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"AN OBJECT LESSON TO THE COUNTRY"

The 1915 Atlantic Fleet Summer Exercise and the U.S. Navy on the Eve of World War I

Ryan Peeks

On 26 May 1915, the *Washington Post* warned its readers that an invading force had "established a base, and landed troops on the shore of Chesapeake Bay," in preparation for a march on Washington. The cause of this invasion? Defeat of the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet by "a foreign foe of superior naval strength."¹ Over the course of several days, the enemy fleet had made its way across the Atlantic and destroyed the American scouting line. The American commander, Admiral Frank Friday Fletcher, was convinced that its target was New England and let the enemy fleet slip unmolested into the Chesapeake with a twenty-thousand-man invading force, the vanguard of another hundred thousand soldiers en route from Europe.² Shortcomings in the quantity and quality of the Atlantic Fleet's scouting force had rendered its seventeen battleships irrelevant.³

Fortunately for the capital, this enemy fleet and invasion army were imaginary, part of the Atlantic Fleet's summer exercise. They were, however, the culmination of a very real campaign to embarrass the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, and force a naval expansion program onto the heretofore skeptical Wilson administration. The leader of this campaign, the outgoing Aide for Operations, Rear Admiral Bradley Fiske, designed the exercises for

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maximum political effect.⁴ By grafting an unrealistic and lurid invasion scenario featuring a thinly disguised German fleet onto the Atlantic Fleet's exercise program, he hoped to "prove" that Daniels had failed to prepare the Navy for war and force Woodrow Wilson's administration to support a renewed naval buildup.

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Although the scenario for the invasion was almost certainly beyond the logistical capacity of the German fleet—lacking, as it did, any bases in the western Atlantic—the maneuvers were not merely an exercise in spite by a disgruntled admiral keen on embarrassing his political masters. The U.S. Navy’s leadership was greatly concerned about the German Empire’s High Seas Fleet and its (highly exaggerated) potential to conduct aggressive action in the Western Hemisphere, although the consensus believed its targets would be in the Caribbean or Latin America rather than the Atlantic coast of the United States.⁵ The purely naval portions of the scenario, especially the weakness of American scouting vessels, reflected the contemporary concerns of the Navy’s strategic elite and their assumptions about the nature of naval warfare.

More than a mere historical curiosity, the full story of the Atlantic Fleet’s 1915 exercise illuminates three aspects of the U.S. Navy on the cusp of America’s entry into the First World War. First, it allows us to examine an underexplored, but serious, rupture in civil-military relations as the Navy’s uniformed leadership sought to undermine Secretary Daniels by working with opposition politicians. Second, it reveals the Navy’s use of its German counterpart as both an administrative model and a strategic threat. Finally, the episode allows us to see how the Navy’s leadership assessed its force structure and readiness for war after two decades of naval buildup.

Viewed through the lens of civil-military relations, these exercises were one salvo in a long fight between Secretary Daniels and an influential cabal of disgruntled officers, led by Fiske, that lasted from Daniels’s installation in 1913 through a bruising set of charges laid against Daniels’s war record by Admiral William S. Sims in 1920. Whatever the relative merit of their complaints, these bureaucratic insurgents stretched the bounds of American civil-military relations in their desire to rearrange the administration of the Department of the Navy to reduce the authority of civilian officials and place control over naval operations and policy in the hands of uniformed officers.

Fiske crossed clear boundaries of professional conduct in his effort to reform the department. Alongside the 1915 exercises, Fiske was busy feeding embarrassing information to hostile elements of the press and pro-Navy Republicans such as Representative Augustus P. Gardner of Massachusetts and Senator George Clement Perkins of California. Here, Fiske was joined by Daniels’s assistant secretary, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who colluded with the secretary’s “bitterest personal enemies in active ways that [could] have led to his dismissal.”⁶ The exercises themselves were catnip for the heterogeneous, though mostly Republican, collection of pressure groups that wanted the Wilson administration to increase military manpower and spending in response to the Great War.

The exercises also highlight the Navy's peculiar fascination with Germany as both an enemy and administrative model.⁷ From about 1900, the Navy viewed the German Empire as a likely threat, imagining its expansion into the Caribbean or South America as the flash point. A 1903 scenario developed at the Naval War College even suggested that German shooting clubs in Brazil represented a potential fifth column intent on destabilizing that country.⁸ Successive iterations of the Navy's Plan BLACK for war against Germany assumed that the Atlantic Fleet would have to stop the High Seas Fleet from capturing an intermediate base in the Caribbean Sea on the way to carving out colonies in Latin America.⁹ Although fanciful, this scenario was one of the key measuring sticks that USN officers used to judge the capabilities of their fleet.¹⁰

Even as they were inflating the threat from the High Seas Fleet, some American officers looked to the German navy's administrative structure as a model to emulate, chiefly its strong general staff and lack of effective civilian control.¹¹ From 1900, the U.S. Navy possessed an advisory General Board, led by Admiral of the Navy George Dewey, the hero of the Spanish-American War, and supported by a small number of personal aides.¹² Along with answering questions from the secretary on topics spanning the breadth of Navy business, the board generally submitted to him yearly recommendations on a construction plan to propose to Congress, and supervised the production of rudimentary war plans. Although Dewey, the senior officer in the Navy, maintained that his board adequately served the functions of a German-style general staff, Fiske and his cabal disagreed.¹³ Instead of the weak General Board, these reformers desired an independent naval staff only nominally responsible to the secretary.

Finally, this episode allows us to see how the Navy's uniformed leadership assessed its force structure and advocated for greater resources. It is true that most elements of the Navy's strategic apparatus, including the General Board and the Naval War College, viewed a strong battle line as the most important determinant of naval strength. By mid-1915, however, many influential officers, among them Fiske and Sims, were sounding the alarm about the Navy's lack of small scout cruisers and large, fast battle cruisers. These fears, incubated at the College, were heightened in the wake of an unsuccessful—and unpublicized—set of exercises earlier that year.

It was no accident, then, that the summer exercise in 1915 prominently featured an inadequate scouting line. Fiske intended to sound the alarm about the parlous state of the Navy's cruisers. A decade had passed since the U.S. Navy last received funding for new cruisers, as the General Board and successive Navy secretaries declined to support cruiser construction over battleships in front of Congress. The Navy possessed only three modern scout cruisers, ordered as an

experiment in the 1904 budget. Beyond those, scouting was tasked to older armored cruisers and a grab bag of superannuated protected cruisers entirely unsuited for modern combat. Fiske's intention was not just to embarrass Daniels but to highlight what he saw as the path forward by creating the political preconditions for the secretary and Congress to increase naval funding.

The force structure gaps highlighted by the 1915 exercises successfully informed the landmark 1916 Naval Expansion Act, which provided for an unprecedented construction program, one that included ten battleships and, critically, six battle cruisers and ten smaller cruisers to improve the Navy's scouting capability. Not only did the exercises play a role in convincing the Wilson administration to support a large construction program in the first place, but a close examination of the record shows that the composition of the bill itself reflected the force structure gaps that the exercises were designed to evince.

Despite this programmatic importance, the 1915 Atlantic Fleet summer exercises have often been discussed in the historical literature only as a spiteful gesture by Fiske, who was facing retirement after Daniels selected the relatively unknown Captain William S. Benson to serve as the first Chief of Naval Operations, which replaced the Aide for Operations position that Fiske held.¹⁴ This article argues that the form of Fiske's challenge to the secretary is important as well. Although Fiske was their animating spirit, the Atlantic Fleet's 1915 summer exercises reflected a consensus view among the service's leadership that the Navy lacked the right mix of ships for modern warfare.

THE NEW NAVY'S MISSING SCOUTS

The roots of the force structure issues exposed in 1915 lay in the birth of the "New Navy" in the late nineteenth century. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, a group of naval officers, many connected with the then-new Naval War College, convinced Secretary of the Navy Benjamin F. Tracy that the United States needed a fleet of oceangoing battleships to ensure its security. In 1890, Tracy convinced Congress to authorize three battleships.¹⁵ These officers, including Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and Commodore Stephen B. Luce, may have been *too* successful; as Robert Greenhalgh Albion has noted, battleships dominated congressional discussion of naval appropriations for decades after 1890, making it "difficult to get enough of the lesser types of ships [through Congress] to form a well-balanced Fleet."¹⁶

Theoretically, the Navy's uniformed leadership understood the importance of cruisers to a modern fleet. In 1903, Secretary William Moody asked the General Board to lay out force structure goals. Its response, General Board Memorandum No. 420, remained at the heart of the board's construction "wish list" for years to come. The document laid out a seventeen-year plan for building a gargantuan fleet of forty-eight battleships, supported by twenty-four large armored

cruisers, ninety-six smaller cruisers, and forty-eight destroyers.¹⁷ While the board's vision stood no chance of full congressional funding and was, perhaps, beyond the country's ability to build, it was a blueprint for a well-balanced fleet of varied ship classes serving complementary roles.

As it soon became obvious that there was no congressional appetite for the entire 1903 fleet plan (table 1), the board made it clear that it was only willing to request cruisers *if* Congress built battleships at a rate to sustain the goal of having forty-eight battleships by 1920, rather than bending to political reality and making plans for a smaller, balanced fleet with appropriate numbers of other classes.¹⁸ This was in keeping with the belief, widespread in the Navy, that battleships were the only determinant of naval strength that mattered.

The board's approach highlights one of the less appealing aspects of the Navy's uniformed leadership in the early twentieth century: its unwillingness to modify its "professional" advice in the face of reality. Rather than acknowledging that its forty-eight-battleship fleet was politically impossible, the board continued to insist on the original plan.¹⁹ At other times, the board urged preparation for war with powers (such as imperial Germany) that American political leaders had no intention of fighting. While this fit with the officer corps's self-identification as a disinterested "naval aristocracy" providing expert (if not always realistic) advice to politicians, it also suggested a certain contempt for the roles of Congress and the secretary in setting naval budgets and policy.²⁰ Fiske's actions in the Wilson administration, although extreme, fit neatly into this worldview.

