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HIGH SEAS, HIGH STAKES NAVAL BATTLES THAT CHANGED HISTORY

COURSE GUIDE



Professor Timothy B. Shutt
KENYON COLLEGE

High Seas, High Stakes: Naval Battles That Changed History

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High Seas, High Stakes:
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Professor Timothy B. Shutt



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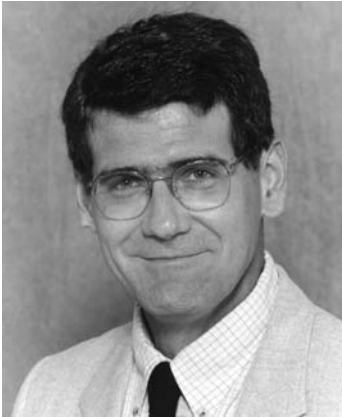
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About Your Professor

Timothy B. Shutt

For more than twenty years, Professor Timothy Baker Shutt has taught at Kenyon College, famed for splendid teaching, literary tradition, and unwavering commitment to the liberal arts. No teacher at Kenyon has ever been more often honored, both by the college and by students, for exceptional skills in the classroom and as a lecturer. Professor Shutt's courses in Kenyon's interdisciplinary Integrated Program of Humane Studies and, before that, in the Department of English, have always been heavily oversubscribed.

Shutt is a native of Ohio, raised in Michigan and schooled in Connecticut. During his high school years at the Hotchkiss School, he was honored as an All-American swimmer and devoted much of his time to drama. He majored in English as an undergraduate at Yale ('72). After three years at St. Mark's School of Texas, where he taught English and history and coached swimming, Shutt went on to graduate school in English, specializing in medieval literature and the history of ideas at the University of Virginia as a Du Pont Fellow. After earning his Ph.D. in 1984, Shutt spent two further years at Virginia as a Mellon Post-Doctoral Research Fellow and took a position at Kenyon in 1986, where he has taught happily ever since, deeply enjoying interaction with his students and the peaceful life of the Ohio countryside.

Shutt is a jovial extrovert and a polymath—a born teacher and lecturer—interested in nearly everything and everybody. In the Integrated Program in Humane Studies, he teaches literature, philosophy, history, art history, religious studies, and, at times, the history of science. He has written on military history, baseball, and birding in addition to his academic studies and gives regular talks at the Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon on migratory birds and on observational astronomy and the lore of the stars. He also works, when time permits, as a sports announcer for Kenyon football games, and for championship swimming meets nationwide, claiming longtime Detroit Tiger announcer Ernie Harwell as his inspiration. Shutt also travels regularly as a spokesperson for Kenyon, giving talks and lectures on behalf of the college from coast to coast. But his real vocation is reading and the classroom.



The Battle of Trafalgar, 1805
by William Turner, 1822

British Admiral Horatio Nelson's ship *Victory* is shown in battle with the pride of the French navy *Redoubtable*, the ship from which Admiral Nelson was shot and wounded.

Introduction

Naval battles have long captured the popular imagination, from confrontations between Athens and Sparta in the ancient world to the epic conflicts that took place during the World Wars and beyond. In this riveting series of lectures, Professor Timothy B. Shutt of Kenyon College explores the naval battles that have helped to establish empires and have changed history.

Throughout the course of world events, as trade and commerce grew in importance and nations became ever more dependent on the import and export of all manner of goods, control of the world's waterways and shipping lanes became a key determinant in which nations reigned supreme. As demonstrated so aptly in the World Wars, blockades at sea can strangle a nation as effectively as sieges laid against walled cities of old.

With studied insight into the events that have shaped the world over the millennia, Professor Shutt imparts an understanding and appreciation for the importance of naval warfare in world history—and of the grandeur and daring that define these awe-inspiring clashes.

Lecture 1: Salamis

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Barry Strauss's *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization*.



Ships are expensive, and warships are even more expensive. Ships are also very complicated—and warships, again, are even more complicated. In fact, in virtually all times and places where there were such things, warships have been the most expensive, the most complicated, and the most technologically advanced human artifacts in existence.

Even so, they are very much worth having, for in its own odd way naval warfare is curiously “clean” in comparison with other modes of fighting, despite its difficulty and despite its cost. A naval battle ordinarily imposes no, or almost no, civilian casualties, and the aftermath is nothing like the orgy of looting, mayhem, and rape that from the time of the *Iliad*, if not long before, characteristically followed a successful besiegement. Naval warfare, quite to the contrary, is the prototype mode of high-technology, relatively low-casualty warfare—of what has in latter days come to be termed the “American” way of war, firepower rather than foot-soldiers—and the antithesis of sloggling it out with vast levies of conscript peasant cannon-fodder. Better to spend money than to spend lives. Or so it has often seemed, at least to those who had the money to spend.

This, in its turn, reveals why only certain cultures have become naval powers. In the first case, naval powers need access to an ocean. But in the second, they need lots of money. These constraints, in turn, have given rise to a sort of characteristic profile for maritime powers. They ordinarily depend in large part on seaborne trade for their prosperity and, often enough, for a substantial portion of their very sustenance. And they tend, historically, to be relatively tolerant and relatively open, in both political and cultural terms—not necessarily democratic, but characteristically oligarchic, with a relatively diffused power base dominated by the merchants, traders, financiers, and those committed to maintaining the relative openness and freedom, and the ensuing sophistication and acumen, upon which their trade and prosperity depend. That is one reason why, as a rule, they would rather spend money than lives.

The Story Begins

Minoan Crete, which flourished in the mid-second millennium BCE and about which a good deal is known by virtue of archaeology and legend (and presumably a good deal more will be known should anyone succeed in deciphering the early Cretan “Linear A” script), seems to have fulfilled at least some of these criteria as a maritime, if not necessarily a naval, power. Tyre,

Sidon, and the Phoenicians, operating from what is now the Lebanese coast, fulfilled a good deal more of them, establishing trade routes throughout the Mediterranean and beyond early in the first millennium BCE, and founding their powerful and influential colony at Carthage in modern Tunisia, by tradition, about 800. And the Greek-speaking Ionian islanders in the Aegean, and Corinth, Aegina, and later Athens as well, followed in their turn.

Early in the fifth century BCE—the 400s—the leading powers on the Greek mainland were Sparta and Athens. Sparta, at the beginning of the period the most potent and respected *polis* in the Hellenic world, was a unique and formidable military oligarchy, with two more or less “constitutional” monarchs simultaneously enjoying real, though limited, powers. Athens, at that time, was the first real democracy on record. Across the Aegean, however, the Ionian Greeks, in and offshore of the western coast of modern Turkey, had fallen on difficult times. In previous generations they had dominated the Hellenic world, financially, culturally, and otherwise. But since the 540s they found themselves under Persian domination. The situation could have been worse. As ancient empires go, the Persians were relatively benign—the Hebrews, in fact, looked upon them as liberators. But even so, the Ionians were restive. And in 499 some among them mounted a revolt to which Athens, though not Sparta, was unwise enough to offer military aid, participating in an attack on the local Persian capital at Sardis. By 495 the forces of the Persian “Great King” Darius had succeeded in quelling the revolt, but the mainland Greeks had meanwhile forced themselves upon Darius’s attention, and he was not slow to act.

Most of the Greek *poleis*, or “city-states,” particularly those nearest the Persian frontiers and the anticipated Persian line of march, saw no choice but to submit to the juggernaut. Athens and Sparta, however, and with them Corinth and a few others, felt otherwise—Athens and Sparta in particular making their intentions unmistakable by killing the Persian envoys requesting “earth and water” in token of submission.

