simple consumer demand. Agreeing the metrics for judging these philosophical problems is fundamental in any discussion about the submarine war.

BAW: How did the role of neutrals influence things?

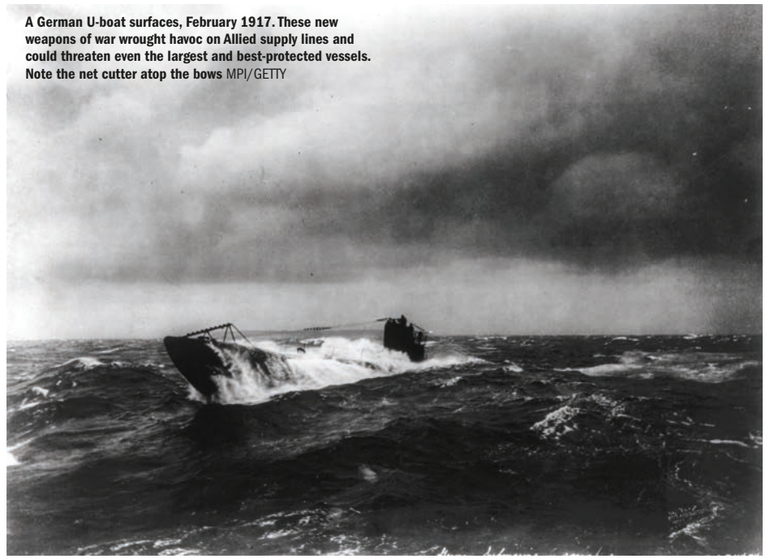
NJ: The submarine war was the first war where neutrals were deliberately targeted, because they carried an opponent's trade. The neutral countries were largely Denmark and Norway, the Netherlands and, the biggest one, the United States. The status of neutral shipping influenced proceedings for both sides.

The issue for British policymakers was to identify materials going to Germany via transhipment through neutral countries, then to interdict shipping carrying them. There was a fine balance to be achieved in interfering in neutrals' trade, as they were also useful to the Allies. For example, timber for British mines came from Sweden, while Denmark supplied a tremendous amount of agricultural goods.

One interesting detail was the voyage of the German commerce submarine *Deutschland* to Baltimore, carrying dyes the Americans needed for the clothing industry. In return, the Germans wanted precious metals and materials.

Conversely, German policy was not just focused on commercial ships. They also sank hospital ships because they carried troops who could be fed back into the line. They attacked neutral liners to create terror, to make neutral crews hesitate to sail cargo through war zones. Terror and threat were weapons themselves.

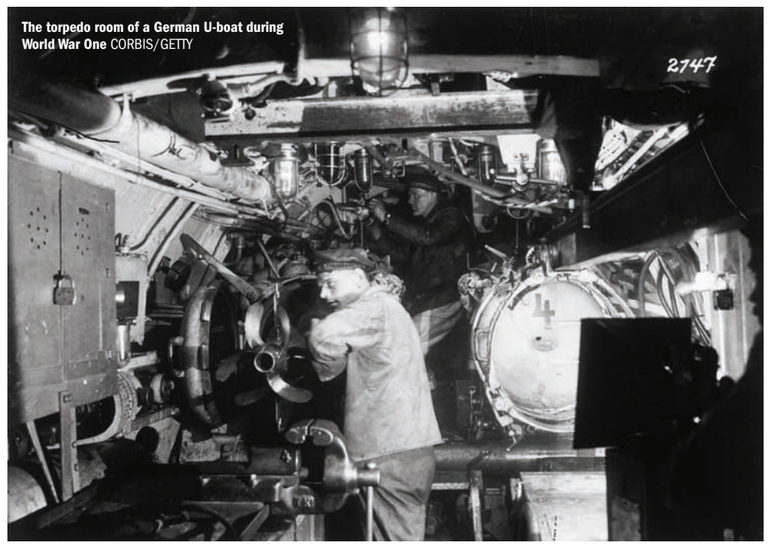
The war was fought differently in various theatres: the biggest example being the diplomatic impact of hitting and sinking American ships and killing US crews. This caused difficulties for Germany, so it shifted some U-boat activity into the Mediterranean, where there was less American shipping. The Mediterranean gave a much better environment for submariners, not having horrendous North Sea and Atlantic storms. There was also not much co-ordination between Allied navies: the Royal, French, Italian and Japanese navies. The Germans and Austro-Hungarian exploited these tensions. The



A German U-boat surfaces, February 1917. These new weapons of war wrought havoc on Allied supply lines and could threaten even the largest and best-protected vessels. Note the net cutter atop the bows MPI/GETTY

highest scoring U-boat captain of the war – who wasn't even matched in tonnage in World War Two – was Lother von Arnauld de la Periere. He sank nearly all of his targets using a deck gun, racking up his tally of 191 vessels/446,708GRT in the Med.