At any rate, while the General Board nearly always recommended cruiser construction, it undercut those recommendations by classifying them as secondary to "the purely distinctive fighting ships of the navy—battleships, destroyers, and submarines"—in its construction requests, leading successive secretaries to strip cruisers out of the construction programs forwarded to Congress.²¹ As shown in table 1, not a year passed without the secretary requesting, and Congress providing, at least one battleship. While it certainly was possible for the board to ask the secretary for cheaper scout cruisers at the expense of battleships—Daniels's 1915 report put the cost of a new scout cruiser at \$5 million, compared with \$18.8 million for a battleship—it simply did not.²² In practice, this meant that the U.S. Navy received no money for new cruiser construction after the Navy bill passed in 1904, which provided funds for three experimental light scout cruisers (*Chester*, *Birmingham*, and *Salem*) and the Navy's last two armored cruisers (*North Carolina* and *Montana*).²³

By the start of the First World War, the U.S. Navy was far behind its competitors in cruisers of all types. Not only did the British, German, and Japanese navies possess more scout cruisers, but all three had built large, fast, and powerful battle cruisers, a class that was absent from the U.S. Navy's force structure, in part

TABLE 1
GENERAL BOARD PLANS VERSUS REALITY, 1904–14 BILLS

Year	General Board Program Cruisers	SECNAV Program	Cruisers Authorized	General Board Program Battleships	SECNAV Program	Battleships Authorized
1904	8 (1 armored, 3 protected, 4 scout)	6–8 (1 armored, 3 protected, 2–4 scout)	5 (2 armored, 3 scout)	2	1	1
1905	5 scouts	0	0	3	3	2
1906	3 scouts	2	0	3	2	1
1907	2 scouts	0	0	2	1–2	1
1908	4 scouts	4	0	4	4	2
1909	4 scouts	4	0	4	4	2
1910	4 scouts	0	0	4	2	2
1911	4 scouts	0	0	4	2	2
1912	4 scouts	0	0	4	2	1
1913	2 battle cruisers	0	0	4	3	1
1914	0	0	0	4	3	3

Sources: Tillman, *Navy Yearbook*, pp. 619–23; General Board to Secretary Daniels, “Ultimate Strength of the United States Navy,” [September] 1912 and [December] 1914, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I; Daniels, “[1915] Report of the Secretary of the Navy,” pp. 85–93.

because the General Board declined to request them prior to 1913.²⁴ Up to 1912, the General Board defended this lack of battle cruisers by defining them as a type of battleship. The board’s earliest mention of battle cruisers, in October 1906, categorized the British battle cruisers as “in reality battleships[—]armored ships available for the battle line.”²⁵ By 1910, it argued that battle cruisers were simply “big gun armored cruisers,” and unnecessary for the United States so long as the Navy had enough battleships “to force the enemy to place armored cruiser[s]” in the battle line.²⁶

In contrast, at the Naval War College, opinion increasingly held that battle cruisers were integral to searching for enemy fleets and blinding their scouts. Officers attending the College’s 1909 Summer Conference claimed that the battle cruiser “is the only ship that can meet the qualifications of speed, endurance, size, and fighting power” needed for effective scouting.²⁷ Most American supporters of battle cruisers made a similar argument, suggesting that battle cruisers were a solution to the Navy’s scouting woes.

This stance was bolstered by at least some practical evidence from the fleet. In mid-1910, the Secretary of the Navy solicited suggestions on future scouts from the commanders of the Navy’s three *Chester*-class scout cruisers. *Birmingham*’s captain, Commander William B. Fletcher, responded that “the ideal scout would be a vessel of the highest speed, together with large radius, capability of

maintaining speed, and with battery and protection such as to [engage successfully] vessels of equal speeds." In other words, a battle cruiser.²⁸

In 1911, then-Captain William S. Sims, attending the first "Long Course" at the College, revived the battle cruiser issue. Sims and his colleagues spent much of their time studying the "Blue-Black" problem—a war between the United States and Germany—and Sims highlighted scouting as the U.S. Navy's major deficiency demonstrated in war games. In a personal letter to a British contact, Vice Admiral Henry B. Jackson, Sims noted that battle cruisers "will be necessary to ensure the success" of scouting and screening in future conflicts, and criticized his navy's unwillingness to build the type, now that it had a sufficient number of battleships.²⁹ Further along in his course, while playing the role of a German admiral in a Blue-Black war game, Sims observed that the American fleet "would remain wholly in the dark as to our movements while crossing the ocean. . . . [The German fleet] is vastly superior, both as to the number and power of [its] scouting forces."³⁰

His conclusions impressed the College President, Captain William L. Rodgers, and in December 1911 he forwarded one of Sims's reports on the matter to Secretary George von Lengerke Meyer.³¹ Meyer was interested in battle cruisers, having already asked the Bureau of Construction and Repair to draft potential battle cruiser designs in 1910.³² What is unclear, however, is the nature of that interest: Did Meyer regard them as part of the battle line, or as scouts? Likewise, the General Board's views remained in flux. In 1911, it made a tepid request for battle cruisers "with a special view for service in the Pacific Ocean," but only if their construction did not interfere with the construction of new battleships.³³

In 1912, battle cruisers again were on the agenda at the College's Summer Conference, with the General Board in attendance. Most attendees appear to have been in favor of battle cruiser construction for the U.S. Navy, so long as that did not interfere with battleship numbers.³⁴ The available evidence suggests that their time in Newport made an impression on the members of the General Board. Prior to the Summer Conference, a board subcommittee had drafted a building program that omitted "problematical" battle cruisers.³⁵ Yet in its final report, written after the conference, the full board claimed that "we must have [battle cruisers] to hope for successful conflict. . . . These vessels have a military value not possible to obtain from other types," and strongly implied that such vessels were to be used for scouting, screening, and other operations away from the battle line.³⁶ Despite this, Secretary Meyer left cruisers out of the Navy Department budget submitted to Congress, which called merely for three battleships and twelve destroyers.³⁷

Still, as the Wilson administration prepared to enter office, it was clear that the Navy was warming up to the idea of spending serious money to remedy its

scouting woes. However, the case had not been made sufficiently outside the Navy to affect the secretary's budget request or congressional appropriations, and the new administration was more skeptical of naval spending than its Republican predecessor.

FISKE AND DANIELS

Josephus Daniels, heretofore most prominent as a violently white-supremacist newspaper publisher and Democratic Party power broker in North Carolina, was, like most Navy Secretaries of his era, entirely new to naval affairs.³⁸ Apart from his marriage to the sister of Worth Bagley—one of the few USN officers killed during the Spanish-American War—he had little connection to, or interest in, the Navy.³⁹ Daniels was, however, an absolutist on the subject of civilian control of the military and intensely skeptical of senior naval leaders, whom he “saw as part of a closed aristocracy” leading a “life of privilege.”⁴⁰ This view was perhaps exacerbated by the advice Meyer gave him to “keep the power to direct the Navy” in the secretary's office and to reject any measure that threatened it.⁴¹

Ironically, the main threat to Daniels's power came from one of Meyer's last appointments, Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske, the Aide (sometimes spelled Aid) for Operations since February 1913. Meyer created the position to provide independent advice, separate from the Navy's administrative bureaus and the General Board. Thus, soon after taking office in 1909, he created four “Aides”—for inspections, material, operations, and personnel—to advise him.⁴² These positions rested on an uncertain foundation. Despite his best efforts, Meyer never received congressional sanction for the aides. While Congress did not take action to disestablish the positions, it did not pass enabling legislation either, leaving them dependent on the secretary's forbearance.⁴³

Daniels entered office in 1913 with Democrats controlling both houses of Congress for the first time since the 1890s. Lacking experience with naval matters, Daniels took many of his personnel cues from congressional Democrats, especially fellow southerners, who were, by and large, opposed to the aide system and naval expansion.⁴⁴ Soon after taking office, Daniels removed the head of the Bureau of Navigation (which was responsible for personnel matters), Captain Philip Andrews, replacing him with Commander Victor Blue, who was elevated over a host of senior officers.⁴⁵ Although very junior for the position, Blue was a fellow North Carolinian with whom Daniels had a preexisting relationship.⁴⁶

Daniels also took steps to get rid of the aide system. In addition to Andrews, he fired Captain Templin Potts, the Aide for Personnel, and then left the billet vacant. Beyond Potts, Daniels intended to let the other aides serve out their terms before letting the billets lapse. Even with those changes, at least one of Daniels's political allies felt that he had not gone far enough. In late April, Senator “Pitchfork Ben”

Tillman (D-SC) warned him, "You are surrounded by a naval clique which is ever on the watch to control your actions and movements and thoughts."⁴⁷

Prominent among this clique was the imperious Fiske, who surely represented all that Daniels disliked about the Navy's officer corps. An author, inventor, and strategist of some renown, Fiske was one of the ablest officers of the age—and he knew it. A man of strong views, Fiske had a history of intemperance in defending them.⁴⁸ By 1913, he maintained that the material and organizational underpinnings of the U.S. Navy were well behind those of its rivals, especially Germany, and desired to change this situation through the creation of an independent naval general staff.⁴⁹ This was anathema to Daniels and, indeed, ran contrary to the fundamentals of American civil-military relations. Previously, Fiske's personal respect for Meyer had acted as a check on his behavior, but he was barely able to contain his contempt for Daniels, whom he viewed as an intellectual lightweight focused on trivia at the expense of preparing the fleet for war.⁵⁰

It is possible that this was Meyer's intent in naming Fiske to the Aide for Operations post as one of his last acts as secretary.⁵¹ Even if he had been unaware of the precise identity of his successor, the Democratic Party's skeptical views on naval affairs were a matter of public record.⁵² Furthermore, Meyer would have been aware of Fiske's views on administration either because his reputation preceded him or from his time on the General Board in 1910–11. Those views were, of course, unacceptable to Daniels and most of the ascendant Democratic Party. In his autobiography, Fiske claimed that "nine tenths [of military officers], except those who come from the South, prefer to have the Republican party in power[,] . . . the more patriotic of the two [parties], and . . . more favorably inclined toward an adequate army and navy," suggesting that Fiske found the new administration unacceptable himself, despite the theoretically apolitical nature of the Navy's officer corps.⁵³ Indeed, throughout his tenure Daniels leaned on southern-born officers, and his preference may have rested on more than simple sectional bias.

Fiske's views on the needs of the service were shared passively by many naval officers and actively by a relatively small, but influential, group of officers who had spent time thinking and writing about naval strategy, professional development, and service organization. Many of these officers, such as William Sims, Dudley Knox, and William Pratt, had spent time at the Naval War College, either as students or staff. Since, in many ways, those at the early-twentieth-century College acted as an ersatz, and formally powerless, general staff, they were acutely aware of, and unhappy with, the lack of a "real" staff.⁵⁴ What separated Fiske from many like-minded officers was his willingness to violate professional norms to put his views across. Amusingly, Sims worried that Fiske, "constitutionally opposed to conflict of any kind," was unequal to the task of promoting naval reform in Washington.⁵⁵

On the contrary, Fiske clashed immediately with the new Secretary of the Navy. After a month under Daniels, Fiske was concerned that he would be forced out after a major row over promotion policies.⁵⁶ That summer, he took the opportunity of Daniels's first visit to the Naval War College to argue in favor of administrative reform (Fiske suggested superciliously that Daniels's trip would be enhanced if he could "prevail upon himself to come *as a student*").⁵⁷ There, Fiske invited Daniels to dinner with a group of officers assigned to the College, along with Sims, whom he specially invited to "help out" with the secretary. One of the attendees, Captain Josiah McKean, suggested that Daniels abdicate some of his military authority in favor of the Aide for Operations, a suggestion the secretary immediately rejected.⁵⁸ It is unclear whether Fiske put McKean up to it (although it would have certainly been in Fiske's character), but Daniels can be forgiven if he developed a certain skepticism toward his Aide for Operations and Fiske's circle of reformers. Indeed, Daniels attempted to shift Fiske out of Washington—to run the Naval War College—and was only stayed by an intervention from Dewey.⁵⁹

Understandably, Daniels preferred to receive his professional advice from other quarters. Despite Fiske's pretensions, he was not the only conduit for information from the Navy to the secretary. In addition to the corporate General Board (on which Fiske sat, but did not run), Daniels placed a great deal of trust in Captain Albert G. Winterhalter, the Aide for Material, despite his concerns about the aide system, and Blue, his handpicked chief of the Bureau of Navigation.⁶⁰ Whatever Fiske claimed, Daniels was not lacking for professional naval advice. Put bluntly, Fiske's main objection was that his was not the professional advice Daniels sought.

