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## The Battle of Jutland

This is a major new account of the Battle of Jutland, the key naval battle of World War I in which the British Grand Fleet engaged the German High Seas Fleet off the coast of Denmark in 1916. Beginning with the building of the two fleets, John Brooks reveals the key technologies employed from ammunition, gunnery and fire control to signalling and torpedoes as well as the opposing commanders' tactical expectations and battle orders. In describing Jutland's five major phases, he offers important new interpretations of the battle itself and how the outcome was influenced by technology, as well as the tactics and leadership of the principal commanders, with the reliability of their own accounts of the fighting reassessed. The book draws on contemporary sources, which have been rarely cited in previous accounts, from the despatches of both the British and German formations to official records, letters and memoirs.

After a career in computing and telecommunications, John Brooks obtained his doctorate from the Department of War Studies, King's College London. Now an independent scholar, he is the author of *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland: The Question of Fire Control* (2005).

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*Again for Anne  
without whom this book would not have been possible  
with my love and thanks*

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## Preface

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The literature on the Battle of Jutland is immense; Rasor's 1992 annotated bibliography runs to 528 items.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in the course of my earlier research and writing on fire control in the dreadnought era, I found that, to understand British gunnery and tactics during the battle, I needed to go back to the *fons et origo*, directly or indirectly, of so much of what has been written about Jutland from a British perspective: namely the despatches (often with supporting charts) submitted by flag officers and by the commanding officers of major ships, flotillas, even individual destroyers. Their great value lies in their immediacy and authenticity. Most were written within a few days of returning to harbour, each addressed to the author's superior officer. Because they were required promptly, there was little or no opportunity for more senior commanders to influence their contents.<sup>2</sup> Thus a typical despatch described the events and observations that were recorded or remembered as most important by the author and his subordinates, with little regard for what might later prove significant to the wider picture. Of course, a despatch was unlikely to include anything explicitly discreditable to its author or openly critical of his superiors (though we shall encounter single instances of both). Even so, these despatches are indispensable as contemporary, personal reports of the battle as experienced by those that were there. My previous book *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland* concentrated mainly on the gun actions between heavy ships during the daylight hours. Now, in this study, I hope to use these same sources and the same methodology in describing, for all the formations present, the course of the battle during daylight on 31 May 1916 and onwards through the night to the morning of 1 June.

In 1920, the great majority of the British Jutland despatches, together with a selection of gunnery reports and a comprehensive list of signals, were published by command as the *Official Despatches with Appendices* (Cmd. 1068). The value of this collection has not always been recognised; Captain

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Rasor, *The Battle of Jutland. A Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 63–170.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 7 for *Lion's* turn through a complete circle.

Roskill described it as ‘an indigestible, unanalysed and in some important respects incomplete mass of material’.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the only significant matter that was expurgated refers either ‘solely to personnel, recommendations *i.e.*, in no way bearing on the course of the action’ or to fire control equipment and methods that remained secret;<sup>4</sup> fortunately, these missing passages can be consulted if needed in the original typed documents preserved in the National Archives.<sup>5</sup> It is true that, as Andrew Gordon states, the despatches are ‘riddled with inconsistencies and conflicts’.<sup>6</sup> Given that they were written as records of individual experiences very soon after an action that was plagued with poor visibility, this is only to be expected. But this gives them their authenticity and they contain much information that appears nowhere else. However, they must be used critically and it is incumbent on all historians drawing on them to state clearly which despatches are the basis for their narrative and conclusions. The text of the *Official Despatches* is now available online, and many readers may wish to download a copy in order to check specific citations.

In addition to the despatches themselves, this account makes use of other sources which are either nearly contemporary with the battle or date from the post-war years when participants’ memories were still fresh.<sup>7</sup> ADM 137 (the files of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence at TNA) contains additional material about Jutland itself as well as the wider war. The Beatty Papers (in the National Maritime Museum) contain several important reports which, had they not been withheld, would probably have been included in the *Official Despatches*. The Jellicoe Papers (in the British Library and online) also contain some unpublished reports, while the four volumes, published by the Navy Records Society, of the papers of the two admirals contain a wealth of material, including that relating to the post-war Jutland Controversy. In 1919, Jellicoe published *The Grand Fleet 1914–1916* and in 1921 Fawcett and Hooper brought out their collection of the ‘personal experiences of sixty officers and men of the British Fleet’ who fought at Jutland. In 1923, Sir Julian Corbett’s five chapters on the battle appeared in the third volume of the official British history, though they provided few references to his sources. In contrast, the Dewar brothers’ suppressed *Naval Staff Appreciation* (1922) and their ‘de-venomised’ *Admiralty Narrative* (1924) contain many references to the *Official Despatches* and also to some other sources that are now probably lost; Jellicoe’s dissenting appendix to the

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Roskill, *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty. The Last Naval Hero: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Athenium, 1981), p. 323.