Persia Acts

The first effective Persian counter-strike came in 490, as Darius dispatched two sub-commanders on a cross-Aegean punitive mission against Athens and other lesser miscreants. The Persian troops landed at Marathon, twenty-odd miles from Athens, evidently hoping for a rising on their behalf from disaffected factions in Athens herself. The size of the Persian force is disputed—twenty to thirty thousand would be a mid-range guess. That of the Athenians—and a few allies from nearby Plataea—half that or less. But outnumbered or no, the Athenians won a striking, breathtaking victory. The Spartans, who arrived in support when the battle was over, were, so we are told, duly impressed.

But the Persians would return, and this time in numbers sufficient to finish the matter once and for all. In the meantime, Darius died and his son Xerxes ascended the throne. And after attending to various rebellious subjects in Egypt and elsewhere, he gathered forces for his great attempt on Greece. How large those forces were is, again, a matter of dispute. Our major ancient source, Herodotus, numbers them in the millions, though most contemporary

scholars reduce those figures by an order of magnitude or more. Even so, the forces of Xerxes vastly outnumbered those of the unstable coalition of city-states opposing him, led once again by Athens and Sparta.

And Xerxes' advantage was likewise overpowering at sea. Herodotus credits him with more than a thousand warships, and thousands more transports and cargo ships in support to feed and equip the Persian host. The Persians themselves were not seafarers, but they had conquered not only Ionia, but Phoenicia and Egypt as well, and the Ionians and Phoenicians in particular were very fine sailors. It was they who manned and in large part provided the Persian ships.

By 480 Xerxes was ready to mount his assault, crossing the Hellespont on newly constructed pontoon bridges and slowly making his way into Greece in a combined-arm land and sea thrust down the eastern coast of the Greek mainland. The Greek allies, meanwhile, met at the Isthmus of Corinth to discuss how to respond. Most of those choosing to resist, Corinth and Sparta prominent among them, resided on the far side of the Isthmus in the Peloponnese, and one obvious potential response was to fortify the narrow isthmus itself. This, however, would leave Athens and Attica, among others, in the lurch, and the assembly accordingly decided first to attempt a defense in depth. A first hope was to make a stand at the Vale of Tempe in the far north, near Mt. Olympus, but reconnaissance revealed that the position could be turned, so the Greeks decided to make a first stand farther south where they could at least fight a delaying action. The positions they chose for their own combined land and sea operations were the mountainous seaside pass at Thermopylae, at that time mere yards across at its narrowest point, and, for the naval forces, Artemesium, at the northernmost cape of the long offshore island of Euboea, along which the Persian ships would have to pass on their way southeast. Even so, the odds didn't look good and would have looked still worse but for the efforts of the Athenian leader, Themistocles, one of the most daring and able—and, when the occasion called, unscrupulous—political leaders on record.

Enter Themistocles

In the years immediately after Marathon, Themistocles had come into prominence and had in the meantime persuaded his fellow citizens to devote the proceeds of a windfall strike in the state silver mines not to a citizen-by-citizen payout, as would have been usual, but instead to building and equipping a fleet, putatively to answer the fleet of nearby trading rival Aegina, but in fact to counter the fleet of Persia should the Persians decide to come again. By 490 the fleet was ready, and well so, since the highly influential—and at this point highly pessimistic—Delphic Oracle had prophesied that Athens would be saved, if at all, by “wooden walls”—according to Themistocles, those of the new ships.

At this point, though, the Greeks needed more help even than that. The Oracle advised praying to the winds. And the winds answered. This was particularly helpful because ancient ships, warships in particular, were spectacularly unseaworthy in heavy weather. During the Persian wars, the standard ship on both sides was the trireme, a long, narrow galley, featuring three banks of rowers on each side, and a bronze-sheathed ram in front. The

complement was about one hundred seventy rowers and about thirty marines. If you were skilled enough, you could fight by ramming. If not—or indeed, in any case—the marines could shoot and board. The advantage of such craft was maneuverability. They were not dependent on the wind and could move in any direction (they carried a sail for long-distance cruising, but the sail was not used in battle). The disadvantages were an almost total lack of storage space—such ships had to beach each night if the crew was to eat and to sleep—and instability in all but favorable weather. It was dangerous, in such top-heavy and long and narrow craft, to venture far from shore, and naval sailors seldom did.

The problem faced by the huge Persian fleet outside of Artemesium was a lack of anchorage and beaching room. The coast to the north is sheer and rocky, and when the winds came up hard, it was a disaster for the Persians driven onto the coast. The Greeks, meanwhile, lay in or near more sheltered waters on the inshore side of Euboea. The winds proved even more helpful to the Greeks when Xerxes detached a portion of his fleet to sail around the offshore side of Euboea and then up the inside channel to surprise the Greeks from the rear. Those ships too were wrecked by storms.

So by the time the Greeks and Persians met in battle at Artemesium, the weather had done much to even the odds, and the Greeks were able effectively to hold the Persians to a draw.

Things did not go so well inland at Thermopylae. King Leonidas of Sparta led a legendary heroic defense, sending away most of his small force after their position was at last turned, and staying himself to fight and die as a rear guard with contingents from Thebes and Thespia and his own three hundred Spartans.

As Xerxes advanced toward Attica, the Greek fleet retired to Salamis, just offshore from Athens herself, to regroup and help the Athenians to evacuate, both to Salamis and beyond, as the Persian forces bore down on them. Here, however, a problem arose—what to do next. In overall command of the Greek coalition forces was Eurybiades of Sparta, and he, and the Peloponnesians generally, seem to have favored a defense at the isthmus. Xerxes meanwhile sacked Athens, and the argument was that there was in Attica nothing left to defend. Themistocles and Athens, however, represented by far the largest fleet, and if the allies would not fight at Salamis, Themistocles threatened to embark the Athenians, men, women, and children, and sail off to the west, to Sicily perhaps, and found a new Athens. To encourage matters further, he supposedly sent a messenger to the Persians claiming that the Greeks were about to disembark, and if Xerxes wanted to catch them at a disadvantage in the Salamis roadstead, he had best act quickly. Xerxes did—and took the bait.

As Themistocles realized, it was to the Greeks' advantage to fight in narrow waters off Salamis rather than in the open sea, off the isthmus or elsewhere. First, once out in open water, the temptation would be "*sauve qui peut*"—each contingent for itself. Second, the Ionians and Phoenicians in the Persian fleet may or may not have matched the coalition in morale, but they were at least their equals in expertise and experience. The Phoenicians, indeed, had more or less invented long-range, deep-water sailing. The less maneuvering

room they had, the better for their opponents. And third, the Persian forces still outnumbered the Greeks, despite weather losses. The narrower the passage, the fewer that could effectively fight at once.

For all these reasons Themistocles thought it better to fight where the Greeks stood and took steps to ensure that his wishes prevailed in spite of dissent. As the decisive September day dawned, the Persians were already in the channel, having spent an uncomfortable night aboard to prevent a Greek escape. The Egyptian squadron, indeed, had embarked earlier to sail around the island of Salamis and take the Greeks in the rear—and to block the west channel should they attempt to escape in that direction.

To draw them further in—and into even narrower waters—the Corinthian commander Adeimantus and his contingent seem to have raised their sails and feigned flight toward the isthmus and the west. (The Athenians claimed they were in earnest, but the rest of the Greeks seem to have regarded this as a baseless slander.) The Corinthians returned, the other allies engaged—and by day's end the Persians were defeated. Greek losses seem to have totaled about forty ships; Persian more like two hundred, out of a total of roughly three hundred engaged on the Greek side and three hundred fifty on the Persian.

The next day the Greeks waited for a renewed Persian assault. Taking the detached Egyptians into account, the Persians still held numerical parity, if not, indeed, still an advantage. But Xerxes had had enough, and leaving his experienced cousin Mardonius to command an occupation force, he departed with the body of the fleet for home. And the next year, at Plataia, a Spartan-dominated combined Greek force under the leadership of the Spartan regent Pausanias defeated Mardonius and put an end to the Persian incursion.

