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## THE U.S. NAVY WON THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

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*David Kohnen, with contributions from Nicholas Jellicoe and Nathaniel Sims*

**I**n 1914, the European empires muddled into a world war of unprecedented scale, which destroyed the global economic and diplomatic system. Initially remembered as the “Great War,” the First World War would influence concepts of strategy and professional education within the U.S. Navy.<sup>1</sup> While the United States remained neutral, the war dominated strategic discussions at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. U.S. naval professionals monitored the conflict from afar, using the innovative “chart maneuver” methods of Captain William McCarty Little and information from all available sources to reconstruct battles.<sup>2</sup> Following the earlier battles of the Falkland Islands and Dogger Bank, the epic battle of Jutland of 31 May and 1 June 1916 particularly sparked major debate within the ranks of the U.S. Navy about the future of naval warfare. This article is the first to analyze the USN studies of the battle of Jutland that were conducted within weeks of the actual battle in 1916.

Battleships remained the predominant focus within the Navy Department, but Captain William S. Sims advocated for the continued development of a “balanced” American fleet.<sup>3</sup> He believed the U.S. Navy also required lighter armored battle cruiser designs that offered firepower similar to that of battleships, combined with speed and endurance.<sup>4</sup> Yet the British battle cruisers had suffered withering losses at Jutland. The poor performance of British battle cruisers prompted Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels to consider cancelling further American investment in battle cruisers. Sims strongly disagreed, warning Daniels to avoid drawing false conclusions from newspaper accounts about Jutland. Sims acknowledged having “read carefully the American press accounts of the action,” but claimed special insight gained from a “considerable number of clippings received from England which give a much fuller account.”<sup>5</sup>



Captain William S. Sims, USN. Circa 1910.  
Naval War College Collection

Sims applied Naval War College methods of analysis to reconstruct the battle of Jutland in detail. He then offered a strikingly accurate assessment of the strategic consequences of Jutland in an 8 July 1916 report to Daniels. Sims also enjoyed unique access to information provided by his longtime friend Royal Navy admiral Sir John Jellicoe—the commander of the Grand Fleet during the battle of Jutland. Shortly after the battle, in June 1916, Jellicoe sent a packet to Sims that included an advance copy of his official report, appended to another study of the battle by British journalist Arthur Pollen. Few outside the Admiralty had access to such information at the time.

These documents enabled Sims to begin framing the basic chronology of the battle of Jutland.<sup>6</sup> Of special note, Sims filed other reports in a paper folder marked in his

hand as “Admiral Jellicoe’s Report of the Battle of Jutland Bank.”<sup>7</sup> The body of information Sims compiled in the summer of 1916 demonstrates the importance U.S. naval professionals placed on the battle at the time. However, after the publication in 1942 of the only comprehensive biography of Sims, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy* by Elting Morison, these particular records fell into general obscurity within the historiography.<sup>8</sup>

Yet it was over the course of this half a year—from the time of the battle of Jutland to the end of 1916—that domestic and external events and the efforts of Sims (and others) combined to set precedents for naval officer education, historical and strategic study, USN fleet organization, and concepts of combined and joint command that informed American naval strategic thinking through the Second World War and into the Cold War era. A century ago, Sims and his associates set the course that led to the U.S. Navy of the twenty-first century.

## THE JELlicOE CONNECTION

A century after the battle of Jutland and other battles of the First World War, contemporary naval professionals may gain fresh insight on questions of strategy and command by revisiting pertinent original documentary sources.

There have been recent studies of Jutland, many centering on Jellicoe’s decision making. The admiral’s grandson Nicholas offered a provocative analysis by addressing popular myths surrounding the battle in *Jutland: The Unfinished Battle; A Personal History of a Naval Controversy*. James Goldrick provided important context to the battle in his study *Before Jutland: The Naval War in Northern European Waters, August 1914–February 1915*. In another analysis, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command*, Andrew Gordon suggested that the

bureaucratic culture of the Royal Navy contributed to strategic mistakes during the battle. The edited publication of the original British naval staff appreciation, as compiled by William Schleihauf and Stephen McLaughlin, highlighted the bitter debates within the Admiralty, as many questioned decisions Jellicoe made during the battle of Jutland.<sup>9</sup>

However, among such published histories of the battle, few researchers examined the obscure role of the U.S. Navy in efforts to understand what actually happened at Jutland. The key to unlocking this major gap in the historical record may be found within the close correspondence between Jellicoe and Sims. Their collaboration began in China after the Boxer Rebellion in the early 1900s and continued to flourish thereafter. Jellicoe's exploits in China, as reported by newspapers throughout the British Empire, had earned him international renown as a naval hero. He was presented as a figure reminiscent of Horatio, Lord Nelson, even as the Royal Navy prepared to mark the centennial, in 1905, of the battle of Trafalgar; the first sea lord, Sir John "Jackie" Fisher, explicitly referred to Jellicoe as the "future Nelson."<sup>10</sup> Jellicoe carried the millstone of Nelson for the remainder of his career, suffering the burdens of unanticipated popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Jellicoe's fame on the international naval stage greatly impressed Sims, while Jellicoe recognized Sims as a unique figure in the U.S. Navy. (They also shared similar interests in the technical field of naval gunnery.) As Sims earned fame within the ranks for fighting the bureaucracy of the Navy Department, Jellicoe initiated correspondence with him. Sims demonstrated acute political sense, gaining access to the highest levels of American command as the naval aide to