With the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914, Fiske's concern about the Navy's administration took on a new urgency. The Aide for Operations worried that Germany would win the war and then turn against the United States.⁶¹ In his words, he saw "the German machine smashing its way across . . . France, crushing the comparatively improvised machines of England and France," while his country was "watching the spectacle as a child watches a fire spreading." He was especially concerned at Daniels's seeming unwillingness to take action to prepare for potential war, instead investing his time on "an elaborate system for educating the enlisted men."⁶²

Fiske's first suggestion concerned the disposition of the Atlantic Fleet, the Navy's primary battle fleet. The Aide for Operations, who had expressed admiration for the High Seas Fleet's large-scale exercises, pushed Secretary Daniels to concentrate the Atlantic Fleet in one anchorage in mid-August, including withdrawing several battleships from the Mexican coast, where they were supporting the U.S. occupation of Veracruz (a deployment sparked, in part, by the delivery of arms for the Mexican government aboard a German steamer).⁶³ With the entire

fleet in one place, it could then conduct large-scale target practice, drills, and exercises to better prepare itself for war. Daniels vetoed the suggestion.⁶⁴

Similar suggestions on how to respond to the European war fell on deaf ears. Undeterred, Fiske decided to put his views in writing, preparing what he called "the most important" paper he had ever written on 9 November. In this memorandum to Daniels, Fiske laid out the case that the U.S. Navy was "unprepared" for war on the grounds of material and personnel shortages, as well as organizational inefficiency. The greater part of Fiske's note was taken up with a plea for a general staff. Without an organization for developing war plans and overseeing training, the U.S. Navy, he claimed, "shall be whipped if we ever are brought into war with any one of the great naval powers of Europe or Asia."⁶⁵ Fiske also convinced the General Board to make a formal recommendation, on 11 November, to Daniels regarding preparation for war and the need for more trained sailors and officers. Daniels declined to act on these recommendations, correctly noting that the role of the General Board was to answer questions posed to it by the secretary, not to offer unsolicited advice.⁶⁶

Someone on the board, perhaps Fiske, leaked its 11 November recommendations to the press, where they became fodder for the nascent "preparedness" movement.⁶⁷ This heterodox movement, linking politicians with advocacy organizations such as the Navy League and those founded after the commencement of war in Europe such as the National Security League, was split between those who wanted the United States to enter the war and those who wanted the country to defend itself from belligerent powers. Both wings, however, agreed that the military needed bolstering immediately. Critically, partisan rancor strengthened the preparedness movement. Mostly led by organizations and politicians from the Republican Party and the remnants of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressives, the movement took a dim view of the Wilson administration.⁶⁸

Evidently believing that the international situation made his advice more important than the chain of command, Fiske threw his lot in with the administration's enemies—and manufactured a civil-military relations crisis. Here, he was aided by Daniels's assistant secretary, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who also supported enlarging the fleet. In October, both men met with Massachusetts congressman Augustus P. Gardner, "Daniels's most vehement critic in the House," and fed him detailed information on the gap between Daniels's shipbuilding requests and the programs suggested by the General Board.⁶⁹ That same month, Fiske also met with California senator George Clement Perkins, another Republican; passed information to the *New York Herald*; and ghostwrote a column in the *Army and Navy Journal*.⁷⁰

By this point, Fiske's activities already were well beyond established norms of behavior for the Navy's officer corps. While unsigned and ghostwritten articles

were just on the right side of regulations regarding advocacy, Fiske's involvement with legislators crossed a bright line. For example, Theodore Roosevelt, although a staunch navalist, was so incensed by naval officers lobbying Congress over legislation in the early 1900s that he threatened to court-martial any officer caught doing so.⁷¹ Secretary Meyer went a step further, adding article 1517 to the Navy regulations, barring naval officers from contacting representatives and senators without going through Navy Department channels. It specifically directed them to "refrain from any attempts to . . . form proposed bills." While Daniels tended to take a laissez-faire approach to the strict letter of article 1517, Fiske undoubtedly knew that his behavior was beyond the pale.⁷²

Nevertheless, Fiske persisted in his campaign. At the end of the year, he convinced former naval officer Representative Richmond P. Hobson, a Democrat from Alabama, to invite him to testify in front of the House Naval Affairs Committee.⁷³ Fiske also planted questions with Massachusetts Republican representative Ernest W. Roberts.⁷⁴ As one historian noted, with some understatement, Fiske's gambit of arranging for himself to testify before Congress "bordered on insubordination" and ran contrary to long-established practice regarding the testimony of serving officers.⁷⁵

In front of the committee on 17 December, Fiske gave blistering testimony, contradicting Daniels's assurance to Congress that the Navy was prepared for any eventuality. Fiske publicly aired the criticisms of administration policy he had been making for some time, including issues with manpower, fleet size, and naval administration. His biggest salvo (in response to a possibly planted question from Roberts) was that the Navy was five years away from being able to fight a war. As one might imagine, Fiske's testimony was the final straw in the worsening relationship between the admiral and the secretary. From that point, Daniels "took Fiske's testimony as a justification for overlooking him henceforth."⁷⁶

Fiske's allegations and charges caused a minor media sensation, with antiadministration and pro-preparedness organs using his testimony as a cudgel against the government. In *The Navy*, a Navy League-aligned journal opposed to Daniels, an editorial claimed that "[t]he country owes [Fiske] a debt of gratitude. . . . [I]t can only be that he is remaining on this duty out of a sense of obligation to the service." It went on to criticize the administration and Congress for failing to build a "properly proportioned program providing the needed units," including scouts and battle cruisers.⁷⁷ Even ex-secretary Meyer weighed in, with an early February piece in the *North American Review* attacking the policies of his successor and calling for a naval general staff.⁷⁸

The 1914 hearings also fanned the flames of invasion scares, which peaked the following year. Even before Fiske's testimony, *Harper's Weekly* published a piece by ex-War Secretary Henry Stimson alleging that "an unknown enemy could

seize New London, Connecticut, and move south.”⁷⁹ In February, the *New York World* suggested that the Atlantic Fleet should make a mock attack on New York to highlight the nation’s unpreparedness.⁸⁰ Fiske later pointed to this article as an influence on his plans for the 1915 exercises.⁸¹

Taking advantage of this surge of favorable press, Fiske went even further, crossing the line into outright rebellion against the secretary. Frustrated with Daniels’s unwillingness to countenance organizational changes, Fiske and six other officers met at Representative Hobson’s house on the night of 3 January and drafted a bill that would, if passed, create a general staff led by a strong Chief of Naval Operations (CNO).⁸² Hobson quickly took the bill to Congress, where a subcommittee of the House Naval Affairs Committee unanimously advanced it.⁸³

If Fiske’s autobiography is to be believed, this plotting occurred with the tacit support of Admiral Dewey. In support of his claim, his band of conspirators practically constituted a committee of the General Board. Three—Captains Harry Knapp, John Hood, and James Oliver—were themselves General Board members. The other three—Lieutenant Commanders Dudley Knox, William Cronan, and Zachariah Madison—were assigned to the Navy Department in Washington. Knox worked under Oliver in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), while Cronan and Madison worked on war plans under Fiske.⁸⁴ Further, prior to joining ONI, Knox had worked with Captain William S. Sims at the Naval War College and in the Atlantic Torpedo Flotilla, helping him apply College methods to the development of tactical doctrine in the fleet.⁸⁵

Luckily for Fiske’s cabal, it appears that Daniels was unaware of just how involved his advisers were in drafting the bill, although he surely would have seen the aide’s hand in the bill’s provisions.⁸⁶ Dirk Bönker has described Fiske’s goal as remaking American “naval politics and institutions in an idealized Germanic image,” and the original CNO proposal was his masterpiece.⁸⁷ Under Fiske’s plan, “the General Board, the Naval War College, and even the bureau chiefs would lose power,” to say nothing of the secretary.⁸⁸ Using his prodigious political gifts, Daniels was able to water the bill down in the Senate, with the help of three bureau chiefs. The final bill kept the CNO position but removed management from his portfolio, as well as stripping his authority over the bureaus.⁸⁹

Naturally, Fiske viewed himself as the ideal choice for the new billet but was aware that Daniels never would select him. Instead, the secretary—rightly convinced that much of the Navy’s leadership was hostile to him—tapped Captain William Shepherd Benson, another southerner and the commandant of the Philadelphia Navy Yard, to be the first CNO, bypassing the Navy’s twenty-six rear admirals.⁹⁰ Although Fiske had no real need to resign from a post made redundant, he nonetheless presented his resignation—because of, he claimed, Daniels’s interference and disrespect.⁹¹

Fiske spent the final year of his career marooned as a supernumerary at the Naval War College, but before moving to Newport he left a parting gift for Daniels in the form of the 1915 Atlantic Fleet exercises, which he was able to shape substantially before departing.⁹² According to Fiske, his original idea was to “show what would really happen if a hostile [German] fleet should start for our eastern coast. . . . [I]t would not be a game at all, but a one-sided slaughter.”⁹³ By purporting to demonstrate what would happen if his warnings were not heeded, Fiske hoped to change the government’s policy through a war game “educational to the people.”⁹⁴

THE U.S. NAVY OBSERVES WORLD WAR I

Before we turn to the exercises themselves, it is critical to understand naval developments in the United States and abroad in 1914 and early 1915. Although the United States was not a belligerent, the members of the U.S. Navy’s officer corps paid rapt attention to the naval component of the First World War and judged their own service against those observations, and what many of them saw cast it in a bad light. However, rather than adopting German or British practices in toto, their solutions to the perceived deficiencies of the U.S. Navy were, unsurprisingly, tempered by their existing appreciation of its strategic and operational contexts.

The early course of the war gave a boost to those officers concerned about the U.S. Navy’s cruiser force. Although accurate and detailed information from the belligerent powers was hard to come by, the war at sea clearly failed to match the prewar assumptions of naval officers on both sides of the Atlantic, who expected another Trafalgar or Tsushima. Instead, the British and German battleships mostly sat in Scapa Flow and Wilhelmshaven, respectively, while other classes of warship took the lead. The naval war began with the chase of the German battle cruiser *Goeben* and light cruiser *Breslau* in the Mediterranean and the cruiser-dominated battle of Heligoland Bight in the North Sea, and cruisers continued to play a dominant role in the naval war through the first year of the war.

Two events in December 1914 proved especially instructive. The first, the battle of the Falkland Islands, demonstrated the power of battle cruisers against armored cruisers. The battle pitted the German navy’s East Asia Squadron, composed at the time of two armored cruisers and three light cruisers, against a hastily organized British squadron centered on two battle cruisers, *Invincible* and *Inflexible*. The German force left the western Pacific in a desperate attempt to reach home. It defeated a squadron of older British cruisers at the battle of Coronel off the coast of Chile in early November. Having rounded the tip of South America, the German commander, Vice Admiral Maximilian von Spee, attempted to attack the British port of Stanley in the Falklands on 8 December. Unbeknownst to him,

the British squadron had arrived the previous day; it proceeded to give chase and destroyed the German squadron, while sustaining minimal casualties.⁹⁵

Eight days later, German battle cruisers shelled the towns of Hartlepool, Scarborough, and Whitby in northeast England, causing little military damage but killing more than a hundred Britons, mostly civilians. British intelligence had given advance notice of the sortie, although not its destination, and Britain's entire Grand Fleet steamed to catch the raiders on their way back to Germany. However, poor visibility, confused communications, and a convoluted chain of command allowed the German ships to make a narrow escape.⁹⁶ These events made an impression in the United States and contributed to unfounded fears of invasion and attack. The next day, the *New York Times* ran a slew of articles on the attacks, including one that claimed ominously that Whitby and Scarborough "are as open to the enemy as is Atlantic City."⁹⁷ Like other lurid predictions of invasion or attack, this one failed to note why any hostile power would undertake a transatlantic crossing to attack New Jersey.