The decisive battle, though, was Salamis, and over the course of the following century Greece, and Athens in particular, enjoyed the fruits of a cultural golden age the likes of which the world had never seen before, and perhaps has never seen since—in many respects the foundation of what we think of still as Western culture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why have only certain cultures become naval powers?
2. Why was it to the Greeks' advantage to fight in the narrow waters off Salamis?

Suggested Reading

Strauss, Barry. *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Other Books of Interest

Burn, Andrew Robert. *Persia and the Greeks: The Defense of the West, 546–478 B.C.* New York: St. Martin's, 1968.

Casson, Lionel. *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

De Souza, Philip. *The Greek and Persian Wars 499–386 BC*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Green, Peter. *The Greco-Persian Wars*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Herodotus. *Herodotus*. 4 vols. Trans. A.D. Godley. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. *The Histories*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Starr, Chester G. *The Influence of Sea Power on Ancient History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Lecture 2: Arginusae

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Philip de Souza's *The Greek and Persian Wars 499–386 BC*.



During her fifth-century heyday, Athens became in many respects a prototypical naval power. After the conclusion of the Persian wars in 479, Sparta was soon enough happy to revert to her traditional insularity.

Athens, however, was eager to continue the contest, and very shortly after the Persians departed the Greek mainland,

Athens took the lead in founding the Delian League, not only to defend against any further Persian aggression, but, if possible, to turn the tide and to free from Persian overlordship various Ionian and Anatolian regions still under Persian control. The putative headquarters and treasury of the League were to be found on the small Aegean island of Delos, sacred to Apollo, but from the outset Athens dominated, and over time the Delian League was gradually transformed into a more or less straightforward Athenian Empire, to which allied or subject states contributed money to buy the protection of Athenian ships—or whatever else it might be that the Athenians wanted or felt they were owed. After 454, when the League treasury was moved to Athens “for safety,” Athens began a lavish civic building program, including the Parthenon, funded in part by League monies. That is not to say, though, that the Athenians gave short shrift to naval affairs. In 465, under the leadership of Cimon, the son of the Miltiades who had been the dominant Athenian commander at Marathon, the Athenians won a smashing victory against the Persians at the river Eurymedon in southern Anatolia, and during the 450s Athens sent off a fleet of 250 ships, ultimately lost, in support of an anti-Persian rebellion in Egypt. The Athenians’ aggressiveness, however, and their ever-more-clear focus on their own interests and ambitions, did not pass either unnoticed or unresented.

Inevitable War

As Thucydides puts the matter in the first book of his great history of the ensuing conflict, which broke out in earnest in 431, the “growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta,” and elsewhere, “made war inevitable” (1.23.6). It was, though, at least early on, a rather curious sort of conflict—a “contest,” as Chester Starr puts it, between “the elephant and the whale.” Sparta still had her matchless, heavy-armored hoplite infantry, an all-citizen *corps d’elite*—selected from birth, trained since childhood, and focused upon war, obedience, and unswerving courage, and very little else. The Spartan underclass, or Helots (many descendants of nearby peoples conquered by Sparta generations before), meanwhile, worked in sub-

jection to support the Spartan elite in their unremitting devotion to the military arts. And the Athenians had their fleet, funded in large part by their subjects or allies, but manned, by and large, by the same proud, free Athenian citizens who dominated the lawcourts and the assembly. For as time passed, fewer and fewer members of the Delian League contributed ships in their own right—or were allowed to do so. The result was that over time and by sheer practice the Athenians came to dominate on the seas almost as thoroughly in skill as they did in numbers.

During the first few years of the long and costly Peloponnesian War—it lasted, on and off, from 431 to 404—neither side made very much headway. Every campaigning season, early on, the Spartans ravaged the countryside of Attica. But safe behind the walls that enclosed both Athens and the Piraeus, Athens's port and gateway to the sea, the Athenians could afford to sit tight. As long as the sea routes lay in their command, particularly the all-important grain route through the Hellespont to the Black Sea, Athens could feed herself and maintain her empire. She could not—and would not, despite provocation—take on the crack Spartan hoplites. But neither could the land-bound Spartans easily threaten Athens's maritime lifelines.

By 421 Athens and Sparta had more or less fought each other out and concluded the so-called "Peace of Nicias," supposed to last for fifty years. In the end it lasted nowhere near that, and within three years the Athenians were working, semi-covertly, against Spartan interests in the Peloponnese, and shortly thereafter, in 415, they chose to widen the conflict, detaching a vast expeditionary force in hopes of taking Syracuse in Sicily. This was a staggering undertaking in view of Athens's other commitments. Syracuse was the foremost Greek power in the region, roughly as populous and as prosperous as Athens herself. At the outset, despite the odds, it looked as if the Athenians might pull it off and fulfill her ambitions, but in the end, in 413, the expedition failed and Athens lost all the ships and troops she had devoted to the project.

Alcibiades

The charismatic and aristocratic young Alcibiades, a one-time associate of Socrates himself, and a very able military commander, had backed the expedition against Syracuse with all the persuasive skills at his disposal, and had been named one of its commanders. But under suspicion, among other offenses, of blasphemously parodying the sacred rites at Eleusis, he was recalled to Athens by his enemies on capital charges and promptly defected to Sparta, where, having taken a leading part in making the plans for invading Sicily, he knew better than anyone how to thwart them. The Spartans took his advice at least to the extent of dispatching to Syracuse the general Gylippus, who in the end proved victorious.

At this point the affairs of Athens stood in a very perilous pass. But then, having worn out his welcome in Sparta (not least by reportedly seducing the wife of one of the Spartan kings), and then having defected again to work with the local Persian governors or "satraps" in the area (whom he advised to do what they could to ensure that the Athenians and Spartans fought each other to a standstill)—Alcibiades emerged once again as an Athenian leader,

taking over the Athenian fleet at the eastern Aegean island of Samos. There, astonishingly enough, he and his associates all but miraculously began to turn back the Spartan tide.

Athens won the battle of Cynossema in the Hellespont in 411, and won a tactically dazzling victory the next year in 410 at Cyzicus in the Propontis, the small sea between the Hellespont and the Bosphorus and the Black Sea beyond, prompting on the part of Hippocrates, successor to the slain Spartan commander Mindarus, in his report back to Sparta, one of the most famous “Laconic” messages on record, translated from Xenophon by Rex Warner as follows: “Ships lost. Mindarus dead. Men starving. Don’t know what to do” (1.1.23).

Lysander

The Spartans sued for peace, but Athens was having none of it. Meanwhile, the Spartans continued to build ships to replace those lost and called out a new “*navarch*,” or naval commander. Lysander was what the Spartans called a “*mothax*,” by birth, if not by training, something less than a full Spartan, but he had been the lover of a Spartan prince, and was, as events would shortly reveal, a man of rare ambition and ability. On coming out to Ionia he moved the main Spartan base in the region to the city of Ephesus, north, and hence closer to the Hellespont, than the Athenian base at Samos. And he began to cultivate the new Persian governor in the region, the young Persian prince, Cyrus, still in his teens. Persian resources were, by Greek standards, more or less unlimited, and with Persian support the Spartans, unlike the Athenians, soon had the wherewithal to build and man whatever ships they needed, and all the more so after Lysander persuaded Cyrus to provide the money for Lysander to pay trained rowers a third more than Athens could offer. While the Athenians were more or less dock-bound for financial reasons, doing their best to raise money—in large part by shaking down their allies—Lysander devoted a lot of time and energy to training. The balance of power began to shift, even at sea, where Athens had previously reigned supreme.