President Theodore Roosevelt. Through Roosevelt's good offices, Sims secured command of the battleship USS *Minnesota* (BB 22)—as a junior commander. This appointment sparked controversy within the service, as commanding officers of battleships typically were full captains.<sup>12</sup> However, Rear Admiral Jellicoe, then third sea lord at the Admiralty in London, warmly encouraged Sims. "I congratulate you and the United States Navy. . . . I hope if you do come over [to Britain] I shall see you."<sup>13</sup>

As skipper of an American battleship, Sims then symbolically sailed into the limelight of the international media: six years before the battle of Jutland, Jellicoe and Sims celebrated an undeclared Anglo-American alliance. The Royal Navy hosted the USN battleships of the Atlantic Fleet's 3rd Battle Squadron for Thanksgiving of 1910. As skipper of *Minnesota*, the flagship, Sims reveled in the spirit of Anglo-American collaboration. In early December, Sims and his crew attended a series of events at Guildhall in central London. Commenting on the traditional maritime connections



Admiral John Rushworth Jellicoe, RN, Grand Fleet commander at Jutland, as a captain. Circa 1905. His appearance on a cigarette package highlights the superstar status he held in the Royal Navy—before Jutland.

Wikipedia, s.v. "John Jellicoe, First Earl Jellicoe," en.wikipedia.org/

between Britannia and the Americas, Sims was quoted as saying that if the “British Empire is seriously menaced by an external enemy, it is my personal opinion that you may count upon every man, every dollar, every drop of blood, of your kindred across the sea.”<sup>14</sup>

The empires of Germany and Japan flooded the American Departments of State and the Navy with strongly worded official complaints about the remarks Sims had offered in London. President William H. Taft removed Sims from command.<sup>15</sup>

### “CHEER UP” AT THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

Sims received orders to the Naval War College for temporary duty in 1911, which later resulted in an extended assignment to the College’s “Long Course.” Sims hoped the Naval War College appointment would end up being a mere waypoint, writing that maybe “things will blow over to such an extent that I may get some duty that I would like better than the War College—something in closer touch with practice and less on the theoretical side.”<sup>16</sup>

Sims regarded the assignment as a complete setback, far from the sort of duty that would lead to higher command within the ranks of the U.S. Navy. Given the seagoing priorities of the service, the College remained modestly equipped, understaffed, and inadequately funded. Since its establishment in 1884, the College had struggled to survive as a unique venue for professional naval education. War games conducted on the third floor of Luce Hall inspired U.S. naval professionals to gain fresh perspectives by examining historical events, using methods of decision analysis to develop naval tactics and to consider transcendent strategic factors applicable to planning future operations. Following the controversy surrounding the Guildhall remarks, many supporters encouraged Sims to treat assignment to the College as an opportunity to “tone down his ideas.”<sup>17</sup> Typically, Sims instead pursued a radical course, refining his radical views about the future strategic role of the Naval War College in relation to the operational forces of the U.S. Navy.

Sims used the Naval War College to open a fresh front in his campaign against USN bureaucracy. During his studies, he produced a series of provocative essays for publication in the Naval Institute *Proceedings* about the importance of education, doctrine, and strategic studies of history.<sup>18</sup> Sims treated the assignment to study at the College as an opportunity to work with the institution’s founders, retired rear admirals Stephen B. Luce and Alfred Thayer Mahan. Other officers affiliated with Sims at the College included Commander William V. Pratt, Lieutenant Commanders Dudley W. Knox and Arthur MacArthur III (Douglas’s brother), Lieutenants William S. Pye and Royal E. Ingersoll, and Marine captains Earl “Pete” Ellis and Frederick Delano (the cousin of Franklin Delano Roosevelt).

Personal associations established during their studies at the Naval War College fueled a competitive spirit among graduates to read, write, and fight for the vision of a U.S. Navy “second to none.”<sup>19</sup>

On graduation, Sims secured command of the then-named Atlantic Fleet Destroyer and Torpedo Boat Flotilla. In this role, he assembled a unique team of younger officers to apply the Naval War College approach to examining questions of strategy and tactics for practical application to operations at sea. Sims referred to his flotilla skippers as a Nelsonian “band of brothers.”<sup>20</sup> He recruited Pratt to serve as his chief of staff and Knox as aide. With Sims establishing temporary headquarters in the flagship USS *Dixie* (AD 1), at anchor off Newport, Lieutenant Commander John V. Babcock served as the staff operations officer. Destroyer skippers serving under Sims in the flotilla developed lasting ties that later proved crucial in wartime, including Lieutenant Commanders Ernest J. King, Harold R. Stark, Harry E. Yarnell, and William F. Halsey Jr.<sup>21</sup>

Working for Sims could be draining. Sims relied heavily on the advice of his staff in organizing the flotilla into a cohesive team. He decided to shift from *Dixie* to the cruiser USS *Birmingham* (CL 2), and leaned on Pratt, Knox, and Babcock to oversee the work involved with refitting *Birmingham*. This took its toll on Knox; he developed ulcers, then collapsed under the stress. However, even after King took his place, Knox continued acting as an adviser to Sims throughout an extended medical convalescent leave ashore.<sup>22</sup> It was at Knox’s recommendation that Sims in the summer of 1914 recruited King to serve as aide. Sims and Pratt arranged early detachment orders for King as skipper in USS *Terry* (DD 25) during operations off Veracruz.<sup>23</sup> Surprised by his reassignment, King was perplexed to receive orders for duty as skipper in USS *Cassin* (DD 43);<sup>24</sup> at the time, *Cassin* was sitting in dry dock at the Boston Naval Shipyard, undergoing an extended refit.<sup>25</sup>