Nevertheless, among naval officers and navalists these engagements reinforced the concerns raised at the College about the Navy's lack of scouts and battle cruisers. At the Falklands, Spee's armored cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*—roughly comparable to the U.S. Navy's newest (though hardly new) *Tennessee*-class cruisers—were no match for two ships of the *Invincible* class, the Royal Navy's oldest and weakest battle cruisers. Likewise, the American fleet possessed no ships that could hope to catch a battle cruiser raid on the coast, coming or going.

Judged solely on the basis of battleships, the United States was the world's third naval power, behind only Britain and Germany, but construction of battleships and destroyers to the exclusion of cruisers over the previous decade had left the U.S. Navy with an unbalanced fleet. Britain, Germany, and Japan all possessed battle cruisers, while the U.S. Navy had none. Both the British and Japanese navies had more armored cruisers than the U.S. Navy. In light cruisers, the disparity was even more pronounced. A table drawn up for Congress comparing the U.S. Navy against the prewar strength of the Great War's combatants showed the United States with fourteen light cruisers as compared with thirteen Japanese, thirty-one German, and seventy-four British. On the U.S. side, only three of the cruisers had been built since the turn of the century, as opposed to ten of the Japanese ships.⁹⁸ The disparities with the Japanese navy were especially problematic, suggesting that the American advantage in battleships disguised a lack of overall combat effectiveness against a potential enemy with a smaller battle fleet.⁹⁹

Many American officers recognized these weaknesses. In London, Commander Powers Symington, a naval attaché, wrote the director of ONI on the subject of cruisers soon after the battle of the Falklands. Symington, who had supported battle cruiser construction during his time at the College's 1910 Summer

Conference, insisted that the U.S. Navy was generally “very weak in not having any fast light cruisers,” and at a disadvantage against Japan in the Pacific because of the threat the four Japanese battle cruisers represented against American lines of communication.¹⁰⁰

The General Board expressed similar concerns. Even before the Falklands action and the German battle cruiser raids, it had warned that “the fleet is very seriously lacking in vessels of the cruiser and scout classes that could do effective work in war,” forcing the Navy to keep superannuated nineteenth-century relics such as the cruisers *Cincinnati* and *Raleigh* (both completed in 1894) in service. While these ships, which were slower than the newest battleships, “should under ordinary circumstances be relieved from active service,” they remained “a very considerable percentage of such few vessels as we do have of even the approximate speed and qualities that would make them valuable for scout and cruiser work.”¹⁰¹

The Atlantic Fleet’s winter exercises in early 1915 fed these concerns. In January, the fleet conducted three short war games on its way to winter quarters in the Caribbean. All three scenarios divided the fleet into “red” and “blue” squadrons, and a major part of their intent was to work on effective scouting and screening techniques. To make up for its lack of cruisers, the fleet’s destroyers were pressed into service as scouts.¹⁰² These ships, designed to protect the battle fleet from torpedo attacks and to launch torpedo attacks of their own, had neither the sea-keeping qualities nor the endurance for successful use as scouts. Using them as such did not improve greatly the scouting picture and stripped vital protection from the battle line. According to the fleet’s commander, Rear Admiral Fletcher, in the moderate seas encountered during the exercises the fleet’s destroyers “were forced to slow to fifteen and then to ten knots.” This was far too slow for effective scout work.¹⁰³

Indeed, “due to the absence of heavy scouts,” the superior Blue fleet “lost” the first of the Atlantic Fleet’s exercises. This outcome, according to Fletcher, highlighted the need for specialized heavy scouts: “Without these scouts our battle fleet will be unable to bring to action an inferior enemy fleet or to evade a superior one. . . . Fast powerful scouts . . . are essential to utilize the power of battleships.”¹⁰⁴ To be clear, Fletcher was not necessarily calling here for battle cruiser scouts, merely for larger and more robust cruisers than the Navy’s existing scouts, to say nothing of its destroyers.

Sims, commanding the Atlantic Fleet’s destroyers, pointed out the absurdity of the fleet’s predicament in a letter to Fiske after the exercises.

The experience on the way down . . . has convinced a good many people that the successful screening of a battleship force could not be accomplished without vessels large enough to maintain their speed in a seaway, having heavy enough guns to drive off the enemy’s cruisers, and heavy enough armor to resist their gun fire. In other

words, there seems to be a majority of opinion that of two fleets the one having a certain number of battle cruisers to support their screen would enjoy a tremendous advantage.¹⁰⁵

Two days later, Sims officially relayed his thoughts in a memorandum to the General Board, again urging battle cruisers as a solution to the Navy's scouting woes.¹⁰⁶ An editorial in *The Navy* (no doubt using information provided by sympathetic officers) took a similar lesson from the January exercises, noting that a previous attempt to scout with destroyers had resulted in vessels "nearly lost, reaching port battered by the seas and severely damaged, while a number had to run for Bermuda." In short, the U.S. Navy was "a fleet lacking scouts that can keep the sea in all weather."¹⁰⁷

Late in January, asked by Daniels to comment on the charges from Fiske's December 1914 testimony, Fletcher took the latter's side. In a radio message to the secretary, Fletcher predicted that "[i]t will require at least five years to provide the necessary scouts . . . to effectively utilize the present battleship strength."¹⁰⁸ In August, Fletcher elaborated on the lessons of the winter exercises: "Our fleet lacked the fast cruisers that are necessary to give information of the position of the enemy as well as to deny the enemy information of our position and to screen our own forces. . . . The winter's work has made it evident that destroyers are quite unsuited for scouting except under very favorable circumstances. . . . Destroyers in no sense can be relied upon to take up the duties of fast cruisers."¹⁰⁹

There is little to suggest that these concerns from the fleet swayed Daniels; Fletcher's implicit endorsement of Fiske's testimony probably did not help his cause with the secretary. In the face of brickbats from the preparedness movement and concern from within the Navy, Daniels continued to insist that the service was perfectly ready for war, should it come. In his annual report to Congress dated late 1914, he lauded the Navy's role in the occupation of Veracruz under the heading "Proof of the Preparedness of the Navy"—a surely deliberate misinterpretation of "preparedness."¹¹⁰ As Daniels well knew, critics of Wilson administration defense policy were concerned about the military's ability to fight with or against one of the Great War's belligerents, not questionable constabulary operations in the Americas.

In 1914, in preparation for the 1915 Navy bill, Daniels declined to follow the General Board's recommendation for new construction. It urged a focus on construction of cruisers, terming them ships of "great use . . . for scouting and screening" that were "markedly lacking" in the Navy. Altogether, the board called for a program of sixteen destroyers, nineteen submarines, four scout cruisers, four battleships, and assorted auxiliaries and gunboats.¹¹¹ From this list, Daniels submitted a program to Congress consisting of two battleships, six destroyers, eight submarines, an oiler, and a gunboat.¹¹² That was still too much for President

Wilson. According to Daniels's diary, the president expressed a desire to cut the program to one battleship at a 22 January 1915 cabinet meeting.¹¹³

DEFEAT BY DESIGN

By early 1915, then, all the elements were in place for Fiske to make a splash on his way out of Washington. The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 gave military affairs greater political salience, as shown by the preparedness movement, which Fiske already had exploited with strategic leaks to the press and Congress. Likewise, there existed a marked disagreement between the secretary and the Navy's senior officers on the service's fitness for war. Not only had Daniels pointed to the Veracruz incident as proof of the fleet's readiness, but he declined to follow the General Board's advice on the size and makeup of the construction plan submitted to Congress in late 1914.

Finally, Fiske recognized that the Navy's uniformed leadership was preoccupied with the vanishingly unlikely risk of a foreign advance into the Western Hemisphere rather than an intervention in Europe. In February 1915, the Atlantic Fleet's chief of staff, Captain Harry P. Huse, sounded the alarm about the Allies or Central powers attacking American holdings and interests in the Caribbean, the location where "our next war will be fought, and [where] we could offer practically no defense." Huse further warned, with great exaggeration, that a European power could capture Cuba easily, in which case "our whole Atlantic and Gulf seaboard would be exposed."¹¹⁴ Likewise, the February 1915 Atlantic War Portfolio, produced by Fiske's small Operations staff and endorsed by the General Board, assumed that the most likely enemy was Germany and the likeliest theater of operations was the Caribbean.¹¹⁵

Therefore, when Fiske expressed a desire for "realistic" war games to Daniels in early February, he probably considered the highly improbable Germany scenario to be a genuine test of the Navy's capabilities against a likely threat.¹¹⁶ In his diary, Fiske indicated his desire to "show what would really happen if a hostile fleet should start for our eastern coast." To further his goals, Fiske convinced Daniels and a hesitant General Board to draw up the Atlantic Fleet's May exercises in Washington—"the modern and foreign method"—rather than letting Fletcher plan his own. This, Fiske argued, would allow the exercises to help the board refine its war plans. But Fiske also had political motives in mind; in a 24 February diary entry, he noted that the *New York World* had printed a "sensational suggestion for [a] sham attack on N. Y. by [the] Atlantic Fleet, using all the ships in the Atlantic—125 in all!! To attempt this would expose our unpreparedness"—no doubt to the political advantage of Fiske's friends in Congress.¹¹⁷

With permission secured, Fiske set about convincing the General Board to write up plans for an invasion. Fiske was only partially successful. Daniels had

approved the exercises with the caveat that the side representing the U.S. Navy emerge victorious. The board, although in agreement with Fiske about the magnitude of the German threat, refused to allow an aggressor fleet of a similar size. An exercise with an accurate German fleet would, most members of the board argued, "not be a game at all, but a one-sided slaughter." Fiske and the rest of the board compromised on an aggressor fleet somewhat less than half the size of the full German battle fleet.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, Assistant Secretary Roosevelt, who attended the board meeting that finalized the plans, wanted to take the games a step further. Desiring to create an "object lesson to the country," Roosevelt, like the *New York World* article from February, suggested that after the main exercises concluded the Atlantic Fleet "could represent a Black [German] force pushing home its attack on our coast," highlighting the ostensible consequences of naval unpreparedness.¹¹⁹

While the board declined to take up Roosevelt's suggestion, the scenario as written contained a tremendously inflammatory element: a German army. The earliest draft of the exercise plan noted that the attacking fleet was carrying twenty thousand soldiers, the advance guard for a further two hundred thousand soldiers in the main invasion force.¹²⁰ While the first wave of soldiers were nominally part of the exercises, in the form of transports that the German fleet needed to protect, the second wave of two hundred thousand (later reduced to a hundred thousand) played no role at all in the exercise—only serving to raise the stakes of "defeat" for the Atlantic Fleet.¹²¹ Without belaboring the point, it should be noted that the notion of sending 220,000, or even 120,000, soldiers across the Atlantic to land on a hostile shore was utterly risible, and beyond the logistical capacity of any military at the time.¹²²

Despite Daniels's clear instructions, the scenario devised by Fiske and the General Board left little chance of an American victory. The exercise pitted ten German dreadnoughts, four battle cruisers, eight predreadnoughts, thirty destroyers, "and a number of scouts," along with transports carrying the vanguard of an army, against an American fleet of six dreadnoughts (later increased to seven), ten predreadnoughts, twenty-three destroyers, twelve submarines, and "a number of inferior cruisers and merchant scouts."¹²³ Perhaps the board did not intend for a "one-sided slaughter," but there could be no doubt about the result of such a lopsided balance of forces.