"The Royal Navy desired hunting groups to search for U-boats, whereas the place to hunt them would actually be at a convoy. The convoy was a tethered goat, so was not necessarily just defensive"



The torpedo room of a German U-boat during World War One CORBIS/GETTY

BAW: How did the U-boat war change?

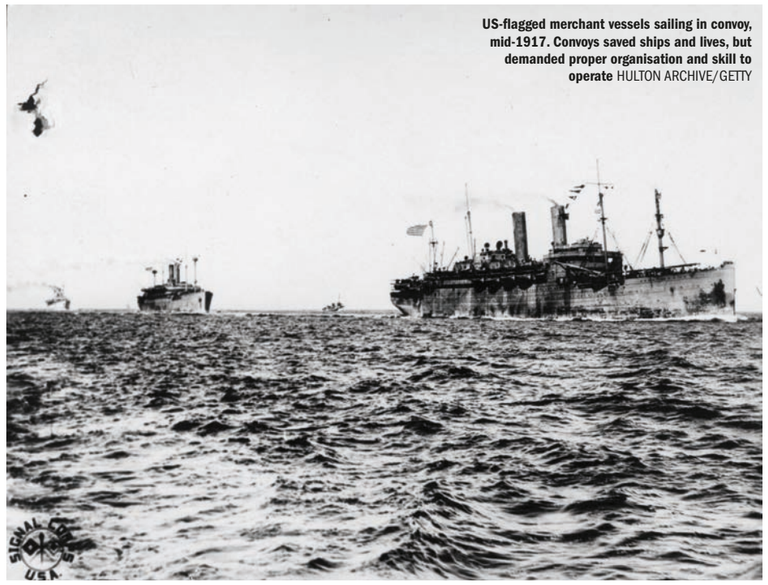
NJ: As the war progressed, the use of U-boats evolved. At the beginning, the functionality and purpose of the U-boat was explored. It went from sentry duty outside ports to expanding its operating range to threaten bases at Scapa Flow and the Clyde. When the cruiser HMS *Pathfinder* was torpedoed by U-21 near St Abbs Head on September 5, 1914, and the cruisers *Aboukir*, Cressy and Hogue were sunk on September 22, the reality of this new weapon started to dawn.

The submarine war muddled through until 1915, when the Cunard liner Lusitania was sunk by U-20 off Kinsale, Ireland, killing 1,197 passengers and crew. This was followed by the White Star liner Arabic being sunk on August 19, 1915, by U-24, also off Kinsale.

At Jutland, Scheer used all elements of the forces at his disposal in the most creative, innovative and integrated way. He tried to place U-boat traps prior to the battle, but by the time of the battle the U-boats' batteries had been depleted and they couldn't take part. After Jutland, he used submarines effectively and, on one occasion, managed to kill off two cruisers, *Falmouth* and *Nottingham*.

In Germany there was constant argument from the Kaiser and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, who tended to oppose a strong, aggressive submarine approach on one side, against Scheer who was becoming more aggressive, and Holtzendorf, who jumped on the bandwagon. After Jutland there was a concerted effort to agree on the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, which came in February 1917.

Within three months, the effect of the declaration was catastrophic for the Allies.



US-flagged merchant vessels sailing in convoy, mid-1917. Convoys saved ships and lives, but demanded proper organisation and skill to operate HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

In the last couple of weeks in April 1917, 860,000 tonnes of shipping was sunk. Given that the total size of the merchant shipping fleet at that point was somewhere around 12 million tonnes, it can be well understood why Holtzendorf was highly optimistic – over-optimistic as it turned out – about being able to bring Britain to its knees. Allied reactions and anti-submarine developments weren't taken into account, nor was U-boat repair time, nor the time needed to sail to and from killing zones.

As Allied tactics evolved, the Germans shifted theirs. One example was the attacking of ships that had arrived at the convoy's end and were sailing on to their receiving ports – the last 20 miles of an ocean voyage. The whole thing was constantly evolving, changing and becoming iterative.

The other interesting things in 1917 were the widening of the operating range to the United States – demonstrated by the *Deutschland's* cruise – and the extension of war zones to Canada, the Azores and West Africa. Operations were becoming global, rather than just centred around the British Isles.