In a wireless message, Sims advised King to recognize the orders to *Cassin* as an opportunity to build a reputation within the ranks. Then, shortly after King took command of *Cassin* in Boston, he received additional orders to report to the flagship *Birmingham* for duty immediately under Sims on the destroyer flotilla staff. King wished to avoid staff duty and preferred to remain in command of *Cassin*, although he sent a deferential letter stating that “I am ready to come to the *Birmingham* if, in your opinion, I ought to come.”<sup>26</sup> Sims recognized King as an officer with great potential, and left King to make the choice on whether to remain in command of *Cassin*. “I can quite understand your desire to get some experience in command [and will] try and get a man to take Knox’s place.” However, Sims pointedly told King that, as “the efficiency of the whole flotilla of course comes ahead of that of any one boat or individual, I may have to ask you to help us out.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, while Sims allowed King to make the decision whether to

remain in *Cassin*, he at the same time appealed to King's sense of teamwork by referring to the broader mission of the flotilla.

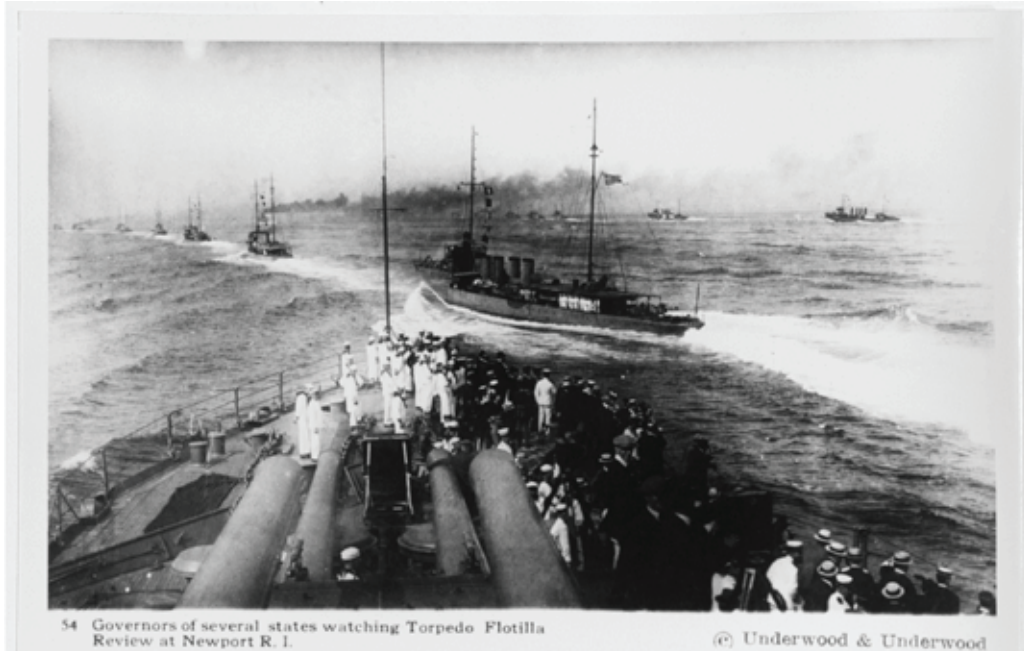
"Captain Sims himself was an officer of extraordinary energy," King recalled; Sims exhibited decisiveness as a commander in that "all matters were clear white or dead black."<sup>28</sup> King remained skipper in *Cassin* and simultaneously accepted the additional duty under Sims on the flotilla staff. On a daily basis, King traveled between Boston and Newport, balancing his responsibilities to both the *Cassin* crew and the flotilla staff.<sup>29</sup> Reflecting on this experience, King maintained that he was "never one of the group of Sims's devoted disciples and followers."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Sims remained a mentor to King as the latter ascended the ranks to higher command, and later in his career King would employ an approach similar to Sims's in organizing fleets and meeting the higher responsibilities of naval command.<sup>31</sup>

Because destroyers largely were relegated to secondary status compared with the battleships and battle cruisers of the Atlantic Fleet, Sims and the destroyer flotilla often operated with significant independence. Sims organized tabletop war games, chaired professional discussions, and engaged in debates about esoteric points of maritime history.<sup>32</sup> Through these discussions, Sims and his staff developed totally new tactics for maneuvering destroyers in unison. In the waters of Narragansett Bay, under the very shadow of the Naval War College, Sims used the smaller destroyers to test theories. He maneuvered his warships in simulated combat exercises off Newport, employing wireless instead of the traditional semaphore and light signals, using a communications system of no more than thirty-one words. Sims and his destroyers successfully demonstrated the "War College afloat" concept.<sup>33</sup>

All this activity provided much entertainment to the many skeptical observers among the larger line-of-battle warships of the Atlantic Fleet. But Sims, with his destroyer skippers, was pioneering new tactics that had potential for application to larger fleet operations, while saving considerable expense by using destroyers instead of battleships. Together, Sims and the destroyer flotilla completely rewrote existing U.S. naval doctrine and tactical procedures.