The Athenians remained confident, however, under the leadership of Alcibiades, who moved much of the Athenian fleet to Notium, just north of Ephesus, to keep an eye on Lysander, and in hopes of luring him out to fight. At first Lysander would not be drawn, and Alcibiades, who had other business to attend to, financial and otherwise, at length departed, leaving his fleet under the immediate command of Antiochus, his own helmsman, as opposed to one of the subsidiary commanders. He left Antiochus with a single order: “Don’t attack Lysander on your own.” But that was just what Antiochus did, sailing a small force close to Lysander in hopes of luring him into a trap, and then losing more than twenty ships when Lysander took the bait. Antiochus himself was killed at Notium, but it was the end for Alcibiades too, who, understandably enough, had plenty of enemies eager to relieve him of command at the first sign of failure. Alcibiades departed, having antagonized Athens, Persia, and Sparta alike, to his private holdings near the Hellespont, and his able lieutenants, Thrasybulus and Theramenes, were not reelected to generalship either.

Callicratidas

Sparta too had a new naval commander. By Spartan law a person could serve as *navarch* for only a single year, and Lysander's year was up. In his place came the young and appealing figure of Callicratidas, according to Diodorus, remarkably straightforward in character and the "justest of the Spartans" (13.76.2). Out of rivalry with Callicratidas, Lysander refused to turn over to him the remaining monies he had been granted by Cyrus, and Callicratidas, more or less deliberately insulted by Cyrus, found begging Persian money not much to his taste. "It was a sad day for the Greeks," or so he said according to Xenophon, "when they had to make up to foreigners for the sake of money," and he claimed that if he survived his assignment "he would do his best to make peace between Athens and Sparta" (1.6.7). He would never get the chance.

Commanding for Athens at this point was Conon, with about seventy ships at his disposal. Callicratidas, with one hundred seventy ships at his command, managed to box him in the harbor at Mytilene on the Aegean island of Lesbos, taking thirty of Conon's seventy ships in the process. Conon was able, even so, to send off a ship to let the Athenians know of his difficulties. But Athens too was in dire straits, with only forty ships on hand, very little money, and very few experienced rowers available. By means of heroic and unprecedented efforts, they managed to come up with another seventy triremes and went to the length of freeing and enrolling as citizens untrained slaves to help man them. Athenian allies provided another forty-five ships, so by July, when they sailed to Samos, the Athenians had managed to come up with a relief force of some one hundred fifty-five ships for the eight generals whom they elected to command them.

Callicratidas kept fifty ships at Mytilene to keep an eye on Conon and departed to meet the relief fleet, which he did off the tiny Arginusae Islands, just across the channel from Lesbos, and less than twenty miles from Mytilene itself.

At no other battle during the Peloponnesian War did the Spartans enjoy such superiority in naval training and tactics. In the past it had been Athens who easily dominated at sea, but Callicratidas had trained rowers and lots of them, and the Athenian fleet was filled with novices. The Athenians accordingly lined up in unprecedented fashion, with their center just offshore of the seawardmost Arginusae Islands, with both the left and right wing doubled, two ships deep. The Spartans, as was customary, attacked in a single line. The reason for the unusual Athenian deployment was to render difficult, if not impossible, the sort of maneuvering tactics that they themselves had customarily employed during their days of naval superiority. The so-called "*periplous*" involved rowing past an enemy, then to turn and ram them in the side or rear; the "*diekplous*" involved rowing between two ships, there to turn aside to take one of them abreast. Both maneuvers were very dangerous with another ship still ahead, ready to move in once one exposed a flank. Hence the Athenian double lines.

The Athenians outnumbered the Spartans one hundred fifty-five to one hundred twenty, and even doubled up, the Athenian lines were longer, and all the more so as the Athenians spread out, the ensuing gap covered by the ships behind. Callicratidas was forced to answer the flank attacks, being driven into the center, and ultimately the relatively fresh Athenian center engaged as well. Callicratidas was killed, the Spartan lines broke, and the Spartans lost seventy-seven ships to the Athenians' twenty-five. A stunning and city-saving victory for Athens. Or so one would think. But things didn't turn out that way.

The End of an Era

After the battle, two-thirds of the remaining Athenian fleet sailed off to Mytilene, hoping to take care of the Spartans remaining there, leaving forty-seven ships, under Theramenes and Thrasylbulus, behind to pick up survivors. A storm blew up, however, and neither group completed its mission. The remaining Spartans escaped, and most of the survivors simply drowned.

Which is where the tale becomes truly astonishing. For the Athenian assembly saw fit not only to try the victorious generals, but to execute those among them—six out of eight—foolish enough to return home on the charge of failing to rescue the survivors, storm or no storm. This course of action, as might be imagined, left a kind of leadership vacuum at the top of the Athenian naval hierarchy, and did little, one might presume, to encourage initiative on the part of those remaining.

The next year, in 405, Lysander returned to command as, technically, the secretary to the new navarch Aracus. Within the year, he caught the Athenian fleet on the beach at Aegospotami in the Hellespont and destroyed it, with only Conon's small detachment escaping. (Alcibiades, who lived nearby, had suggested to the Athenians that they might consider moving their anchorage, but they paid him no heed.) The war was effectively over, and though the Spartans refused their more vengeful allies' demand that Athens be treated as she had treated some of her rebellious subjects—the men executed and the women and children sold *en masse* into slavery—the greatest days of Athens, and some would argue, of ancient Greece, were over.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. How did Alcibiades help to thwart the Athenians' attempt to take Syracuse?
2. What maneuvers are described by *periplous* and *diekplous*?

Suggested Reading

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Lecture 3: Ecnomus

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Nigel Bagnall's *The Punic Wars: Rome, Carthage, and the Struggle for the Mediterranean*.



According to tradition, Rome expelled the last of her kings in 509 BCE—by coincidence within a year or so of the time when the reforms of Clisthenes initiated democracy or something like it in Athens. But it was a long time before Rome attained anything like the influence and power of Athens in her heyday. By the 270s, though, Rome had expanded to control effectively all of central Italy south of mid-Tuscany and the Po Valley, forging in the process a web of allied and federated states that was to prove, under pressure, very durable indeed. One of the sources of Roman strength was the Romans' unusual willingness to assimilate those they had conquered, to make of them effective sharers in the Roman polity—and ultimately even Roman citizens. Roman allies and federates were thus much more closely and willingly connected to Rome than the members of the Delian League had ever been connected to Athens. One result was vastly to increase the resources available to the Romans, financial, military, and otherwise, and to give to Rome a resilience in the face of adversity. The Romans just didn't give up and were willing to sustain costs and casualties in pursuit of their ends with a grim fortitude that made them masters of the Mediterranean world and beyond for half a millennium and more.

The process began in earnest in 264 with the beginning of the First Punic War, which ended at last with victory for Rome twenty-three years—and hundreds of thousands of casualties—later in 241. Even then the matter wasn't entirely settled. The Second Punic War, from 218 to 202, the war against Hannibal, was very nearly as costly,



A *corvus* on the Roman ship in the foreground with Roman Marines lined up prepared to use it (highlighted), attacks a Carthaginian ship during the Punic Wars.

and it took a Third Punic War, from 149 to 146, before Rome's rival Carthage was finally subdued once and for all.

Rome and Carthage

Carthage was originally a Phoenician colony, the city itself very near modern Tunis in North Africa, and from the outset it was a maritime trading power. The Phoenicians, as even the Greeks freely conceded, were the most skilled mariners of the ancient world, and the Carthaginians established trading colonies all over the Western Mediterranean and, indeed, beyond, willing and able to venture beyond Gibraltar and the Pillars of Hercules into the open Atlantic, down the African coast and as far north as Britain. They were especially dominant along the North African coast, in coastal Spain, and in western Sicily, and it was with regard to Sicily that they and the Romans first came into conflict.