BAW: How important was the contribution of the Americans?

NJ: The American contribution is interesting and underrated in the literature of anti-submarine warfare. It is clear that America's entry into the war was at a critical moment, enabling Jellicoe to implement convoys in a way he couldn't have before. Jellicoe was not opposed to convoys and I take exception to academics who say he was. He was very cautious about introducing something at the flick of a pen that had huge ramifications, as Lloyd George and Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey wanted to do. Introducing convoys required land-based logistics, transportation and port facilities be organised in support. To put in place convoys, there had to be access to neutral harbours to gather ships and time taken to train merchant crews to sail in formation.

The US arriving didn't solve things overnight. Josephus Daniels, Secretary of State for the US Navy, and William Benson, Chief of Naval Operations, were both against convoys. Benson said it was better to arm merchant ships, Daniels was of the same opinion. When Benson sent Sims off to Europe, he told him to be careful not to have the wool pulled over his eyes – the argument being that the Americans could just as easily go to war with the British, because they were destroying US commercial interests by restricting the freedom of the seas. But Jellicoe, in combination with Sims, managed to change attitudes and subsequently valuable assistance was given. Some of it didn't work because of flaws in technology – such as the American sub-chasers, which were not very effective. What were super-effective were the Curtiss H-12 seaplanes used for long-range reconnaissance.

The Americans didn't sink many submarines, but the benefits they brought – the technology they contributed, particularly in the development of listening devices, along with the bases they constructed in Queenstown, Corfu and Brest, the manpower and the finance, Britain couldn't have done without. Their overall contribution, in terms of manufacturing mines and ships, as well as the now accessible US convoy collection points, was huge.

It is interesting to note that the presence of the US Navy in European waters put, for the first time, an American admiral under British command – then the reverse when Sims took charge of Royal Navy ships. That was the first time there had really been a true naval partnership.

BAW: So what was Jellicoe's greatest triumph?

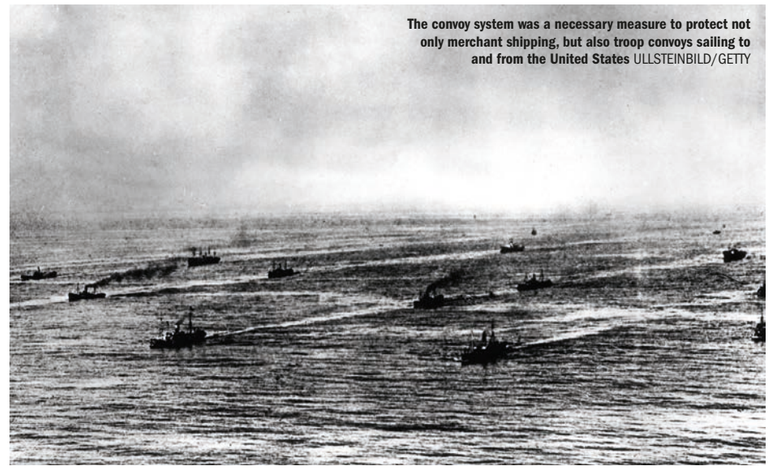
NJ: Should Jellicoe be remembered for Jutland or the convoys and the U-boat war? Which is his greatest victory? As Jutland was a set-piece battle, it had some great moments, whereas with the convoys and the U-boat war Jellicoe was roundly criticised, even though convoys were not the silver bullet everybody says they were.

Jovial British sailors observe the surrender of the German fleet at Scapa Flow, November 1918 TPA/GETTY

The captured U-148 displayed at Hoboken, New Jersey, to encourage the sale of war bonds. The entry of the US into World War One provided a significant boost to countering the threat of U-boats BETTMANN/GETTY

Yet, in many ways, this is the wrong perspective. Jellicoe cannot be criticised for saying he was an opponent of convoys, because the system was imposed on his watch. They were one of a portfolio of anti-submarine elements, but a very important one. The period between Jellicoe's first day in the Admiralty in December 1916 and May 10, 1917, when the first convoy test was run out of Gibraltar, was not long when you consider the breadth of issues needing to be solved. In any case, convoys probably wouldn't have taken place without the US entry into the war, given the opposition existing in the Admiralty.