One of the innovative tactics was the "ripple maneuver."<sup>34</sup> Using a single wireless signal, Sims and his destroyers executed simultaneous turns in unison. Traditionally, fleet commanders had run the risk of collision while maneuvering a number of warships together in combat. While Sims's methodology seemed basic, conducting such maneuvers with wireless and in the absence of visual signals proved revolutionary.<sup>35</sup>

German naval strategists apparently noted the success of Sims and the now-named Atlantic Fleet Destroyer Flotilla. During the battle of Jutland, the German fleet executed the very difficult maneuver of turning simultaneously away from the British Grand Fleet. After the war, Sims invited some of the German skippers



Atlantic Fleet Destroyer Flotilla in action in Narragansett Bay in 1914.

U.S. Navy Photograph (NH 93694)

to deliver lectures for the educational benefit of the U.S. Navy. In one lecture on Jutland, German rear admiral Paul Behnke told Naval War College students that the German High Seas Fleet commander, Admiral Reinhard Scheer, executed the “ripple manoeuvre” as perfected by Sims and the Atlantic Fleet destroyers.<sup>36</sup> Although Behnke may have been attempting to ingratiate himself with former American enemies, Sims, the War College afloat concept, and the tactics developed by the Atlantic Fleet Destroyer Flotilla clearly resonated among naval thinkers on the international stage.

Despite the educational benefits the Naval War College offered, Navy Secretary Daniels questioned the cost of maintaining it. Notwithstanding the particular Newport focus on maritime aspects, the strategy and doctrine covered appeared comparable to that studied at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In discussions with the newly appointed Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral William S. Benson, Daniels proposed organizing a unified army and navy war college, which could be established in closer proximity to the capital. As the first to hold office as CNO, Benson recognized the politics inherent in the idea. Given Daniels’s point of view, Benson gave serious consideration to the idea of a joint war college.<sup>37</sup>

However, it seemed outrageous to Sims to consider closing the Naval War College while the U.S. Navy was navigating the difficult waters of neutrality. He considered the College’s location an advantage, because he valued the intellectual



objectivity enhanced by the distance between the political arenas of Washington and the classroom battlefields of the war colleges. In this discussion, Sims regarded the mission of the Naval War College as strategic in nature, and he defended the separateness of America's war colleges on the basis of the differences between the land and sea services. Sims viewed the Naval War College as foundational for shaping the future of the U.S. Navy.<sup>38</sup> On behalf of the College, he fought against the entrenched bureaucracy of the Navy Department. "The Naval War College should be made one of the principal assets of the Naval Service," he opined. If cost savings were necessary, he argued that the service should place warships "out of commission in order to avoid decreasing the efficiency of the education of our officers."<sup>39</sup>

Sims alternately scolded fellow U.S. naval professionals and sought to enlist their support in the fight. He challenged them to seek perspective from history, arguing that they should recognize the fundamental role historical studies played in framing contemporary plans for the future. Sims published an article in *Proceedings* under the provocative title "Cheer Up!! There Is No Naval War College." The piece offered a counterfactual argument that allowed him to make "plain that he [was] a thorough and enthusiastic advocate of the college, and that he deplore[d] the failure of many officers to understand its vital importance to the efficient conduct of our fleet." "When I went to the college," Sims exclaimed, "the service was very generally ignorant of its purposes and the great practical value of its teachings." Sims chastised critics of the Naval War College, suggesting that they suffered from "wholly unpardonable ignorance"; he railed against complaints from within the seagoing ranks that many needed a "dictionary to tell them the meaning of the commonest terms." Sims and his associates believed that the U.S. Navy suffered under officers of the highest rank who were "educated" only in preparation for the lowest commissioned grade.<sup>40</sup>

## NEUTRALITY AND WAR

In this fight to maintain the Naval War College, the European conflict amplified Sims's assertions. War among the European empires inevitably spread beyond the poisoned trenches of the western front, immediately affecting affairs within the American sphere of influence. British, French, and Dutch targets attracted German warships into American waters.<sup>41</sup> The reverse occurred as well; for example, the German auxiliary cruisers SMS *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* drew Royal Navy and French warships into American waters. Under the international laws of the time, President Woodrow Wilson allowed these German commerce raiders to seek sanctuary in American ports, but British and French warships maintained a steady presence off the U.S. coast in case the German vessels attempted to escape their internment.<sup>42</sup> British and German warships also battled

off the Falkland Islands—which brought warfare into the Western Hemisphere, albeit far away. Clearly, these actions challenged the assertions of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904.

As the European navies fought for control on the high seas, the U.S. Navy conducted separate operations against Mexican insurgents in the Veracruz campaign.<sup>43</sup> American forces in the Asiatic theater also stood watch as Japanese forces seized German-claimed territories in China and the Pacific. With the First World War thus raging in both Europe and Asia, the distracted Wilson administration struggled to keep foreign wars from spreading farther into the Americas. Both Germany's commerce-raiding operations at sea and its clandestine terrorist attacks in New York further amplified tensions: the 1915 sinking of RMS *Lusitania* off the Irish coast by a German submarine coincided with a terrorist campaign by German navy captain Franz von Rintelen inside the United States. Rintelen's activities inspired German saboteurs to bomb USN facilities on Black Tom Island off the New Jersey coast in July 1916. The resulting explosion damaged the Statue of Liberty and scarred the New York City skyline.<sup>44</sup>

Headlines about the Black Tom explosion and those about the battle of Jutland appeared contemporaneously. Having recently won reelection on a platform of neutrality, President Wilson directed Navy Secretary Daniels to examine the naval options against imperial Germany. By 1916, Wilson and Daniels had largely accepted the ideas of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, embracing the notion of employing the U.S. Navy as a buffer against foreign naval operations in American waters. To these ends, Congress passed the Naval Expansion Acts of 1915 and 1916, which advocated an American navy "second to none."<sup>45</sup> As the U.S. Navy stood fast in anticipation of war with Germany, the battle of Jutland seemed very close in the minds of many Americans.