Even the orders for the invader suggested something of the framers' preoccupations. In laying out the "General Situation" for the aggressor fleet's commander, Rear Admiral Frank Beatty, the board noted that the invasion was sent "[w]ith full knowledge of Blue's state of preparedness for war, and the consequent inability of Blue to mobilize quickly and efficiently its Naval and Military forces."¹²⁴ Given the prevailing political situation, this was a shocking—and, for the

TABLE 2
EXERCISE FLEET APPORTIONMENT

Type	German ("Red"/"Black")	American ("Blue")
Dreadnoughts	10	7
Predreadnoughts	8	10
Battle cruisers	4	0
Modern armored cruisers	6	4
Older cruisers	6	5
Civilian liners	0	4
Scouts	20	2 + 1 as a flotilla leader
Modern protected cruisers	0	2

Sources: [General Board], "Red Situation"; [General Board], "Blue Situation."

purposes of the exercise, entirely unnecessary—attack on government policy.

Critically, the imbalance between the two fleets was most severe in cruisers, as shown in table 2. The instructions identified the American cruisers by name; outside of the Navy's four newest armored cruisers and its three scouts, very few of these ships were suited for modern warfare.

The five older cruisers included *Chicago*, commissioned in 1885, in use at the time as a training ship for state naval militiamen. The two protected cruisers, *Tacoma* and *Des Moines*, were overgrown gunboats and significantly slower than modern battleships, to say nothing of proper cruisers. Not a single ship in the American order of battle could keep pace with the German battle cruisers, boasting top speeds of twenty-five knots or more, nor the generally-as-fast scout cruisers.¹²⁵

In a departure from the Atlantic Fleet's winter exercises, this plan made extensive use of imaginary ships to represent elements of both fleets, including all the scouting forces. Four ships represented the German battle fleet, one represented its scouting line, and another the Blue (American) scouting line. The German fleet and the single ship representing the Blue scouting line would steam together, with the Blue scout sending periodic position updates on a schedule set by the instructions.¹²⁶ Whatever else happened, this protocol ensured that the Atlantic Fleet could *not* use its exercises to practice scouting techniques with real ships.¹²⁷ It ensured, too, that much of what followed would be governed by the assumptions about scouts and scouting held by senior Navy leadership.

The scenario's details also blazed a path to the desired outcome. According to the initial problem, the German fleet was steaming from the Azores (for reasons unremarked on in the scenario), accompanied by the vanguard of an invasion force. The game was to begin with the invaders approximately five hundred miles off the American coast, bound for a location between Eastport, Maine, and Cape Hatteras in North Carolina—comprising nearly half the eastern coastline, and constituting a vast area for the defenders to cover.¹²⁸ Rear Admiral Beatty, the "German" commander, was under orders to steam for Cape Cod until encountering Blue units; after that, he was to turn south and make for the Virginia Capes at the entrance to the Chesapeake.

Blue's force started the exercise concentrated in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, under orders to "locate the Black fleet[,]. . . place his entire fighting force . . .

between the Black fleet and its objective, and bring Black fleet to battle near the end of its voyage, and before it has reached its objective."¹²⁹ The last point was critical. Under the terms of the problem, Fletcher could not attempt to attack the German fleet at its most vulnerable position: after it reached its target but before the landings were completed.

Contrary to Fiske's earlier assertions to the secretary and the board, the exercise was not intended to help further the development of a war plan, or even to allow the Atlantic Fleet to improve its tactical efficiency. Instead, it was designed to "prove" a point on which the Navy's leadership already agreed: the U.S. Navy was not ready for a war with a great power. As Sims put it in a letter to Fiske before the exercises, "[W]e will be able to get a good deal out of [the exercises]—perhaps not a little in the way of things to be avoided next time."¹³⁰ By devising such an incendiary scenario, Fiske and the board ensured that it would have the maximum political impact.¹³¹

Still, the exercise scenario differed only slightly from the service's own war plans. Navy planners in the Atlantic Fleet, the General Board, and the Naval War College had spent a great deal of time planning for a war with Germany. As we have seen, those same planners assumed that the German fleet would escort a large army across the Atlantic, and those who had spent time considering a war with Germany were rather pessimistic about the odds of American victory. The main difference was location; the plans assumed that any actual German landings would occur in Latin America, not New England or the Middle Atlantic states.

The onset of the exercises was well reported in the national press, with a front-page story in the *New York Herald* and articles in other major papers. The *Washington Post* even carried a piece, using an interview with Secretary Daniels, which assured readers that the war game would "have a greater degree of realism than such exercises in the past."¹³² Also, it should be borne in mind that over a thousand passengers and crew, including 128 Americans, had been killed earlier that month when the cruise liner RMS *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine, inflaming American opinion against Germany and heightening attention on naval issues. Even President Wilson, no fan of martial displays, traveled to New York to review the fleet before the exercise.¹³³

The exercise itself, as intended, was anticlimactic, resulting in a resounding "German" victory. According to the referee, Naval War College President Rear Admiral Austin Knight, the Atlantic Fleet started off the exercise facing "the difficult problem of meeting an enemy force stronger than his own . . . and especially stronger in scout's [*sic*]," and could not overcome that disadvantage. Despite an "excellent" scouting plan developed by Admiral Fletcher, "his smaller number of slow scouts" ran into the opposing scouting line on the third day of the exercise and were mauled, with "the most effective work against them being done by the

enemy battlecruisers[,] whose high speed and long range guns enabled them to pick off the slower and weaker . . . cruisers almost at will.”¹³⁴

As a result, Fletcher’s force was blinded, and the “German” fleet “made its every move with full knowledge of the enemy’s whereabouts.” While Fletcher withdrew his fleet to cover potential landing sites in New England, Rear Admiral Beatty, following his initial orders, made for the Chesapeake, well ahead of the Blue fleet. After sending his transports ahead to the landing site, Beatty turned his battle fleet northward toward the Atlantic Fleet. At this point, Knight stopped the exercise, determining that the attacking fleet “was decidedly more powerful” than Blue’s and “could, without difficulty, seize a base.”¹³⁵ In his annual report Fletcher himself blamed “the lack of heavily armored fast vessels and light cruisers” and the opponent’s “superior cruiser force” for the defeat. With such an imbalance in scouts, “the enemy . . . was well informed of our movements and dispositions at all times.”¹³⁶

The public-relations aftermath of the exercise went according to Fiske’s plan as well. The *New York Times* reprinted Knight’s report on the exercise under the headline “Battle Cruisers Won for ‘Invaders,’” musing that “[t]he lesson of the war game, pointing to the need of fast and powerful scout cruisers . . . , will, it is believed . . . , result in a recommendation that the coming Congress inaugurate the policy of building battle cruisers.”¹³⁷ The *Washington Post* went a step further, noting the obvious similarities between the invaders and the German High Seas Fleet and luridly claiming that the Atlantic Fleet was “adjudged incapable of protecting the United States from invasion by a foreign foe[,] . . . [who] was considered able to establish a base [and] march against Washington.”¹³⁸

Supporters of naval expansion derived similar lessons. *The Navy*, of course, claimed that the game showed “decisively that the navy of the United States is lacking in battle cruisers.”¹³⁹ *Scientific American* argued that the exercise provided “an instructive lesson in the need for” scouts and battle cruisers.¹⁴⁰ At the College, Lieutenant Commander Harry Yarnell, a budding naval strategist, wrote soon after the exercise that the U.S. Navy needed scouts with “speed and gun power sufficient to overtake and destroy enemy vessels of the same class”—attributes noticeably lacking in the 1915 fleet.¹⁴¹

Fiske, having resigned from the Aide for Operations post, took time to bask in his success. While the war game was under way he took Assistant Secretary Roosevelt to lunch—and asked whether the latter was ready to take over at the Navy Department in case Daniels was forced out.¹⁴² At the annual dinner of the Naval Academy Graduates Association on 3 June, Fiske gave what he called “destructive criticism”—in front of a crowd that included Daniels—laying out the supposed dangers of a foreign invasion:

[A]n attack by one of the great naval powers is the only kind we need consider. . . .

[T]he attacking force would include battle cruisers, dreadnoughts, pre-dreadnoughts,

scouts, cruisers, destroyers, . . . all fully manned and all strategically directed by a General Staff.

What have we with which to oppose this force—a smaller number of dreadnoughts, pre-dreadnoughts and destroyers than the enemy would bring; no battle cruisers, no effective scouts. . . .

This means that, reasoning on the assumption that the United States desires that the navy shall be able to guard our coast effectively against the only kind of attack that would be made, the navy must obtain several types of vessels and instruments that we do not now possess.¹⁴³

In the speech, extracts of which were published on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day, Fiske went on to urge members of the audience to make the public understand the Navy's alleged inadequacies, even in the face of official censure and risk to their careers. He himself continued to agitate for naval expansion and a staff from his new perch in Newport, sparking another major confrontation with Daniels, with support from preparedness advocates in and out of office.¹⁴⁴

The exercise also helped to increase pressure on President Wilson—already under fire from the *Lusitania* sinking—to loosen the Navy's purse strings. Outside the government, the Navy League agitated for a \$500 million naval construction bill. Inside, men such as Assistant Secretary Roosevelt and Wilson's closest adviser, Edward House, urged the president to expand the military in the service of preparedness.¹⁴⁵ It is difficult to assign to the exercises a specific share of the credit for the shifting political momentum, but they certainly gave ammunition to the administration's opponents.

Wilson, who earlier had tried to cut the 1915 program to one battleship, told Daniels in July to prepare a large ship-construction program for the next fiscal year.¹⁴⁶ Armed with that knowledge, the General Board drafted a new naval policy, aiming to make the Navy "equal to the most powerful maintained by another nation . . . not later than 1925." At the same meeting, the board agreed tentatively to place battle cruisers in their construction plan for the next year's Navy bill.¹⁴⁷

The sentiments expressed about the exercises certainly contributed to the shape of the Navy's final construction proposal. In October, Daniels clarified the scope of the new program, asking the board to prepare a five-year, \$500 million program, echoing the Navy League's calls for such a program in May.¹⁴⁸ Two days later, the board gave Daniels a program built around ten battleships, six battle cruisers, and ten scouts.¹⁴⁹

As the board related in November, this program had little to do with war experience, instead resting on its assessment of the existing American fleet. Noting that many American observers had been impressed by the performance of British battle cruisers in the war to date, the board took pains to make the caveat that "the particular course of the present war does not justify the

prevalent exaggerated idea of their importance.” Instead, the role of battle cruisers was “chiefly . . . to secure information . . . and break through a hostile screen” while protecting their own, not the roles demonstrated by the belligerents in the North Sea.¹⁵⁰ This scouting rationale, however, matched exactly the concerns expressed by Fiske, Sims, Fletcher, and others, as well as the preordained outcome of the summer 1915 war game.