Like the Phoenicians themselves, the Carthaginians spoke a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, and unlike the Romans, they made no attempt to assimilate or to naturalize those whom they dominated. Their empire was based upon trade and tribute and wealth, and by preference, when they could, they relied on mercenaries for military service.

The dispute that brought the Romans and Carthaginians into conflict involved who was to dominate the area around the straits of Messina between Sicily and the Italian mainland. Not long after the Romans detached their first overseas expeditionary force to Sicily, in ships evidently provided by maritime Greek allies in southern Italy, it became apparent to the Romans that if they wanted to take on Carthage, they would have to take Carthage on at sea. This was an immensely daunting challenge. It is not, strictly speaking, true that the Romans had no naval tradition whatsoever, but their experience of such matters was slight, and the Carthaginians had been sailing for centuries. Nonetheless, fighting Carthage required a navy, and a navy was what the Romans determined to have.

Step one was to procure ships. This was a problem, because the Romans didn't know how to build them. Fortunately for them, however, early in the conflict a Carthaginian quinquireme had run aground, and Romans used that as a model. Quinquiremes had succeeded triremes as the naval weapon of choice in the century or so between the Peloponnesian War and the conflict between Rome and Carthage, and they, like triremes, were military galleys, bigger and more powerful than triremes, but designed for the same sort of ramming and boarding tactics. Triremes had three banks of oars, one rower to each oar. Quinquiremes, according to the best modern guess, had either two or three banks of oars, but with at least some manned by more than one rower, most plausibly three on one oar and two on the other with a corresponding increase in thrust and power. In any case, if in the mid-third century you wanted to compete at sea, quinquiremes were what you needed, and quinquiremes were what the Romans built.

They still had to man them, though, and this posed other problems. Not only were they lacking skilled rowers, but they also, at least initially, lacked any ships to practice on. But according to Polybius, our major source on the First Punic War, the Romans were equal to this challenge. They arranged seats

on land in the appropriate pattern and practiced there until the ships were ready, and then sent them off to sea for in-the-water trials.

A Helpful Raven

It is astonishing that in view of their clearly *ad hoc* and rushed preparations, when the Romans finally felt able to take on the Carthaginians at sea, they all but immediately proved victorious. Their crews and skills were very much inferior, their ships probably inferior too. How then did they achieve victory? The answer is, a secret weapon, one of the most bizarre on record: The raven, or *corvus*, was a long gangplank mounted on a swivel in the bow of the Roman galleys, equipped with a spike on the business end so that when it was swiveled into position and dropped onto an opposing galley, it would catch and allow the very able Roman marines to board and fight what would then be a more or less regular infantry battle, at which the Romans excelled.

It was first used in action at the battle of Mylae in 260, off the north coast of Sicily just west of the Straits of Messina. Hannibal, the Carthaginian commander (not the famous victor of Cannae, but another Hannibal) led his ships straight at the Romans, by all reports, and with seemingly good reason, not taking them very seriously as opponents. They weren't sure, though, what to make of the strange contraptions looming over the bows of the Roman ships. Soon enough, however, they found out, and lost forty-odd ships and about ten thousand marines and rowers.

Thus encouraged, the Romans became more ambitious and built more ships. By 256 they were ready to launch a vast expeditionary force not across the narrow Straits of Messina but all the way across the Mediterranean to Carthage herself. According to Polybius, the Roman fleet included some 330 warships and assorted transports and horse transports beyond that, involving the staggering total of about 140,000 men. Opposing them after embarking from the Carthaginian base at Lilybaeum in far western Sicily was a Carthaginian fleet of 350 ships and roughly 150,000 men. The ensuing battle near Ecnomus, off the southern Sicilian coast, was accordingly the biggest naval battle fought in antiquity—and perhaps the biggest ever.

Roman Triumph

The Romans, under the leadership of Atilius Regulus and Manlius Vulso, advanced westward with their warships divided into four squadrons, the first two forming a “Vee” formation, with the third, towing the transports, completing the triangle behind them, and the fourth squadron in line behind that. The Carthaginians, under Hamilcar and Hanno, were likewise formed into four squadrons, in their case advancing eastward, squadrons one through three line abreast, the fourth squadron angled close to the shore, more or less facing the Roman right. The center two Carthaginian squadrons initiated the action by feigning flight, drawing the leading Roman “Vee” after them—and away from the Roman third and fourth squadrons. The two Carthaginian squadrons on the flanks then turned to the attack, the shoreside Carthaginian squadron attacking the Roman third—who promptly cut their transports adrift to meet the threat, and the seaside Carthaginian squadron attacking the Roman fourth in the rear. Meanwhile, the two central Carthaginian squadrons ceased their retreat and went into attack

against the now isolated Roman leading “Vee.” The Romans, however, still had their “crows,” and the leading Roman squadrons at length put their Carthaginian foes to flight, and then turned to bail out the beleaguered third and fourth squadrons. In the end the Romans triumphed, losing twenty-four ships or thereabouts, while the Carthaginians lost thirty with another sixty or more captured.

And indeed, the Romans went on to invade Africa, though not, in the end, very successfully, and in the very long run, fifteen years later, ultimately won the war, losing only a single naval battle in the meantime.

Though the Romans proved themselves to be ingenious, determined, and effective sea-fighters, they proved far less effective in seamanship, and suffered on three separate occasions staggering losses due to shipwreck and storm. Quinquiremes and triremes alike were notoriously unseaworthy in heavy weather, top-heavy, long and narrow, and overmanned. And mounting a “*corvus*” on the bow made them even more top-heavy. Beyond that, according to Polybius, the very cast of character that made the Romans so formidable on the battlefield tended to work against them at sea. Being dauntless and determined, never giving in no matter what, was simply not an effective strategy in dealing with adverse weather, particularly with limited skills at sea. Weather-wise pilots were not the sort of people Roman commanders were accustomed to listen to, especially if they counseled what looked like cowardice or backing down. But the winds are not easy to bully or intimidate. And each time the Romans contested them, they lost, and lost big.

Off Camarina, in southern Sicily, the Romans lost 284 out of 364 ships in 255, the year after their victory at Ecnomus. Slow learners, in this regard at least, they lost another 150 two years later off Cape Palinurus, taking a short-cut home. And finally, in 249, once again off Camarina, the Romans lost yet another fleet, with purportedly only two of two hundred or so surviving. The casualty figures here are what really stagger belief, and all the more so if indeed, at the time of the First Punic War, as J.F. Lazenby suggests, the total population of the regions under Roman domination was about three million. For in the first disaster off Camarina, they lost nearly 120,000 men, with corresponding losses in the later disasters. The equivalent figure for the contemporary United States would be a loss of twelve million—and then five million, and then seven or so. Casualties—not deaths, but casualties—for *all* American wars are about two and one-half million. The Romans sustained, from weather alone within six years, losses at least ten times greater. And kept on fighting. As much as any other factor, that steadfast doggedness was why the Romans finally prevailed.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What brought the Romans and Carthaginians into conflict?
2. How did the raven help the Romans gain naval superiority?

Suggested Reading

Bagnall, Nigel. *The Punic Wars: Rome, Carthage, and the Struggle for the Mediterranean*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005.

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Lecture 4: Actium

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Chester G. Starr's *A History of the Ancient World*.



Shakespeare wrote of the battle of Actium in *Antony and Cleopatra*—this was the battle in which, on September 2, 31 BCE, Agrippa and Octavian, soon enough to be Caesar Augustus, defeated Antony and established what we now know as the Roman Empire. The dissolution of the preceding Roman Republic, however, was a protracted and painful

process—no one fought so effectively against Romans as Romans—and had begun in earnest a century and more before with the attempted land reforms and subsequent assassination of the Roman aristocrat Tiberius Gracchus in 133 BCE and the subsequent killing of his brother, Gaius Gracchus, who attempted to continue to implement his elder brother's program in 121.