### JELlicoe, SIMS, AND THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

Jellicoe, as commander of the Royal Navy Grand Fleet at Jutland, had faced a difficult decision: to seek a smashing victory akin to Trafalgar, or to ensure the preservation of the Grand Fleet so as to maintain the ability to fix the imperial German High Seas Fleet in place. During the action in the North Sea approaches to the Skagerrak, British battle cruisers under Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty had charged ahead of the Grand Fleet, into the teeth of the battleships of the High Seas Fleet—and sustained heavy losses. Heroic accounts of the British battle cruiser action at Jutland made it appear comparable to the charge of the light brigade at Balaclava or the dramatic last stand at the Little Bighorn—at Jutland, battle cruisers seemed to have been completely inadequate compared with battleships. Within minutes of Beatty making contact with the German battle cruisers, under Vice Admiral Franz von Hipper, the Germans sank two battle cruisers

under Beatty's immediate command. As the Grand Fleet under Jellicoe closed with Beatty and the remaining battle cruisers, and as the Germans maneuvered to the sanctuary of port, the latter continued inflicting heavy damage on the former. While the Germans lost one battle cruiser, four light cruisers, one predreadnought, and five torpedo boats at Jutland, the British lost three battle cruisers, three armored cruisers, and eight destroyers. Within seventy-two hours, an estimated 2,551 Germans and 6,094 British sailors were killed in the battle of Jutland.

The Grand Fleet at Jutland ultimately achieved its actual mission—forcing the Germans to withdraw from the battlefield. Jellicoe successfully maintained the integrity of the Grand Fleet, ensured Royal Navy superiority in European waters, and retained for Britain the strategic advantage at sea. But the German High Seas Fleet remained a potent threat after the battle. Critics castigated Jellicoe for being indecisive, while his subordinate Beatty blamed the Grand Fleet for failing to support the battle cruisers at Jutland. British newspapers also highlighted the losses the Royal Navy had sustained under Jellicoe, which seriously damaged his reputation as a “future Nelson.”<sup>46</sup> Facing the media, Jellicoe fueled perceptions of a Pyrrhic victory at Jutland. He emphasized the strategic necessity of preserving the superiority of the Royal Navy so as to keep the German High Seas Fleet in check. Jellicoe also believed that Beatty had acted on his own initiative, charging headlong with the Battle Cruiser Fleet into the mist.

Jellicoe was frustrated by the severe price he paid in the popular media for failing to deliver a spectacular victory akin to that at Trafalgar. While he grappled with that imperfect victory, Jellicoe turned to his old American friend, Sims. Additionally, from the British perspective, Jellicoe recognized the importance of fostering ties between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy.

On the other side of the Atlantic, reports of the stunning losses of the British battle cruisers inspired members of Congress to make official inquiries. Within the Navy Department, Secretary Daniels considered the option of cancelling construction of USN battle cruisers because of the British losses at Jutland. Learning of these discussions, Sims warned Daniels to avoid making false assumptions about the lessons of Jutland.<sup>47</sup> As early as 8 July 1916, Sims applied Naval War College methods of analysis to construct a detailed study of what actually had happened during the battle of Jutland, which he then submitted to Daniels.<sup>48</sup> By refuting Daniels's assertions about battle cruisers, Sims sparked even greater interest within Congress to understand the consequences of Jutland. Congress launched an official inquiry to determine whether the U.S. Navy should continue constructing battle cruisers. In response, Sims produced two highly detailed reports in July 1916.

First Sims provided an astonishingly accurate account of the battle of Jutland, suggesting that “the action in question was in reality a skirmish.”<sup>49</sup> He then

defended Jellicoe's actions by placing responsibility for the ambiguous results of the encounter squarely on Beatty's shoulders. In a six-page report, Sims suggested that

of course the Germans knew that Admiral Beatty would come after them with his battlecruiser squadrons. Doubtless, also, they assumed, from his supposed reputation for impetuosity and ambition for distinction, that he would attack at once and try to head them off at their base. He apparently did so, and the battleships came up and pounded him between the two forces, with the inevitable result that he got the worst of it until the British battleships [of Jellicoe] came to his support and forced the Germans to retreat.<sup>50</sup>

Evaluating all available evidence, Sims concluded on 31 July 1916 that Jellicoe had acted correctly and Beatty had mishandled the battle cruisers at Jutland by ignoring the "fundamental principle that involves bringing against the enemy a greater force than he has *at* [emphasis in original] the point of contact."<sup>51</sup> Sims argued that Jellicoe had acted in the better strategic interests of the Royal Navy, whereas Beatty had violated the basic rule of using "just plain common sense unrestricted by any sentimental fool traditions of the glory type."<sup>52</sup> Sims concluded that "control of the sea is accomplished when the enemy's fleet is defeated or 'contained'; and the German fleet has been contained since the beginning of the war, is now contained, and doubtless will remain so."<sup>53</sup>

Sims strongly cautioned American policy makers against abandoning the construction of battle cruisers. "There is nothing," Sims argued, "in the incidents of the [Jutland] fight to justify any argument against the necessity of battlecruisers."<sup>54</sup> According to Sims's conclusions, Beatty had employed his battle cruisers improperly. Sims also rushed to the defense of his friend Jellicoe. By implication, Sims argued that Jutland actually resulted in as decisive a British victory as that of Trafalgar more than a hundred years earlier.