In addition, there was a lack of consciousness in the War Cabinet about how grave the situation was. It caused Jellicoe to go overboard. He was extremely pessimistic, even if he was actually trying to be realistic, and he really put Lloyd George's back up. But by September 1917 there were convoys on a number of routes: from New York, Halifax, Hampton Roads, West Africa and Gibraltar. On each route, the frequency of convoys and the groupings of ships had to be worked out: the slower ships together, the faster ships together, what cargo had to be prioritised and the number and type of escorts needed. This could not be worked out in weeks. It was a huge undertaking.



The convoy system was a necessary measure to protect not only merchant shipping, but also troop convoys sailing to and from the United States ULLSTEINBILD/GETTY

WHO WON THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND?

Controversy has always raged about who could claim the laurels of victory at Jutland. In May 1916, both Jellicoe and Admiral Reinhard Scheer, the Hochseeflotte commander, planned offensives to force a decisive battle. Jellicoe had been made aware by codebreakers that the Germans planned to leave port in the early hours of May 31. A day earlier, he ordered his battlecruisers, led by Vice-Admiral David Beatty, to put to sea from Rosyth and for the Grand Fleet to leave its base in the Orkneys.

The Grand Fleet was stronger, with 28 battleships and nine battlecruisers, against the 16 battleships and five battlecruisers of Germany. Both had much the same tactical plan: the battlecruisers would steam ahead with the objective of identifying and engaging the enemy before leading their opponents into the battle squadrons.

The German battlecruisers, under Admiral Franz von Hipper, had sailed an hour before the Hochseeflotte at 0100hrs on May 31. The opposing battlecruisers engaged at 1545hrs and Hipper turned south to draw in the British, with Beatty trying to close the range. Two British battlecruisers, *Indefatigable* and *Queen Mary*, were sunk and Beatty's flagship, Lion, was badly damaged. *Invincible* was also sunk, but later.

When Beatty sighted the Hochseeflotte he turned away, as Hipper had done, to draw them toward Jellicoe. However, Beatty has been accused of not sufficiently signalling Jellicoe to make him aware of the tactical position. Though aware battle was imminent, Jellicoe did not have full knowledge of the enemy's disposition. Confusing cruiser and destroyer actions followed as the battlefleets closed and both battlecruiser forces steamed to join their main fleets.

By 1830hrs, the main fleets had engaged. Apparently, Scheer was taken by surprise, emerging from smoke and haze to be confronted by the Grand Fleet stretching in a huge arc. Spotting the trap, he signalled his fleet to disengage. Jellicoe, aware of the torpedo threat from destroyers, did not directly follow. Instead, he steered south to keep the Germans to his west and make it difficult for them to return to their bases.

Scheer believed his best chance would found be in darkness, but night wasn't due for a couple of hours, so he reversed course, hoping to surprise Jellicoe. However, outgunned, Sheer turned west again, but this time it proved harder to execute as his squadrons were losing cohesion. To cover the turn, Scheer ordered a torpedo attack by his destroyers and a death charge by his battlecruisers, which faced the greatest concentration of naval gunfire experienced to date.

Scheer slipped away under a smokescreen as his destroyers forced Jellicoe to turn away. After sunset, the last major exchanges took place as the remaining British battlecruisers caught up with their German opposites. Jellicoe decided to wait until dawn before re-engaging, so steamed south to cut off Scheer and maintained a screen astern. This faced numerous confused skirmishes overnight, but Scheer broke through, steamed across Jellicoe's rear and retired.

In total, 250 ships and 100,000 men fought at Jutland. Britain lost 6,094 killed, 674 wounded and 177 captured, with three battlecruisers, three cruisers and eight destroyers sunk. The Germans lost 2,551 killed, 507 wounded with one battlecruiser, one pre-dreadnought, four cruisers and five destroyers sunk.

Controversy has raged as to who won, much of it a consequence of the British public's anticipation for a Trafalgar-like annihilation. What actually happened was that the Germans blundered into the Grand Fleet, and while they dealt great damage to Beatty's battlecruisers, they were unable to cause serious harm to Jellicoe's squadrons. Scheer skilfully turned his fleet and disappeared, leaving Jellicoe the master of the North Sea.

There followed a shift in German policy towards U-boat operations and unrestricted submarine warfare. Had Germany destroyed the Grand Fleet, it would have opened the way for it to knock Britain out of the war, cutting off its seaborne trade and ability to continue fighting. In this, it failed.