While civilian officials have the final say on the specifics of the military’s budgetary requests and Congress authorizes acquisition programs and appropriates their funding, military officers play a critical role in this system. Yet few politicians enter Congress with a working knowledge of the intricacies of military policy, and frequently they defer to the judgment of uniformed professionals. With their technical knowledge and experience, military officers often set the bounds and terms of debate over providing for their services. Congress can accept proposed budgets, cut them, or increase them, but very rarely do they change the fundamental nature of the military’s requests for new acquisitions. For example, Congress may not fund the number of attack submarines the Navy wants in a given budget, or even kill the program entirely, but the legislature is unlikely to force the service to build conventional submarines instead of the nuclear submarines it desires.¹⁵¹

In the 1880s and 1890s, a relatively small group of naval officers convinced leading civilian policy makers to fund a battleship navy, often in the face of opposition from other parts of the service. As this article shows, they may have swung the pendulum of political opinion too far in favor of battleships. Viewed in this context, for Fiske to take part in advocacy for the Navy was in keeping with the recent history of American civil-military relations, although the means he employed to intervene in political processes were wildly inappropriate. Still, his campaign of dissent and underhanded politicking must be judged a partial success. He did not create dissatisfaction with the Wilson administration or lead the preparedness movement, but he skillfully turned critics of the administration toward supporting his desired program for the U.S. Navy. Wilson’s about-face on naval appropriations cannot be traced to Fiske alone, but his actions—influenced by and coordinated with Wilson’s political adversaries—clearly played a role in creating the domestic climate for a large Navy construction program. Furthermore, the nature of Fiske’s actions primed the pump for a construction program incorporating more scouts than battleships.

Standard accounts of the 1916 Navy act’s genesis, even those written from a naval history perspective, often have overlooked the active role that Fiske played (and the General Board’s more passive role) in helping to create the preconditions for its framing and passage.¹⁵² Let us be clear about what happened. Led

by Fiske, the members of the Navy's uniformed leadership conspired to undermine the stated policy of their political masters, stopping only when the administration agreed to pursue a large construction program (although Fiske, especially agitated by Daniels, carried on for some time afterward).

The May 1915 exercise was a critical part of this strategy. As the evidentiary record makes clear, its framers were well aware of the effect an "invasion" of the United States would have on domestic opinion. Likewise, they were aware that Secretary Daniels had demanded that the exercise show proof that the Navy could defend the Eastern Seaboard from attack. Instead, the scenario the General Board wrote made success for the "American" side in the war game a near impossibility. This outcome was then spun as the inevitable failure of an unbalanced fleet, as in (ex officio board member) Knight's report on the game, which ended up substantially reprinted in the press.

The nature of the Atlantic Fleet's failure was critical to Fiske's project. The scenario did not just guarantee American defeat; it guaranteed defeat as a result of inadequate scouting capability. As theoretical work from the College and the Atlantic Fleet's exercises earlier that year had demonstrated, major elements of the Navy's planning components were concerned about the U.S. Navy's paucity of scouts compared with its ostensible peer competitors. The summer exercise scenario broadcast as widely as possible—and more forcefully than the board's construction memorandums—that the Navy's leadership wanted new cruisers as soon as possible.

At the same time, none of this should imply that war games or exercises with overdetermined outcomes are somehow rare. Readers may remember U.S. Joint Forces Command's "Millennium Challenge 2002," which was dogged by allegations that the game was rigged to validate "transformationalist" military stratagems.¹⁵³ More benignly, framers of war games are forced to make any number of assumptions about the capabilities of untested weapons, an unknown enemy's order of battle, and the like, which can have major effects on the course of an exercise or chart maneuver.¹⁵⁴

Even the political effects sought by Fiske and the General Board have had echoes in other exercises. Ex-Secretary of the Navy John Lehman recently wrote that the Navy's exercises in near-Soviet waters during the 1980s were intended to reassure allies and affect Soviet estimates of the balance of naval power.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, the Soviet Navy's OKEAN exercises in the 1970s were designed to impress observers with the global reach of conventional Soviet power.¹⁵⁶ Contemporary American exercises with foreign militaries are designed with diplomatic and signaling objectives in mind, alongside testing operational efficacy.

What makes Fiske's exercise unique is that the desired political effect and predetermined result were intended to embarrass the administration he served

and, perhaps, spark the removal of Daniels as Secretary of the Navy.¹⁵⁷ Fiske was only partially successful with this risky enterprise, and then only because his objectives reflected a settled consensus on strategy and judgment of the Wilson administration's policies in critical nodes of naval leadership, including the General Board, the Naval War College, and the Atlantic Fleet.¹⁵⁸ Even after his ouster, the General Board drafted and justified the 1916 bill using language similar to Fiske's. When asked to defend their recommendations in Congress, General Board members did not treat the battle cruisers and scout cruisers as supernumerary add-ons, but "special ship[s] for special duties," critical for conducting modern naval warfare. Even after the Battle of Jutland in May and June of 1916 threw the future of the battle cruiser type into doubt, American officers continued to insist, truthfully, that their ships were intended for a different mission, and that British and German practices and outcomes were inappropriate evidence on which to judge American plans.¹⁵⁹

One of Fiske's biographers has stated, rather generously, that he "at times . . . allowed his blue-and-gold professionalism to place him at variance with accepted precepts of civil-military relations in a democracy."¹⁶⁰ This flaw was shared by many naval officers of the early twentieth century. As members of the American elite, they felt themselves free to engage with members of their stratum of society, including newspapermen and politicians. The Navy League—firmly embedded in the political, social, and financial elite of the coastal regions—was created in part because President Roosevelt had threatened to court-martial any officer who lobbied Congress directly.¹⁶¹

Even against that background, Fiske's behavior stands out for its audacity. Any flag officer seeking to follow his path today would be relieved of command and court-martialed, and rightly so. Even though he was not the only naval officer of the period willing to ghostwrite newspaper columns and advise congressmen and senators on policy under the table, he was the only one willing to write controversial legislation in a congressman's sitting room. Even so, Fiske only felt comfortable designing the exercises when he knew his career was effectively over. More research is needed to state this conclusively, but 1915 may be the only time in American history that a senior military officer designed an exercise for the express purpose of embarrassing a sitting administration.

We also should not ignore the role that personal animus played in these events. Naval officers of the day tended to have a generalized disdain for politicians, but many of the officers discussed here appear to have had a thoroughly personal contempt for Daniels specifically. It is difficult not to see this as a motivating factor in Fiske's actions. His autobiography, published in 1919 while Daniels was still in office, drips with hatred for the secretary. Beyond Fiske's individual feelings, many of the actions of other officers discussed in this article—from the other six

conspirators who met at Representative Hobson's house to officers at the College asking the secretary to cede some of his power—hardly suggest respect for the man or his position.¹⁶²

Most naval historians, this author included, would argue that Fiske and his supporters had a more realistic understanding of the Navy's operational shortcomings than did Daniels; their fixation on the virtually nonexistent threat of a German invasion in the Western Hemisphere is a different story. That said, Daniels was not a naval, but a political, professional. Fiske's forays into Daniels's arena were amateurish; his hope that he could induce Wilson to fire a member of his cabinet over caterwauling from the opposition or a failed exercise was absurd.

Yet even though Fiske was only partially successful, that should not blind us to how wildly inappropriate his political machinations were, almost from the beginning of Daniels's installation as secretary. Fiske's activities violated a host of regulations and civil-military norms. Any contemporary officer following his lead would be lucky indeed if he only ended up waiting for retirement in a dead-end assignment.

NOTES

1. "U.S. Fleet 'Crushed,'" *Washington Post*, 26 May 1915, p. 2.
2. Rear Adm. Austin Knight to Secretary Josephus Daniels, "Report on the Outcome of the Exercises," 26 May 1915, General Board Subject File #434, Record Group [hereafter RG] 80, National Archives and Records Administration I, Washington, DC [hereafter NARA I].
3. "Battle Cruisers Won for 'Invaders,'" *New York Times*, 27 May 1915, p. 7; "Victory to Fast Ships," *Washington Post*, 27 May 1915, p. 3.
4. The position of Aide for Operations, which existed from late 1909 through 1915, was superseded by the Chief of Naval Operations. The aide was charged with examining and developing war plans and otherwise ensuring that the Navy was prepared for conflict, but lacked any executive authority. Instead, the aide was restricted to advising the Secretary of the Navy.
5. See Dirk Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age: Naval Ambitions in Germany and the United States before World War I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 127–30, and Nancy Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams: German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 53–63. Mitchell concludes (p. 217), "What did Germany actually do to establish hegemony in the region? The simple answer is nothing. There was no German threat."
6. Kenneth Davis, "No Talent for Subordination: FDR and Josephus Daniels," in *FDR and the U.S. Navy*, ed. Edward J. Marolda (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), p. 8.
7. Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams*, p. 43.
8. Naval War College, "Summer Problem of 1903. Strategy," RG 12, vol. 9, Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, RI [hereafter NHC].
9. See Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age*, pp. 127–30. During this period, most of the U.S. Navy's strength, especially its battleships, was kept in the Atlantic Fleet, as it was believed that European powers represented a more immediate threat to the economically vital Eastern Seaboard, whereas American possessions in the Pacific were less important and the American position possessed more strategic depth.

10. Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams*, pp. 61–62.
11. See Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age*, pp. 5–6. With hindsight, the history of the Imperial German Navy before the First World War is itself a strong argument in favor of firm civilian control over military institutions.
12. The General Board consisted of Dewey, several ex officio members such as the head of the Bureau of Navigation, and a handful of officers at or above the rank of lieutenant commander detailed for service on the board. Critically, the General Board served solely to advise the secretary; it had no independent executive authority or supervision of the Navy's powerful administrative bureaus, which controlled most of the day-to-day functions of the Navy. One of its most important duties was the annual recommendation of a construction program to the Secretary of the Navy, who was free to adapt or ignore the board's recommendations in the formal construction plans submitted to Congress. In the period covered by this article, secretaries most often submitted construction plans derived from, but cheaper than, the board's recommendations. See John T. Kuehn, *Agents of Innovation: The General Board and the Design of the Fleet That Defeated the Japanese Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), p. 11, and Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age*, pp. 294–96. For more on Dewey as Admiral of the Navy, see Ronald Spector, *Admiral of the New Empire: The Life and Career of George Dewey* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 122–78. For discussion of the General Board's role before World War I, see Daniel J. Costello, "Planning for War: A History of the General Board of the Navy, 1900–1914" (PhD dissertation, Tufts Univ., 1968); Kuehn, *Agents of Innovation*, chap. 1; and John T. Kuehn, *America's First General Staff: A Short History of the Rise and Fall of the General Board of the Navy, 1900–1950* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017), chaps. 1–5.
13. Mary Klachko, with David F. Trask, *Admiral William Shepherd Benson: First Chief of Naval Operations* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), p. 37.
14. Brief discussion of the exercises is scattered over several pages in Paolo Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske and the American Navy* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), pp. 152–63, and Benjamin Franklin Cooling, "Bradley Allen Fiske: Inventor and Reformer in Uniform," in *Admirals of the New Steel Navy: Makers of the American Naval Tradition 1880–1930*, ed. James C. Bradford (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990). From more-general histories, on the exercise's political nature, see William Reynolds Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909–1922* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 184–185, and Robert O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), p. 200. On the politics of the preparedness movement, see Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973), p. 190. He obliquely hints at the politics behind the exercise design, mentioning "preparedness advocates" who could "frighten their audience and themselves with visions of vast German columns making another Belgium of the United States," although he argues that this fear sprang solely from the size of the German battle line. For his part, Fiske cited the creation of General Board-directed war games as one of his five main accomplishments as Aide for Operations; see Bradley A. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral* (New York: Century, 1919), p. 587.
15. Scott Mobley, *Progressives in Navy Blue: Maritime Strategy, American Empire, and the Transformation of U.S. Naval Identity, 1873–1898* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), pp. 175–77.
16. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy 1798–1947*, ed. Rowena Reed (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980), p. 211.
17. General Board Memorandum No. 420, 17 October 1903, pp. 1–6, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
18. This was a moving target. Initially, the board noted that two battleships per year would suffice to reach forty-eight by 1920, but ironically, as Congress "failed" to provide those ships, the board's requests grew. Starting with its construction memorandum for the 1908 bill, the board began requesting four battleships per year rather than adjusting its target to reflect political and fiscal realities. Considering that Congress initially had balked at an annual appropriation of two battleships, this was not a strategy calculated for success. As the General Board put it in its 1914 construction plan, "In the attempt to complete the