To prove these points, Sims used war-gaming and chart-maneuver methods to produce objectively detailed studies of the battle of Jutland. Fighting the separate battle for the future of professional education within the U.S. Navy, he also organized a war-game study of Jutland at the Naval War College. This took place a short two months after the actual battle, in September 1916.

### JUTLAND WITH "TOYS" IN 1916

Jellicoe maintained regular correspondence with Sims, which provided unique means for the U.S. Navy to evaluate the broader significance of the battle of Jutland. During the summer of 1916, while at sea off the American east coast supervising shakedown as skipper in USS *Nevada* (BB 36), Sims again employed the War College afloat method. Sailing off the Virginia Capes for gunnery exercises in August 1916, he organized Jutland war games in *Nevada's* wardroom.<sup>55</sup> Sims

wrote of his observations about Jutland to his protégés Pratt and Knox, now at the Navy Department, and encouraged them to gather newspaper accounts, personal letters from their foreign contacts, and U.S. naval attaché reports from London, Paris, Rome, and Berlin.<sup>56</sup>

Given the political stakes involved, USN studies of Jutland had significant strategic ramifications for the future of American naval policy. Following Sims's lead, the faculty and students at the Naval War College took great interest in the battle. Sims pooled his information with that of his Naval Academy classmate Captain Albert P. Niblack, who was completing studies at the College. Niblack shared the information Sims supplied with Lieutenant Commander Harry E. Yarnell and Lieutenant Holloway H. Frost, among others. Using the Sims material as a basis, Niblack, Yarnell, and Frost amassed additional information from other sources.<sup>57</sup> They then conducted a war game to replicate the battle of Jutland in September 1916.

As with their Naval War College studies of Civil War battles, U.S. naval professionals recognized that the scope and complexity of Jutland offered useful foundations for examining transcendent questions of command, the answers to which would have application to future operations. The pioneering methods of McCarty Little, whose service on the Naval War College faculty began in the 1880s, inspired Sims and his associates to recognize that "tactics is the servant of strategy [and] every tactical problem should have a strategic setting, or at least keep in view the master idea which it is intended to subserve [*sic*]. That is the reason why tactics left to develop by itself is like servants without a master." In examining historical battles such as Trafalgar, McCarty Little had emphasized the importance of evaluating decisions made in combat by first considering the strategic context to gain a holistic understanding of the tactical details.<sup>58</sup>

Seeking to attain an objective, firsthand understanding of historical wars, McCarty Little used nautical charts and tiny model ships to replicate situations faced on the battlefield. The curious practice of wargaming past battles appeared trite to some—at first glance. Similarly to many Naval War College graduates, Ernest J. King joked about the practice of using "toys" and "play things" in the serious studies involved with decision analysis and war gaming.<sup>59</sup>

Nonetheless, in the fall of 1916 faculty members and students at the Naval War College played out the Jutland scenario with toy ships, chalk, and measuring sticks. Drawing on newspaper accounts and naval attaché reports, the Naval War College undertook one of the earliest detailed studies of the battle of Jutland. In September 1916, Sims and Knox traveled to Newport to assist the students and faculty at the College, whose members included their close associates Niblack, Yarnell, and Frost. Working together, they adapted one of the historical battles already in use within the Naval War College curriculum—they used the rules for



Examining the battle of Jutland on the third floor of Luce Hall, Naval War College. Circa 1916.

Naval War College Collection

the battle of Trafalgar of 1805 to reconstruct the more recent battle of Jutland of 1916.<sup>60</sup>

Following the war-game reconstruction of Jutland, Frost took the lead in producing an official Naval War College report on 26 November 1916.<sup>61</sup> Coincident with the strategic study of Jutland at the College, Sims received orders to testify about the battle before Congress.

At that time, Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske also told Sims of the latter's tentative selection for promotion to rear admiral. "They could not have done otherwise," Sims understood, "without precipitating a storm that would have wrecked the keeping of selection in navy hands."<sup>62</sup> Under restrictions established by congressional appropriations, Sims now stood thirty-first on a roster limited to thirty rear admirals; according to the *Naval Register*, his status was "awaiting commission" in the rank of captain.<sup>63</sup> Given congressional interest in the battle of Jutland, Sims recognized that his opportunity to discuss the subject in Congress constituted a unique opportunity to make a lasting impression and thereby to secure a fruitful assignment in the rank of rear admiral in the near future.<sup>64</sup>

On 19 December 1916, Sims explained to Congress the strategic consequences of Jutland. In answering queries about the tactical role of battleships and battle cruisers in the context of that particular engagement, Sims more broadly outlined

the potential influence of wireless communication, intelligence, submarines, and aircraft on naval warfare.<sup>65</sup> When discussing the strategic priorities of the U.S. Navy, Sims specifically referred to the Naval War College report about the battle. “There is a typewritten copy of an analysis made at the Naval War College,” Sims explained in testimony, “simply compiled from official and semiofficial published reports.”<sup>66</sup>

### GERMANY INTRUDES

Within the same context of his remarks concerning the battle of Jutland, Sims also answered congressional queries about recent visits to American ports by German submarines. Between July and November 1916, the German submarines *U-Deutschland* and *U-53* visited the ports of Baltimore, New London, and Newport.