The Gracchi were indeed high aristocrats, despite their populist leanings—their grandfather was at least arguably the greatest Roman of them all, the humane, Hellenophile, and immensely talented Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Hannibal. But the turmoil resulting from their careers initiated a century in which the Roman Senate essentially destroyed itself from within, prompting a series of costly civil wars that destroyed the Republic.

The next round involved the careers of the gifted military commander and “new man,” Gaius Marius, and his early lieutenant and later rival, the fascinating, impoverished, but immensely ruthless and able aristocrat, L. Cornelius Sulla, who ultimately became dictator—the term itself is Roman—

Enobarbus. Naught, naught, all naught! I can behold no longer.

The *Antoniad*, the Egyptian admiral,
With all their sixty, fly and turn the rudder:
To see't mine eyes are blasted.

Scarus. The greater cantle of the world is lost
With very ignorance; we have kissed away
Kingdoms and provinces.

Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt—
—whom leprosy o'ertake!—I' th' midst o' th' fight
Hoists sails, and flies.

She once being loofed,
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
Claps on his sea wing, and (like a doting mallard)
Leaving the flight in height, flies after her.
I never saw an action of such shame;
Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before
Did violate so itself.

~Shakespeare,
Antony and Cleopatra 3.10

and then, his bloody and self-appointed task of what he took as reform completed, resigned.

The First Triumvirate

Then came the so-called “First Triumvirate”: Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Crassus, all in their differing ways very able and forceful men. Crassus, in many respects the least appealing of the three, by preference worked behind the scenes, a task in which he was greatly aided by his status as the richest man in Rome. At last, though, he came to aspire to military glory greater than that he had already gained, evidently hoping to match the achievements of his rivals Caesar and Pompey, and got himself killed fighting the formidable mounted archers of Parthia, effectively modern Persia, at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE.

Pompey the Great is in many ways a more engaging figure. His career began very young, and from the very outset he showed abilities of a very high order, among other achievements clearing the Mediterranean of pirates (and humanely resettling a good many of them) and bringing within the Roman orbit Syria and Palestine.

But the most impressive of the three was, of course, Gaius Julius Caesar, yet another relatively impoverished aristocrat, whose signature achievement was the conquest of Gaul, effectively the northern two-thirds or so of modern France and Belgium. This marked the first substantial incursion of Roman power beyond the Mediterranean orbit, and was rich with unforeseen implications for the distant future. For it was in Gaul, or more properly, in France, where Roman and Germanic influences ultimately cross-fertilized and intermingled, that what we think of as medieval, and accordingly, in many respects, the beginnings of modern Western culture were born.

Caesar and Pompey, of course, eventually came into conflict after the death of Crassus, and while Pompey was a brilliant commander, Caesar was more brilliant still, and despite being outnumbered—and roundly hated by many members of the Roman aristocracy—it was Caesar who triumphed at the battle of Pharsalus in northern Greece in August, 48 BCE. Caesar then established himself as dictator for ten years in 46, and then for life in 44, planning a whole series of sensible reforms, and planning, meanwhile, to avenge the death of Crassus in Parthia. All of this, however, was more than the Roman aristocracy could swallow, and on the Ides of March, March 15, 44 BCE, Caesar was assassinated.

Their hope was to reestablish the Republic and of course their own dominance, but that is not what happened. What happened instead was the establishment of a “Second Triumvirate,” consisting of one of Caesar’s major lieutenants, Mark Antony; of a relatively ineffectual aristocrat named Lepidus; and of Caesar’s surprise heir, his great-nephew and, so it was discovered in his will, his adoptive son, Octavian. Then only eighteen years old, Octavian was sickly and, at least seemingly, unprepossessing and unwarlike to boot. At first the established grandees wrote off the young Octavian as a nonentity. But Caesar’s insight, unsurprisingly, was much sharper than theirs. Octavian turned out to be one of the most capable politicians who has ever lived.

Octavian, Mark Antony, and Cleopatra

In 42 BCE Octavian and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, leaders in the assassination of Caesar, and their followers at the battle of Philippi in Macedonia, the experienced and capable Antony taking the lead in the actual fighting. They thereupon split up the empire between them, Lepidus gradually fading from the picture until the division became, in effect, the still-young Octavian in Italy and in the West, and Antony in the more prosperous East.

Octavian knew how to delegate, and both at this point and later he was particularly well served by M. Vipsanius Agrippa, Octavian's military leader on land and sea alike. Antony, meanwhile, had found other matters to engage his attention, not least among them the famed Cleopatra. In hopes of encouraging unity, Antony had previously married Octavian's older sister Octavia, but Cleopatra at last proved too alluring to resist, and in 34 Antony made her "Queen of Kings" and in effect co-ruler of the East.

Cleopatra has proved a fascinating figure, but though she was indeed ruler of Egypt, she was not ethnically Egyptian. She was a Macedonian Greek, the descendant of Alexander the Great's general Ptolemy, who at Alexander's death three hundred years before had established a dynasty in Egypt centered upon the then-new city of Alexandria, which quickly became an intellectual capital of the ancient world. Cleopatra was also a woman of surpassing, ruthless intelligence who came very close indeed to dominating the Roman world.

Octavian was aware of the threat that she posed very quickly, and mounted a devastatingly effective propaganda campaign against her, the effects of which echo to this day—not least in the passages from Shakespeare at the beginning of this lecture. The Octavian line was that Cleopatra was an unscrupulous, wily seductress, bent on ensnaring plain, bluff Roman virtue with her feminine, Eastern wiles. The very soul of Rome was at stake in resisting her and all that she represented.

Octavian's task became all the easier when Antony at last divorced Octavia. Octavian then confiscated and publicized Antony's will, deposited with the Vestal Virgins in Rome, which among other provisions recognized as the legitimate son of Caesar and Cleopatra the result of an earlier dalliance, Caesarion—hence threatening the position of the adoptive son Octavian himself—and including handsome bequests of various Roman possessions to Antony's own children with Cleopatra. The Romans were suitably appalled.

Antony and Cleopatra accordingly took a fleet and an expeditionary force to Greece, where in due time the forces of Octavian and Agrippa followed, cutting off Antony's supply lines to Egypt in the process. By late summer the opposing camps lay on either side of the Ambracian Gulf, just south of the Greek island now known as Corfu and immediately to the north of the island of Levkas in northwestern Greece. Antony's fleet was bottled in the gulf itself with the fleet of Octavian just outside. Antony's supply situation was getting desperate, and early on the morning of September 2, 31 BCE, he attempted a breakout.

Antony enjoyed a slight advantage both in the size of his ships and in numbers, roughly 480 to 400. Antony himself personally commanded the right, northernmost wing of his fleet with two further squadrons to the south and

Cleopatra's squadron to the rear in the east. Octavian's fleet was likewise divided into three squadrons. He himself, asthmatic and chronically seasick, was in command to the south on the right, and Agrippa faced Antony on the left wing to the north. That is where the sharpest fighting took place, at least early on, as both Antony and Agrippa tried to turn their opponent's flank.

The battle was long and hotly contested—ten hours long on some accounts—but at length, in the afternoon, Antony's center and left, where he was not directly commanding, began to give way and opened a gap. Cleopatra and her squadron sailed through it to round Levkas and make their way southwards back to Egypt. Antony followed, and when he caught up, boarded Cleopatra's flagship, the *Antonina*, and continued in flight. Octavian and Agrippa easily took care of the ships that remained, and within a week or so, Antony's abandoned army of about forty thousand simply deserted or disappeared.