- primary fighting elements of the fleet [battleships and, to some extent, destroyers], no cruisers or scouts have been recommended or authorized for several years, and the fleet has become markedly lacking in this class of vessel." General Board to Secretary Josephus Daniels, "Building Program [FY] 1916," 1 July 1914, p. 10, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
19. Arguably, this is the same attitude shown by today's Navy in its quixotic drive for a 350-ship fleet despite clear congressional unwillingness to fund the necessary construction.
 20. Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (New York: Free Press, 1972), pp. xiii–xiv.
 21. General Board to Secretary Daniels, "Increase of the Navy; Building Program and Personnel, 1916," 17 November 1914, p. 8, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 22. Josephus Daniels, "[1915] Report of the Secretary of the Navy," 1 December 1915, in *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1915* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [hereafter GPO], 1916), p. 80.
 23. Benjamin R. Tillman Jr. [Sen.], ed., *Navy Yearbook: Embracing All Acts Authorizing the Construction of Ships of the "New Navy" and a Resume of Annual Naval Appropriation Laws from 1883 to 1917, Inclusive* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1916), pp. 619–23.
 24. This type of warship, introduced by the British, alongside the famous battleship *Dreadnought* in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, combined the speed and relatively light armor of cruisers with the main battery of battleships. Pithily described as "eggshells with hammers," they outclassed earlier armored cruisers in much the same way *Dreadnought* did "predreadnought" battleships. Most major navies stopped building armored cruisers. The British, German, and Japanese navies quickly shifted construction toward battle cruisers, while the U.S. Navy stopped building large cruisers altogether after the two armored cruisers *North Carolina* and *Montana* in the 1904 bill.
 25. Adm. of the Navy George Dewey to Secretary of the Navy Charles Bonaparte, 24 October 1906, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 26. General Board, "General Board Report on Building Program," 28 September 1910, pp. 6–7, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 27. 1st and 3rd Committees of the 1909 Summer Conference, "Report on Question 14," [July] 1909, 1909 Conference, vol. 2, RG 12, NHC. Prior to 1911, the War College accepted a class of two to three dozen officers for a weeks-long "Summer Conference" in Newport, often joined by the General Board. During the remainder of the year, the College's staff worked on their own projects and answered inquiries from the General Board and secretary. In 1911, the College began the "Long Course," a yearlong program of intensive instruction, war gaming, and writing, initially with four students but growing to a dozen or so students by 1914. Ronald Spector, *Professors of War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1977), pp. 121–24; U.S. Naval War College, "Register of Officers, 1884–1979," 1979, author's photocopy of original from Archivist's Office, NHC.
 28. See Cdr. William B. Fletcher to Secretary of the Navy George von Lengerke Meyer, 16 September 1910, General Board Subject File #420-8, RG 80, NARA I. In general, smaller scouts lacked the fuel capacity for long-range reconnaissance at high cruising speeds. Likewise, they lacked the size needed to maintain speed in seaways. Combined with the potential need to engage with foreign battle cruisers conducting their own scouting operations, Fletcher's logic pointed toward building battle cruisers for the American fleet.
 29. Capt. William S. Sims to Vice Adm. Henry B. Jackson, RN, 2 November 1911, William Sowden Sims Papers, box 21, Library of Congress, Washington, DC [hereafter LoC].
 30. Sims, untitled Naval War College wargame report, [mid-?]1912, William Sowden Sims Papers, box 21, LoC.
 31. Capts. William L. Rodgers and William S. Sims to the Secretary of the Navy, 12 December 1911, item #9469-48, RG 80, NARA I.
 32. Secretary of the Navy George von Lengerke Meyer to the Chief of the Bureau of

- Construction and Repair, 16 June 1910, General Correspondence of the Navy Department, 1897–1915, item #26834-102, RG 80, NARA I.
33. General Board, “General Board Report on Building Program,” 25 May 1911, pp. 4–5, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 34. For exhaustive coverage of the 1912 Summer Conference and battle cruisers, see Ryan Peeks, “The Cavalry of the Fleet” (PhD dissertation, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), pp. 220–28.
 35. “Memorandum, Third Committee, General Board. Building Program for the Period 1914–1920,” 17 July 1912, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 36. General Board, “Memorandum from General Board. Building Program, 1913–1917,” 25 September 1912, General Board Subject File #420-2, RG 80, NARA I.
 37. *Estimates Submitted by the Secretary of the Navy, 1913: Hearings before the H. Comm. on Naval Affairs*, 62d Cong. (3d Sess.) (1913) (statement of George v. L. Meyer, Secretary of the Navy).
 38. Daniels and his newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, played a major role in inciting the 1898 coup in Wilmington, North Carolina, in which a mob of well-armed white supremacists overthrew the democratically elected city government. See Lee A. Craig, *Josephus Daniels: His Life & Times* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2013), pp. 183–88.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
 40. Paul E. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy: Politics, Economics, and the Rise of American Naval Power, 1881–1921* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), p. 202.
 41. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 104.
 42. Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy*, p. 218.
 43. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, pp. 181–85, 189, 198.
 44. *Ibid.*, pp. 203–204.
 45. As of 1 January 1913, Blue was fifteenth in seniority on the commanders list. U.S. Navy Dept., *Register of the Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1 January 1913), p. 14. (Subsequent citations to this annual publication are given as year and *Register*.) Both Andrews and Blue held the temporary rank of rear admiral while running the bureau.
 46. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 104.
 47. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, p. 204.
 48. See, for example, Fiske’s “American Naval Policy” from the March 1905 issue of the U.S. Naval Institute’s *Proceedings*, which attacked then-Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan’s “British” understanding of naval power and allegedly old-fashioned views on warship design.
 49. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 107.
 50. See Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 528, 548. Fiske said of Meyer that he was “an excellent man to work with,” even if he lacked the technical knowledge to speak with “ordnance officers, engineers, and constructors . . . in their own language.”
 51. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 102–103.
 52. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, p. 199.
 53. See Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 625, and Karsten, *Naval Aristocracy*, pp. 203–206. It is, however, hard to recover Fiske’s exact opinions at the time. *Midshipman* was written after Fiske’s retirement, following his very public dissatisfaction with Wilson’s Democratic administration. At any rate, most naval officers had broadly Republican sympathies, even if they rarely voted in the World War I era. While they tended to disdain politicians in general, it is telling that the politicians who raised the most individualized ire in this era were Democrats such as William Jennings Bryan, Wilson, and Daniels.
 54. Spector, *Professors of War*, p. 101.
 55. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 103.
 56. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 531–32.
 57. Bradley A. Fiske to Josephus Daniels, 6 August 1913, p. 3, Josephus Daniels Papers, reel 49, LoC. Emphasis in original.
 58. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 106.
 59. Kuehn, *America’s First General Staff*, p. 90.
 60. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 103–104.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
62. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 548–50.
63. For a detailed description of the secretary's actions around the Mexican intervention, see Craig, *Josephus Daniels*, pp. 170–73.
64. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 132–33.
65. See Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 555–60. Fiske was so taken with his 9 November 1914 memo that he reprinted it nearly in full in his memoir.
66. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 140–41.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
68. Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less than War: A New History of America's Entry into World War I* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2011), pp. 36–40.
69. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 137.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–38.
71. Donald Chisholm, *Waiting for Dead Men's Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793–1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 469.
72. Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy*, p. 172.
73. See Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 564. Hobson was a lame duck, having not been on the general election ballot in 1914.
74. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 145.
75. Cooling, "Fiske," p. 133.
76. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 145–46.
77. See *The Navy*, January 1915, pp. 6–8. Throughout the year, *The Navy* ran a feature collecting anti-Daniels articles from the Republican press across the country.
78. See Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, p. 214. Meyer specifically noted that a staff could do a better job of overseeing construction and finances than the combination of the bureaus and Congress. It is unclear whether Meyer subscribed to Fiske's more expansive vision, although his advice to Daniels to keep power in the secretary's office suggests he did not.
79. See Doenecke, *Nothing Less*, p. 105. Confused geography aside (Stimson was presumably referring to New York City, roughly west-southwest from New London), he failed to answer *why* anyone would want to seize New London and, indeed, *how*. The United Kingdom was the only power with even a theoretical ability to capture the city, and of course it had expressed absolutely no interest in doing so.
80. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 153.
81. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 575.
82. *Ibid.*, pp. 567–68.
83. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 150.
84. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 552, 554, 567–68; U.S. Navy Dept., *1915 Register*, pp. 10, 20–22.
85. Elting Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1942), pp. 292–312; Ryan Peeks and Frank Blazich, "The Intellectuals behind the First U.S. Navy Doctrine: A Centennial Reflection," *War on the Rocks*, 1 December 2017, warontherocks.com/.
86. See Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 160–61, and Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 569. Daniels's biographer claims that one of his civilian aides warned him of Fiske's attempts to establish a uniformed head of naval operations in the fall of 1914. This, however, came before Fiske wrote the bill at Hobson's residence in early January 1915. Daniels was certainly aware that Fiske wanted a powerful Chief of Naval Operations, but if he had been aware of just how involved Fiske (and, for that matter, Dewey) was in the construction of the bill, even the mild-mannered secretary would have taken steps up to and including Fiske's dismissal and court-martial. See Craig, *Josephus Daniels*, p. 235.
87. Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age*, p. 299.
88. Cooling, "Fiske," p. 134.
89. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 151–54.
90. U.S. Navy Dept., *1915 Register*. Prior to mid-1915, rear admiral was the highest grade in the Navy, save for the singular Admiral of the Navy rank awarded to Dewey.
91. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 581.
92. See U.S. Navy Dept., *1916 Register*, p. 8. Although Fiske turned in his resignation in April and his post ceased to exist in May, his