Of particular interest, *U-53*'s skipper specifically targeted the Naval War College for an unannounced visit. On 7 October 1916, Lieutenant Hans Rose sailed *U-53* into Narragansett Bay and brazenly anchored under the shadow of the Naval War College. He appeared on shore in proper dress uniform, wearing white starched collar, bowtie, and cap—cocked at an angle. Rose casually walked from the Naval War College pier up a hill, knocked on the front door of Luce Hall, and introduced himself to the President of the Naval War College, Rear Admiral Austin Knight.<sup>67</sup>

The appearance of a German submarine coincided with the College's efforts to compile the official report on Jutland. Clearly, Knight avoided discussing these



Lieutenant Thomas Symington, USN, aide to Commander, Atlantic Fleet Destroyer Flotilla, shakes hands with Lieutenant Hans Rose, IGN, on board *U-53* at buoy two at the Naval War College, 7 October 1916.

U.S. Navy Photograph

studies in conversations with Rose. Rose later recalled that he “was received in the roomy naval station,” but that “[Knight] was not quite sure what he ought to do.”<sup>68</sup> After the brief meeting in the office of the President, Rose hosted a number of USN officers for drinks in *U-53*. During these conversations, the Germans joked about speaking in English (the language of the enemy) by claiming, “I speak American.”<sup>69</sup>

Despite the bonhomie, Rose’s targeting of the Naval War College had demonstrated the capacity of German submarines to reach American waters. When *U-53* departed for operations in the Atlantic, local Newport yachtsmen trailed behind. Rose took station near the Nantucket lightship in the approaches to Narragansett Bay—just beyond American territorial waters. On 8 October 1916, the day after his visit to the College, he sank five vessels, three from Britain and one each from Norway and the Netherlands—an implied challenge to the warships of the Atlantic Fleet sitting at anchor a mere boat hail from the College.<sup>70</sup>

Such acts of German aggression fueled tensions within the Wilson administration, as did British disclosure of the so-called Zimmermann telegram, which revealed a German plot to support Mexican and Japanese attacks on the United States, information the British shared with American journalists as early as January 1917.<sup>71</sup> The cybernetic implications of the Zimmermann telegram would coincide with Germany’s reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. These developments ultimately forced the Wilson administration to make strategic preparations for war against imperial Germany.<sup>72</sup>

Falling as it did chronologically between the Jutland war game and Frost’s report on the Naval War College’s analysis of the battle of Jutland, *U-53*’s visit to the College brought home more forcefully the importance of thinking deeply and carefully ahead of time about what might be involved in fighting the German navy. As the U.S. Navy anticipated war with Germany, the battle of Jutland remained the focus of heated discussion regarding the prospective focus of American strategy in the spring of 1917.

## NO EQUAL IN HISTORY

Early USN studies of Jutland focused on Jellicoe’s operational decisions by examining the battle through the separate lenses of strategy and tactics. Among other major tactical findings, Frost concluded that “Jellicoe was well served by his division commanders [who] brought the battle line in order despite his confusing and conflicting signals.”<sup>73</sup> Frost found that “Beatty committed numerous errors . . . and did not show tactical skill [whereas] Jellicoe executed a poor conception of war excellently.”<sup>74</sup> Drawing debatable analogies, Frost found Jellicoe most closely comparable to Union Army general George B. McClellan from the American Civil War. This critique perhaps reflected a predetermined conclusion



on Frost's part; previous studies of Civil War battles may have tainted Frost's objectivity in examining Jellicoe's decisions. Sims, taking a different approach, recognized that Jellicoe had made all the correct strategic decisions by focusing on the ultimate objective: containing the High Seas Fleet.<sup>75</sup>

Having examined British and German naval operations at Jutland in detail, Sims drew a variety of conclusions for future application within the U.S. Navy. He refuted critics of Jellicoe by suggesting that "there is no reason to believe that the Germans have ever intended to risk their fleet in a decisive action against a greatly superior British fleet[;] . . . they accomplished what they intended, namely, the trapping and pounding of the British battle cruisers." Sims then hastened to press the point that "to the surprise of Naval critics, and doubtless to the Germans, was the extraordinary resistance battle cruisers can sustain and the extraordinary amount of damage they can inflict, even against battleships which indicates a greatly enhanced value when they are employed in their proper role in a general naval engagement."<sup>76</sup>

Seizing on Sims's assertions, Assistant Navy Secretary Roosevelt fostered a political alliance with Virginia senator Claude A. Swanson. Together, Roosevelt and Swanson circumvented Daniels in their effort to continue the construction of battle cruisers for the U.S. Navy.<sup>77</sup> In the winter of 1916, Roosevelt used Sims and the findings of the Naval War College war-game report on Jutland to frame future American naval policy.

Following his testimony on Jutland in Congress, Sims received orders to the Naval War College. In February 1917 he assumed duty as the President of the College. Sims then received secret orders to sail for London with verbal authorization to assume rank as a rear admiral on 21 March.<sup>78</sup> Concurrently, Navy Secretary Daniels and CNO Benson directed Sims to act as the Navy Department liaison to the Admiralty in London.<sup>79</sup> The United States declared war on Germany while Sims was at sea in April. Shortly after their first meetings in London, Sims and Jellicoe built on their personal friendship to facilitate the broader collaborative relationship between the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy.<sup>80</sup>

By the manner in which the Admiralty headquarters synthesized operations at sea with intelligence, Jellicoe enabled Sims to assume a more strategic role in framing combined strategy and in conducting U.S. naval operations at the front. As Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe after April 1917, Sims pioneered new American concepts of combined and joint command. He also set a new precedent when he assumed temporary command over Royal Navy forces with the arrival of USN destroyers in Queenstown (Cobh), Ireland.<sup>81</sup> Having thus pioneered new concepts of combined and joint naval command, Sims returned from wartime service for duty as President, Naval War College in April 1919.<sup>82</sup>



Rear Admiral Sims, standing at center, pioneered new concepts of U.S. naval organization in wartime as Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe and as senior naval representative of the American Expeditionary Force on the Supreme Allied Naval Council between 1917 and 1919.