<sup>4</sup> *Battle of Jutland . . . Official Despatches with Appendices*, Cmd.1068 (London: HMSO, 1920), pp. 54 and 381 and, e.g. pp. 77 and 126.

<sup>5</sup> ADM 137/301–2.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game. Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996), p. 539.

<sup>7</sup> Full source details, including those available on the Web, are in the Bibliography.



*Admiralty Narrative* and his appendix for an unpublished revised edition of his book provide further insights into some of his important decisions. The *Harper Record*, eventually published in 1927, was in large measure a summary of the *Official Despatches* but it also contains some additional information.<sup>8</sup> The series of Staff College lectures on Jutland prepared in 1929–30 by Captains Bertram Ramsay and John Godfrey have also been consulted. Of more recent publications, the account of the battle by Nigel Steel and Peter Hart (2003) quotes extensively from the recollections of the battle that are held by the Imperial War Museum; those that were set down soon after the battle have been used here where they provide additional contemporary insights. Many other relevant modern publications are listed in the Bibliography. These works include the third volume of Arthur Marder's *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* and John Campbell's *Jutland. An Analysis of the Fighting*; the latter must be treated critically but the author's deep knowledge of ships' structures and the effects of shell hits remains indispensable.

Because of this study's emphasis on British primary sources, it has a point of view that, at least to some extent, is closer to the British than the German ships. Even so, it requires a reliable German perspective on the battle. In the early 1920s, little was available to the British authors then writing about Jutland other than the despatch of the German commander-in-chief Admiral Scheer and his memoir of 1920. In contrast, the works of these British writers, and the *Official Despatches* that underpinned them, were published while the German official historian, Captain Otto Groos, was still preparing his account of Jutland; this was published in 1925 and a translation was completed in the following year, though only for official use within the Royal Navy. Since Groos could also consult the despatches of German ships and formations, he claimed, with some justification, that he was able 'for the first time to present an account based on official information from both sides'.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps partly because of this, his work was some two-and-a-half times the length of Corbett's account, giving detailed descriptions of the movements and actions of the German ships. Thus Groos's *German Official Account* provides the necessary German point of view for this book (though his concluding attempts to claim an unqualified German victory have been discounted). While the British translation that has been cited here has not, to my knowledge, been published, it was the basis for V E Tarrant's *Jutland. The German Perspective* (1995) which provides

<sup>8</sup> For the history of these publications, see A Temple Patterson (ed.) *The Jellicoe Papers. Volume II, 1916–1935* (Navy Records Society, 1968), pp. 399–404, Bryan Ranft (ed.) *The Beatty Papers, Volume II 1916–1927* (Aldershot: Scholar Press for the Navy Records Society, 1993), pp. 417–28, Roskill, Ch. 15 and Gordon, Ch. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Captain O Groos (trans. Lieut-Comdr. W T Bagot), *The Battle of Jutland (The German Official Account)* (Naval Staff, Admiralty, 1926), p. iv, original emphasis.

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extended quotations and summarises the remainder of the text. In addition to Scheer's memoir, another important early German source is the book by Commander Georg von Hase, the gunnery officer of the battlecruiser *Derfflinger*; this was published in English in 1921 as *Kiel and Jutland* and is particularly informative about German gunnery methods.

Both official histories were published with a considerable number of detailed charts, though the German set has proved to be the more influential, because it was evidently the basis of the charts that were prepared by Captain John Creswell RN to accompany Marder's volume on Jutland.<sup>10</sup> The resemblance between the two sets is too close to be coincidental; compare, for example, the tracks of the two battlecruiser forces on Marder's Chart 4 with those on the German Charts 4 and 5, redrawn for Tarrant's book as Figs. 17 and 18. However, the historical accuracy of these detailed charts, which show the movements of many ships, large and small, is questionable. They are doubtless helpful in gaining an overall impression of the progress of the battle. But, as Andrew Gordon had demonstrated so convincingly in *The Rules of the Game*, even the track charts of just one formation, the British 5th Battle Squadron, are too inaccurate and inconsistent to be reconcilable.<sup>11</sup> How Captains Groos and Creswell went about the daunting task of unifying the navigational information from two complete fleets is unrecorded and, to me, impossible to imagine. For the simple charts that illustrate this book, I have preferred, as with the text, to go back to the immediate aftermath of the battle, specifically to the charts that accompanied the despatches from the senior commanders, Jellicoe, Beatty and Scheer. For each phase of the battle, the tracks of the British and German flagships are redrawn together on the same scale to show the relative movements of the two sides. But no adjustments have been made to eliminate any apparent inconsistencies, so that readers can decide for themselves whether they can be resolved.