Some have argued—and with some plausibility—that considering his supply situation, a breakout was what Antony had intended all along, but the more usual reaction, even among Antony's own troops, seems to have been that which Shakespeare attributes to Scarus, a sort of awed horror. In any event, a year later Octavian landed in Alexandria, where Antony's legions promptly defected, and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. Octavian, soon to be Augustus, was master of the Roman world and would rule for more than forty years longer, during which he laid the foundation for an empire that would endure for centuries to come.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Who made up the First Triumvirate?
2. What was Octavian's assessment of Cleopatra?

Suggested Reading

Starr, Chester G. *A History of the Ancient World*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Other Books of Interest

Eggenberger, David. *An Encyclopedia of Battles: Accounts of 1,560 Battles from 1479 B.C. to the Present*. New York: Dover, 1985.

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Lecture 5: Lepanto

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Niccolò Capponi's *Victory of the West: The Great Christian-Muslim Clash at the Battle of Lepanto*.



In 1055 the Seljuk Turks captured Baghdad. Sixteen years later, in 1071, under the leadership of Alp Arslan, at the battle of Manzikert in what is now eastern Turkey, they defeated the emperor Romanus IV Diogenes and the Byzantines and took control of most of the Byzantine heartland of Anatolia. Another Turkish group, the Ottoman Turks, a few centuries later, under the leadership of Mehmed II, in 1453 succeeded in conquering Byzantium, or Constantinople itself, and thereby put an end to the Eastern Roman Empire, more than twelve hundred years after the emperor Constantine had first settled his capital there. The Ottomans continued their expansion for several centuries, making Constantinople the effective heart of the Islamic world, and taking control not only of the Byzantine empire, but of Egypt and much of North Africa, of the near East and most of Arabia, of Mesopotamia, of the Crimea and most of the Balkans as well. Belgrade fell in 1521, and after the battle of Mohács in 1526, the Turks pressed on to what is now central Hungary. In 1529, under Suleiman I, the Magnificent (and again in 1683), they came very close to capturing the Habsburg seat and stronghold of Vienna. And their empire remained largely intact, if in decline, long enough to participate on the side of the Central Powers in World War I, most capably and famously at Gallipoli.

Ottoman Incursions

As part of that process of expansion, in the sultanate of Selim II, the Ottomans demanded that the Venetians relinquish to them the island of Cyprus, which for the better part of a century had been the most important Venetian base and *entrepôt* in the eastern Mediterranean. Since the “*serenissima repubblica*” of Venice was a prototypical maritime and commercial polity and depended almost exclusively on trade—and indeed, on trade with the East—the Venetians were most reluctant to relinquish their invaluable eastern outpost. The Ottomans dispatched a force of over fifty thousand, which overran the entire island, with the exception of the port of Famagusta. Here the Cypriots and Venetians held out for a year or more, hoping and waiting for a relief force that never came, and finally surrendered on August 3, 1571. To compound the loss, from a Venetian perspective, and in contravention to the terms of surrender, the Venetian governor, Marco Antonio Bragadino, and some of his associates were executed, Bragadino by being publically flayed alive, his stuffed skin being later displayed as a trophy.

This was by no means the first Ottoman incursion in the Mediterranean. The island of Rhodes, with its splendid harbor, defended by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, otherwise known as the “Hospitalers,” who had been there since 1310, had fallen to the forces of Suleiman I in 1522. The Habsburg Emperor, Charles V (reigned 1519 to 1556), reestablished the Knights on Malta in 1530, but in 1565 Malta too was besieged by the Ottomans, who took the fortress of St. Elmo, but after a ferocious siege proved ultimately unable to take Valletta itself.

Habsburg Spain, meanwhile, had been fighting the Muslim forces in North Africa on something close to an annual basis, at Tripoli, at Oran, at Tunis, and elsewhere.

On all fronts the Ottoman forces were on the advance. In 1556, however, exhausted by years of seeking to govern his far-flung domains in Austria, in Spain, in Lombardy and Naples, in the Netherlands, and in faraway Mexico and Peru, Charles V abdicated, leaving his Austrian dominions to his brother Ferdinand I, who became Holy Roman Emperor in his turn, and bequeathed his holdings at his death to his son Maximilian II, who reigned 1564 to 1576. His Spanish holdings, however, and with them the Indies, the Netherlands, and his extensive lands in Italy, he bequeathed to his son Philip II, who ruled from 1556 until his death in 1598. Philip II, the cutting edge of the Counter-Reformation, from a Protestant point of view, was for centuries a *bête noire* in English-speaking historiography, but he was, by his own lights, a scrupulously honorable and hard-working man, confronted with an almost impossible task in defending the faith and preserving his domains. For the Turks were only one of his problems, and by no means always the most pressing, relentless and formidable as they were.

Martin Luther had promulgated his celebrated “95 Theses” in 1517 and accordingly been excommunicated in 1521, but that marked the beginning, not the end of what from Charles’s and ultimately from Philip’s perspective was the Protestant threat, not only in Germany, but ultimately and more damagingly in the Netherlands as well. The Spanish Netherlands were far and away the most prosperous portion of Philip’s domain and consisted of the regions we now know as Belgium as well as what we now think of as the Netherlands proper farther north. Antwerp, in particular, was a financial powerhouse, and Flanders had been for centuries a wealthy center of textile manufacture. The spread of Protestantism and Philip’s pressing need for money to pay not only for defense, but also simply to service his debts, led to demands for religious uniformity and for taxes that were both resisted with increasing vigor until in 1567 Philip found it necessary to send the Duke of Alva north with Spanish troops. This led, in its turn, to what, depending upon one’s perspective, can be termed the Dutch revolt or the Dutch war of independence, an interminable and very costly conflict that continued in more or less active form until 1609, and was not resolved once and for all until 1648.

And Philip had other conflicts to contend with. The Habsburgs and their great rivals, the Valois kings of France, had been fighting on and off, most often in Italy, for decades, and things became more complicated still after the accession of child-monarch Charles IX of France and the regency of his mother, the formidable Catherine de Medici, which led in its turn to civil war in

France, with the adamantly Catholic House of Guise on one side and the (more or less) Protestant House of Bourbon on the other. France was, in any case, perfectly happy to gain influence at the expense of the Habsburgs, whether in Italy, in the Netherlands, or elsewhere, and this further complicated Philip's affairs.

And then there were the *moriscos*, nominally Christian former Muslims in Granada in the south, who revolted in 1568 and were suppressed only in 1571. And then there was England, Protestant in one sense or another from 1534 until the accession of Mary in 1553, until her death in 1558 Philip's devoted and devoutly Catholic wife. After Mary, though, her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth ascended the throne, and Philip had hopes, in 1571, of seeing her assassinated and the reliably Catholic Mary Stuart of Scotland installed as Queen of England in replacement, a hope all the more encouraging because of Elizabeth's sympathy with and occasional help for the Protestant rebels in Philip's own domains in the Netherlands.

For all of these reasons, Philip was less enthusiastic and forthcoming than might have been expected when in 1570 the Venetians and Pope St. Pius V called for the formation of a Holy League to turn back the Ottomans and to relieve the Cypriot and Venetian forces in Cyprus. It was not that Philip did not perceive the Ottomans as a threat. It was simply that he confronted more demands than he had the resources to fulfill. And in any case, the Spanish felt more threatened by the Islamic presence in North Africa than in relatively more faraway Cyprus. Nonetheless, Pope Pius in particular was insistent, and, on May 20, 1571, the Holy League was formed under the command of Philip's young, but surprisingly able, illegitimate half-brother, Don John of Austria, and composed of detachments revealing varied degrees of expertise and commitment not only from Spain and from Venice—and indeed from the Papacy—but also from Genoa, Savoy, and Tuscany, and elsewhere.