JELLICOE AFTER JUTLAND

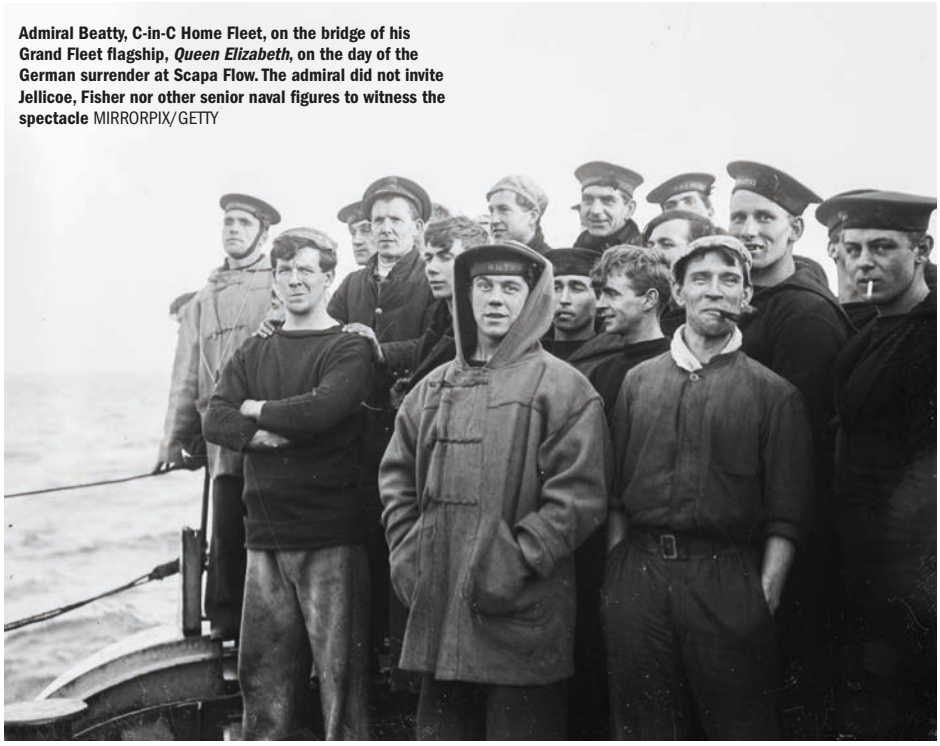
After his meteoric rise to command of the Grand Fleet, eased by his status as a protégé of Admiral Fisher, Jellicoe faced the challenge of an expanded German surface fleet. Britain's security relied upon the Germans being bottled in their bases. That Germany would invade was never a serious threat, but there was great danger in the Hochseeflotte entering the Atlantic.

With the Grand Fleet poised at its anchorage at Scapa Flow, Jellicoe denied the Germans the Atlantic at Jutland. He subsequently became First Sea Lord, the pinnacle of any British naval officer's career, and faced the growing U-boat threat.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George resented Jellicoe for his prior support of modernisation funding, curtailing the Welsh Wizard's social welfare plans. In December 1917, as convoys began to improve safety for merchantmen, Jellicoe was abruptly sacked by Sir Eric Geddes, then First Lord of the Admiralty, being presented with his dismissal letter as he left the Admiralty on Christmas Eve. Though delivered by Geddes, there is little doubt that Lloyd George was behind the dismissal. Jellicoe was made Admiral of the Fleet in April 1919 and later Governor-General of New Zealand.

Jellicoe was intellectually brilliant and warm-hearted. He was deeply religious and cared for his sailors' well-being. He enjoyed a reputation for being cool under fire and a tough adversary, but won people over with his easy manner and humour. He has been criticised for an inability to delegate, micro-managing rather than letting subordinates deal with detail, and was also uncomfortable playing the politics inevitable in high positions. However, as a fighting admiral in command of Britain's largest fleet, Jellicoe was at helm when Britain needed him most.

Sir John Jellicoe, 1st Earl Jellicoe, as Admiral of the Fleet, circa 1919 CORBIS/GETTY



Admiral Beatty, C-in-C Home Fleet, on the bridge of his Grand Fleet flagship, *Queen Elizabeth*, on the day of the German surrender at Scapa Flow. The admiral did not invite Jellicoe, Fisher nor other senior naval figures to witness the spectacle MIRRORPIX/GETTY

"Should Jellicoe be remembered for Jutland or the convoys and the U-boat war? Which is his greatest victory? I would like to judge Jellicoe on the effectiveness of the implementation of convoys"

I would like to judge Jellicoe on the effectiveness of the implementation of convoys. This achievement demanded good intelligence of U-boat dispositions, the effective nationalisation of the shipping fleet, comprehensive crew training, experience of convoying and the adoption of the right tactics. These things weren't developed overnight. They started 1917 with nothing, they ended 1917 with effective convoys. BW