The Battle of Jutland was a grave disappointment to the British people, who had expected that, if only the German fleet could be brought to action, the Royal Navy would win an annihilating victory in the tradition of Nelson. Because of the Admiralty's bald initial communiqué, there was even some delay before the public accepted that, despite the British losses, the outcome had been a strategic victory; after a brief excursion, the German High Sea Fleet had withdrawn hastily to its harbours, leaving the Grand Fleet's dominance of most of the North Sea essentially unchanged. But the price of strategic victory had been no less than a tactical defeat.<sup>12</sup> The British forces were considerably stronger – 151 British and 99 German ships were present while, type for type, British

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. Vol. III. Jutland and After* (Oxford, 1978), pp. xi–xii. The German charts are acknowledged as only one of Creswell's sources.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, Ap. II. <sup>12</sup> *FDSF III*, Ch. 6.

ships fired heavier broadsides. Yet they suffered many more casualties – 6,768 British killed and wounded compared with 3,058 German. Of major vessels, Britain lost three battlecruisers and three armoured cruisers, Germany one battlecruiser and one predreadnought battleship, though only Germany also lost light cruisers, four in all.<sup>13</sup> This book has two principal objectives. The first is to try to identify and explain the many reasons for this striking disparity, including the significant differences in technology and tactics and in leadership and command. The second objective is to provide a detailed and substantiated account of the whole battle as experienced by all formations from the squadrons of dreadnoughts to the flotillas of destroyers. To avoid a work of inordinate length, I am not attempting a critique of the existing literature. Instead, as in my last book, I am returning to the contemporary and near-contemporary sources that have been discussed earlier; throughout, my aim is to identify clearly the sources on which my narrative and conclusions are based. My best hope is that, by taking this approach, I can construct a new, source-based foundation on which further research can build with confidence. Readers will doubtless find some of my interpretations less convincing than others, but I hope that they will always be able to identify my sources as a starting point for their own investigations.

In the narrative chapters, the text is interspersed with tables which list the signals that are relevant to the events being described. These signals are, I believe, indispensable since they capture so much of the essence of each episode – its temporal sequence, the exchanges of reports and orders passing between commanders and subordinates, navigational details like courses and speeds, and tactical manoeuvres. The format of these tables for both British and German signals is the same as that used in the *Official Despatches* for British signals (though with simplified punctuation); note that the left-hand column contains the time of despatch of British signals but the time of receipt of German signals, and that the German sources identify signals *not* sent by wireless as ‘Visual’. For consistency with the original sources, these signal times and the times in the text are given using a 12-hour clock followed by ‘am’ or ‘pm’;<sup>14</sup> however, again as in the originals, signal times-of-origin use a 24-hour format. All times are expressed in Greenwich Mean Time. In both navies in World War I, with only a few exceptions, courses and bearings were expressed by means of the 32 magnetic compass points and this convention has been retained; also, I hope that, like me, most readers find that, say, SWbyW has an immediate significance that 223° True does not. For brevity, in the text and tables squadrons and flotillas are identified simply by a number and two or

<sup>13</sup> N J M Campbell, *Jutland, an Analysis of the Fighting* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1986), pp. 338–41.

<sup>14</sup> A slight change from the originals, made to avoid ambiguity, is that ‘12’ always means the hour after noon, ‘0’ the hour after midnight.

three letters for the formation type. Arabic numerals are used for British units and Roman for German while the letters follow national conventions: for example, 12DF for the British 12th Destroyer Flotilla but XIITF for the German XII Torpedo-boat Flotilla.

To keep the footnotes as brief as possible, frequently referenced sources are identified by short mnemonics, e.g., *OD* for *Official Despatches*, *GF* for Jellicoe's *The Grand Fleet*. The full citations can be found against the mnemonics, listed alphabetically, in the first part of the Bibliography. Other cited published works are identified in the footnotes by the names of their authors plus, if needed for multiple works by the same author, an abbreviated title; full details are in Section III of the Bibliography.

## Acknowledgements

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