- posting at the War College evidently did not take effect until 1 July 1915.
93. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, p. 577.
 94. *Ibid.*, p. 578.
 95. Julian Corbett, *Naval Operations*, vol. 1, *To the Battle of the Falklands, December 1914* (London: Longmans, Green, 1920), pp. 379–439; Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 297–98.
 96. This short account is derived from the documentation of the raid in BTY/3, Admiral of the Fleet David Beatty Papers, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, U.K.
 97. “East Coast Scene of Raid: Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby Swept by Rain of Projectiles,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1914, p. 1.
 98. See Tillman, *Navy Yearbook*, p. 640. The figures for the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan were taken from their strength on 1 July 1914, the U.S. numbers from 1 November 1916. Since the Navy commissioned no new cruisers between 1914 and 1916, these figures are an accurate measure of immediate prewar strength.
 99. Although the Navy considered Japan to be a secondary threat compared with Germany, it began serious planning for a naval war with Japan during a major diplomatic break between the two countries in 1906–1907. Although that specific spat was resolved by the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” to reduce Japanese immigration to the United States, war with Japan continued as a major Navy planning scenario, becoming the service’s predominant concern by the early 1920s. Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 21–23; Peeks, “Cavalry of the Fleet,” pp. 93–94, 385–90.
 100. Cdr. Powers Symington to Capt. James Oliver, 10 December 1914, box 51, RG 8, NHC. Symington’s letter mentions his attendance at the War College in 1911, but the College’s roster lists him as a participant in 1910 alone.
 101. General Board to Daniels, “*Salem, Cincinnati, Raleigh, Wheeling: Military Value in View of Contemplated Expenditures*,” 2 December 1914, General Board Subject File #420-8, RG 80, NARA I.
 102. Rear Adm. Frank Friday Fletcher to Secretary Daniels, 15 January 1915, Josephus Daniels Papers, reel 50, LoC.
 103. Fletcher to Daniels, “Scout Cruisers—Urgent Necessity For,” 19 January 1915, General Board Subject File #420-8, RG 80, NARA I. Fletcher was promoted from rear to full admiral in March 1915, ahead of the spring exercise.
 104. *Ibid.*
 105. Capt. William S. Sims to Rear Adm. Bradley Fiske, 3 February 1915, William Sowden Sims Papers, box 57, LoC.
 106. William S. Sims, “Memorandum on Scouting and Screening,” 5 February 1915, General Board Subject File #418, RG 80, NARA I.
 107. “Fleet Maneuvers,” editorial, *The Navy*, February 1915, pp. 33–34.
 108. Rear Adm. Frank Friday Fletcher to Secretary Josephus Daniels, 26 January 1915, Josephus Daniels Papers, reel 50, LoC.
 109. Frank Friday Fletcher, “[Atlantic Fleet] Commander in Chief’s Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1915,” 15 August 1915, reprinted in *The Atlantic Fleet in 1915* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1916), p. 15.
 110. Josephus Daniels, “Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy [for FY 1914],” 1 December 1914, in *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1914* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1915), p. 52.
 111. General Board to Daniels, “Building Program [FY] 1916.”
 112. Daniels, “Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy [for FY 1914],” p. 8.
 113. Josephus Daniels diary, 22 January 1915, Josephus Daniels Papers, series 3, folder 91, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
 114. Capt. H. P. Huse to Admiral Fletcher, “Status of United States Relative to European Wars,” 10 February 1915, Josephus Daniels Papers, reel 50, LoC.
 115. General Board, “War Portfolio No. 1: Atlantic Station; General Considerations and Data,” February 1915, General Board of the Navy

- War Portfolios, 1902–1923, RG 80, NARA I. As Mitchell notes, much of the content of the portfolio would have dated from earlier iterations of the plan going back a decade or more. Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams*, pp. 58–59.
116. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 152.
 117. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 576–77, 575.
 118. *Ibid.*, pp. 577–78. This force was still large enough to “defeat” the Atlantic Fleet easily in May. Fiske certainly anticipated this result; it is unclear whether the board was being equally mendacious or honestly expected a fair fight.
 119. General Board Meeting, 16 March 1915, in *Proceedings and Hearings of the General Board of the United States Navy* (Washington, DC: National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1987), reel 3, p. 76.
 120. General Board, “Statement of the Problem: War Exists between Black and Blue (Blue Copy),” 13 March 1915, General Board Subject File #434, RG 80, NARA I. While the General Board was developing the exercises, the opposing fleets were called Blue and Black, the standard Navy code names for the United States and Germany. In material bound for the Atlantic Fleet and released to the public, the fleets were called Blue and Red. Although Red was the standard code name for Britain, in this case it represented a generic exercise adversary. For the ease of the reader, I will refer to the aggressor fleet as “German.”
 121. [General Board], “Red Situation,” 23 April 1915, General Board Subject File #434, RG 80, NARA I.
 122. For example, see Martin van Creveld’s analysis of German logistics in the west in the early months of the war. Despite operating next to Germany with access to dense road and rail networks, the German army’s logistics very nearly broke down completely in the first weeks of the war. There is no chance that a World War I–era army could maintain adequate stockpiles of ammunition and spare parts under the conditions of transatlantic amphibious assault. Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 122–288.
 123. General Board, “Proposed Problem for Spring Exercises, Atlantic Fleet,” 13 March 1915, General Board Subject File #434, RG 80, NARA I.
 124. [General Board], “Red Situation.”
 125. Siegfried Breyer, *Battleships and Battle Cruisers, 1905–1970*, trans. Alfred Kurti (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), p. 270.
 126. General Board, “Proposed Problem.”
 127. Instead, each fleet’s commander sent orders for its scouting line to the game’s chief umpire, Naval War College President Rear Adm. Austin Knight, who plotted the movements of the scouts using the rules of the College’s chart maneuvers. [General Board], “Blue Situation,” 23 April 1915, General Board Subject File #434, RG 80, NARA I.
 128. Various iterations of the BLACK war plan included German fleets staging from the Azores but, again, bound for the Caribbean. Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams*, p. 58.
 129. General Board, “Proposed Problem.”
 130. Capt. William Sims to Adm. Bradley Fiske, 5 May 1915, William Sowden Sims Papers, box 57, LoC.
 131. In late April and early May, the College ran a version of the game with Black restricted to a single destination, Salem, Massachusetts. In this scenario, the Blue commander was able to interpose his fleet between the invaders and the target, at which point the game was ended and adjudged in favor of Blue. [William S. Pye (Lt. Cdr., USN)], “Red Situation,” 13 April 1915; [Carl T. Vogelgesang (Cdr., USN)], “Special Strategic Situation for Fleet Maneuver,” 10 May 1915; both General Board Subject File #434, RG 80, NARA I.
 132. “More like Real War,” *Washington Post*, 24 April 1915, p. 2; “Ready for Manoeuvres,” *New York Times*, 12 May 1915, p. 22.
 133. “Wilson at Luncheon Champions Daniels,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1915, p. 5.
 134. Knight to Daniels, “Report on the Outcome of the Exercises.”
 135. *Ibid.* Knight cited the absence of Blue’s submarines as a reason for stopping the exercise before the engagement. Perhaps the artificiality of the situation was more to blame. Since the Red (German) battle fleet was essentially imaginary, a battle between Red and Blue

- would have been rather tricky to play out. The Red fleet's battle line was certainly stronger, but not so much that a simulated battle would not have been useful under ordinary circumstances. Sadly, Knight's short message to Daniels is the most complete description of the games.
136. Fletcher, "Annual Report, . . . 1915," p. 15.
 137. "Battle Cruisers Won for 'Invaders'"; "Victory to Fast Ships."
 138. "U.S. Fleet 'Crushed.'" The identity of the *Post's* "reliable authority" would be fascinating to discover. As we have seen, the exercise was designed to give the attacking fleet a tremendous advantage.
 139. "The Naval War Game," editorial, *The Navy*, June 1915, pp. 142–43.
 140. "An Argument for Battle Cruisers," *Scientific American*, 7 August 1915, reprinted in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (September–October 1915), pp. 1690–91.
 141. H. E. Yarnell [Lt. Cdr., USN], "Naval Tactics," 30 May 1915, box 107, RG 8, NHC.
 142. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, p. 161.
 143. "Fiske Says Navy Is Not Prepared to Guard Coast," *New York Times*, 4 June 1915, p. 1, William Sowden Sims Papers, box 57, LoC. The article consists almost entirely of a reprint of Fiske's speech.
 144. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral*, pp. 590–620.
 145. Doenecke, *Nothing Less*, pp. 109, 145.
 146. Wilson to Daniels, 21 July 1915, in *Woodrow Wilson Papers* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 1973), series 4, case file 21, reel 174.
 147. General Board Meeting, 27 July 1915, in *Proceedings and Hearings*, roll 3, pp. 199–200.
 148. General Board Meeting, 7 October 1915, in *Proceedings and Hearings*, roll 3, p. 295.
 149. General Board Meeting, 9 October 1915, in *Proceedings and Hearings*, roll 3, pp. 299–303. The final act passed by Congress in August 1916 compressed that program into three years. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, p. 228.
 150. "Report of the General Board," 9 November 1915, in *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1915*, p. 76.
 151. To put it into modern terms, Congress will, say, cut a shipbuilding request from three submarines to two but will not force the Navy to build diesel-electric submarines instead of nuclear-powered submarines.
 152. For example, Pedisich's account denies the Navy an active role in the process, as does Craig's. Kuehn notes that the General Board "supported" the 1916 bill but provides no further specifics and does not mention the exercise. A notable exception is Fiske's biographer, Coletta, who credits Fiske's post-aide work (but not the summer exercise) for helping to get the bill passed. Pedisich, *Congress Buys a Navy*, pp. 218–28; Craig, *Josephus Daniels*, pp. 305–25; Kuehn, *America's First General Staff*, pp. 105–106; Coletta, *Admiral Bradley A. Fiske*, pp. 179–80.
 153. "Millennium Challenge 02," *United States Joint Forces Command*, [Summer 2002], www.jfcom.mil/; Fred Kaplan, "War-Gamed," *Slate*, 28 March 2003, slate.com/.
 154. To give an example, the rules for College board games, at least as of 1911, gave battle cruisers the same number of "life points" as the more heavily armored predreadnought battleships, which may explain why many early USN battle cruiser enthusiasts envisioned them as part of the battle line. [Naval War College], "The Tactical Exercises," 1911 Conference, vol. 4, RG 12, NHC.
 155. John Lehman, *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: Norton, 2018), pp. 70–87, 273. That claim is, essentially, the main argument of the book.
 156. William H. J. Manthorpe Jr. [Capt., USN], "The Soviet Navy in 1975," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 102/5/879 (May 1976), pp. 206–207.
 157. Like Sims after World War I, Fiske greatly overestimated his own political importance and underestimated Daniels's political position and skills.
 158. Tellingly, the only member of the board to oppose the specific structure of the 1916 program was Daniels's handpicked Chief of Naval Operations, Benson. General Board Meeting, 27 July 1915.
 159. *Estimates Submitted by the Secretary of the Navy, 1917: Hearings before the H. Comm. on Naval Affairs*, 64th Cong. (1917) (statements

of Rear Adm. Charles J. Badger, Ret., and Rear Adm. F. F. Fletcher, members of the General Board of the Navy).

160. Cooling, "Fiske," p. 121.

161. Chisholm, *Dead Men's Shoes*, p. 469.

162. This behavior did not stop with Fiske's retirement. Shortly after the war, Sims, now in charge of USN forces in Europe, wrote that he would rather not see his wife than have her accept an offer to travel across the Atlantic with a Daniels-led delegation. William Sims

to William V. Pratt, 7 February 1919, box 16, folder 5, William Veazie Pratt Papers, NHC. In 1920, Sims publicly charged Daniels with mismanagement of the war, leading to a bruising set of Senate hearings. While Sims's charges reflected the views of many naval officers and some, most notably Dudley Knox, took his side, most senior naval officers refused to support such an obviously insubordinate maneuver. Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy*, pp. 440–60.