U.S. Navy Photograph (NH 52790)

Sims overhauled the Naval War College curriculum by recruiting veterans of the London headquarters to the faculty. Among them, Sims appointed Knox to serve as chief of staff. Knox also reorganized the Department of Command, within which he organized the Historical Section, under Lieutenant Tracy Barrett Kittredge, U.S. Naval Volunteer Reserve. During their watch, the Naval War College archives served as the repository for the USN records of the First World War. Sims also approved the titles that Knox and Kittredge selected to expand the library from fewer than 7,000 to more than 45,000 volumes.<sup>83</sup> Carl von Clausewitz and Henri de Jomini remained required reading, along with Colmar von der Goltz and other Franco-German military thinkers. Looking outward from the lectures of Stephen B. Luce and the quasi-historical studies of Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sims expanded the reading curriculum to include the works of foreign naval strategic thinkers, including Sir John Knox Laughton, Spenser Wilkinson, and Sir Julian Corbett.<sup>84</sup>

Along with other faculty in the Sims era, Knox helped expand the role of historical studies in framing critical discussions of contemporary doctrinal

assumptions about future wars. While maintaining the traditional focus on battles such as Trafalgar and the American Civil War studies of the Union blockading strategy, Sims and Knox placed the battle of Jutland at the center of the basic curriculum on strategy and tactics after 1919.<sup>85</sup> Through the 1920s and '30s, students attending the Naval War College examined Jutland in ever-greater detail. The influence of Jutland on the U.S. Navy appeared within the studies completed by Naval War College students in the generation of William D. Leahy, Ernest J. King, Harold R. Stark, Chester W. Nimitz, and William F. Halsey Jr.

By intermixing strategic discussions of history with decision analysis reconstructions of past battles, the U.S. Navy arguably “won” the battle of Jutland in the classrooms and on the war-gaming floors of the Naval War College. Because of Jellicoe and Sims, the battle of Jutland influenced the perspectives of countless U.S. naval officers. For example, Commander Chester W. Nimitz mused in his Naval War College “Thesis on Tactics” that the battle of Jutland had “no equal in history [and that] it is doubtful if the total forces engaged in the battle of Jutland will be exceeded[,] at any rate during our time.”<sup>86</sup> Nimitz recalled studying the battle in such detail that he knew every commander intimately and every decision they made “by heart.”<sup>87</sup> Twenty years later, Nimitz commanded battles that far exceeded in scope the battle of Jutland, such as at Coral Sea, Midway, and Leyte Gulf. Arguably, education at the Naval War College provided the critical foundations that enabled him and his contemporaries to secure decisive victory in the Second World War.

## THE CENTENNIAL

Through such deep and careful study, the U.S. Navy won the battle of Jutland in the classrooms and on the war-gaming floors of the Naval War College after the First World War. To highlight this rich history and to mark the centennial of Jutland, the Naval War College replicated the war game that Sims and his associates conducted in the battle’s immediate aftermath. In May 2016, the College revisited the battle on the historic war-gaming floors of Pringle Hall. Jellicoe’s grandson Nick provided a video with a narrative animation of the epic battle, while Sims’s grandson, Nat, observed the battle’s replication. Among other participants in the Jutland war game, Rear Admiral Sam Cox, USN (Ret.), the director of naval history, filled the role of Jellicoe, while the President of the Naval War College, Rear Admiral P. Gardner Howe III, USN, assumed the role of the German High Seas Fleet commander, Admiral Reinhard Scheer.

The Jutland war game of 2016 allowed faculty and student participants to gain fresh insight not only into the original battle of a century ago but also into the war game as conducted at the Naval War College later in 1916. By emphasizing the historical influence of Jutland on the curriculum of the College, the war game

evoked how the battle resonated through the history of the U.S. Navy over the intervening hundred years. The College intends to stage a series of similar events and educational programs between 2017 and 2023 as the U.S. Navy marks the centennial of its involvement in the First World War and its aftermath.

During the century since Jutland, the Naval War College has maintained the study of history and war-gaming analysis as central components in the professional education of American strategic thinkers. When Sims attended the long course with the class of 1913, he examined the 1805 battle of Trafalgar more than a century after the actual battle. Using the same methodology, he applied the War College afloat method to reconstruct the battle of Jutland within weeks of the actual battle. He helped compile the official report on the Jutland war game and decision analysis, published in November 1916. Sims then used this study to inform Congress on questions of American naval strategy, just three months before the American declaration of war against Germany in April 1917. After the First World War, Sims again referred to Jutland in overhauling the College curriculum, producing the course of study that educated the strategic minds of the American naval professionals who would win decisive victory in the Second World War.

Over the two hundred years since Trafalgar and the one hundred since the battle of Jutland, the strategic perspectives gained from studying this rich history remain relevant to contemporary strategic thinkers as the U.S. Navy charts a fresh course through the twenty-first century and beyond.



Naval War College faculty and students revisiting the battle of Jutland on the historic war-gaming floors of Pringle Hall, May 2016.  
Naval War College Collection

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