A Noble and Memorable Event

The fleet gathered at Messina, and ultimately consisted of some 316 ships. Of these, 208 were galleys, not all that different from those that had fought at Actium fifteen hundred years and more before, and rowed, as they had been, largely by free sailors. The one major difference was ordinance. The galleys on both sides carried a wide variety of cannon, and many of Don John's marines also carried an arquebus, a relatively cumbersome early form of musket. The Ottomans had cannon as well—indeed, it had been the Ottoman artillery train that had made the difference at Constantinople a century before. But as a personnel weapon, they were more inclined to rely upon their maritime archers than upon arquebusiers. Nonetheless, despite the ordinance, traditional ramming and boarding tactics still loomed large.

The Ottoman fleet, commanded by Ali Pasha, consisted of some 250 galleys, some of them smaller galleys, or galiots, built for speed, for the most part rowed by slaves, a good many of them Christian, or formerly Christian, captives. Don John's total force evidently numbered about eighty thousand, Ali Pasha's a bit more, though perhaps fewer of them soldiers.

Don John's forces also had a secret weapon. The Venetians had built six so-called "galleasses," double-sized galleys with some features of a sea-going galleon, and for their time, very heavily armed. They were cumbersome

ships and had, in fact, to be towed into combat, but even so they were formidable in relatively calm waters. Don John sent them into battle leading his three forward divisions, two in front of each, and in the event, they proved very useful, raking the Ottomans as they passed.

Don John's fleet departed from Messina on September 16 and arrived at Corfu on September 26. By October 4 they had made their way to the entrance of the Gulf of Corinth, which separates the rest of Greece from the Peloponnese. The Ottoman fleet stood at Lepanto, modern Navpaktos, at the narrow point in the gulf now spanned by a suspension bridge leading to Patras, and it was in the waters beyond where the gulf opens into the Adriatic that the battle of Lepanto took place on October 7, 1571.

As contemporary woodcuts and etchings show clearly, both fleets divided into four squadrons, three abreast and one in reserve in each case, the Spanish and Venetian forces advancing eastward into the gulf, the Ottoman forces advancing westward and out, with their central squadron, or perhaps all three leading squadrons (depictions differ), taking on a crescent shape, horns in the lead. Leading once again, on the Christian side, were the six galleasses.

What ensued next was a protracted and furious close-range *melée*, lasting three hours or more, as the Ottoman center drove ever deeper into Holy League forces, gradually giving ground on the flanks, but in which, even so, the forces of Don John, aided by their superior firepower, slowly began to prevail. Ali Pasha himself was killed in the fighting and lost, all told, about 190 galleys, and about thirty thousand men. Don John's forces lost seventeen ships and about seventy-five hundred men—and were able in the aftermath to free fifteen thousand or so Christian galley slaves. According to Miguel de Cervantes, later author of *Don Quixote*, who lost the use of his left hand in the battle, it was the "most noble and memorable event that past centuries have seen or future generations can ever hope to witness."

Be that as it may, although the Ottomans were able to rebuild their fleet by the next year and posed a real threat for years to come, the Ottoman advance in the Mediterranean was checked, and as things turned out, checked decisively. *Mare nostrum*, "our sea" as the Romans had called it, remained a divided, not a thoroughly Ottoman and Islamic lake, and the Ottomans' reputation for invincibility was broken, never entirely to recover. Pope Pius, who more than anyone else had been responsible for the formation of the League, and who had purportedly been granted a miraculous vision of the victory, died the next year a happy man—and became the only Renaissance pope to be canonized.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What led to the Dutch war of independence?
2. What secret weapon did Don John's forces possess?

Suggested Reading

Capponi, Niccolò. *Victory of the West: The Great Christian-Muslim Clash at the Battle of Lepanto*. Cambridge: Da Capo, 2006.

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Lecture 6: The Spanish Armada

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is David Howarth's *The Voyage of the Armada: The Spanish Story*.



England had been a thorn in the side of His Most Catholic Majesty, King Philip II of Spain, since the death of his wife Mary Tudor, Queen Mary I of England, better known to Protestants as “Bloody Mary.” Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, and, in England, insofar as lay in her power, she was the devout restorer of the Catholic faith abandoned by her father and her half-brother, the child king Edward VI. Mary’s half-sister and successor, Queen Elizabeth I, daughter of King Henry and the committedly Protestant Anne Boleyn, took a very different course when she ascended the throne in 1558. Elizabeth, unusually for her time, does not appear to have been a person of overpowering religious convictions—her preferences, such as they were, seem to have inclined toward a relatively moderate Protestantism in theology and toward something not too unlike the traditional Catholic liturgy. What she valued more than either was peace and good order in her realm, and provided those obtained, she was, as she made quite clear, perfectly willing not to inquire too deeply into what in fact her subjects believed.

Plots Against Elizabeth

And so matters might have remained had not Pope St. Pius V, the *eminence grise* behind the formation of the Holy League and the Christian victory at Lepanto, seen fit, in a less inspired moment in the bull *Regnans in Excelsis* of 1570, to depose Elizabeth, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, if not those of her subjects, and to call upon her subjects to rebel. This made of Elizabeth’s many Catholic subjects at least nominal traitors *ipso facto*, and treason in England, up until the 1700s, was punished with horrifying brutality. It also encouraged a series of plots against Elizabeth’s life in hopes that the Catholic Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, and Elizabeth’s next of kin, might be placed on the throne in her stead. And it encouraged Elizabeth to offer what support she could to Protestants elsewhere, most notably in the Netherlands, where a largely Protestant revolt against Spanish rule had begun in the 1560s. In 1575, indeed, a deputation from the Netherlands approached Elizabeth with an offer of sovereignty. Elizabeth was not willing to foment so open a breach with Spain and the Habsburgs—Philip had, despite his crippling debts, ten times or more the resources available to England. But more or less covertly, she sent what aid she could. The situation was in some respects not unlike that which would obtain during the Cold War—determined ideological opponents fighting each other in proxy wars, not in Korea and Vietnam, but instead Brabant, Holland, and Zealand.

And so matters remained until 1584, until the discovery of another plot against Elizabeth, in which the Spanish were implicated, and the growing success of the Spanish commander, Alexander Farnese, the Duke of Parma, in Flanders and Brabant, just over the Channel, inclined Elizabeth to take a more active role, not only in the Netherlands themselves, but against the Spanish overseas. The delighted Dutch once again offered Elizabeth sovereignty, which she again refused. But she agreed to send troops and cash, and perhaps more far-reachingly, authorized Francis Drake to raise a fleet to disrupt and plunder Spanish shipping in the Caribbean. Which “El Draque” soon enough did with exemplary energy and enthusiasm, raiding the Spanish port of Vigo, the Cape Verde Islands, Santo Domingo, in what is now the Dominican Republic, Cartagena, in what is now Colombia, and, for good measure, St. Augustin (now St. Augustine), in what is now Florida on the way home.

By January 1586, Philip had had enough and asked Parma and his veteran admiral, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, to come up with contingency plans for the invasion of England. Whether his goal was really to conquer England may be questioned. It was proving difficult enough to suppress the turmoil in the Netherlands, already a part of Philip’s domains, and there was no particular reason to think that subduing England would be easier. But if Parma could, say, take London—or even if Parma could take Kent—Philip might be able to prompt a revolt by English Catholics, might be able to have Elizabeth killed or deposed or, even failing that, he could almost certainly negotiate an English withdrawal from the Netherlands, negotiate an end to English depredations by sea, and negotiate toleration, if no more, for English Catholics. Indeed, even the plausible threat of invasion might measurably dampen the ardor of Elizabeth and her subjects. Or so it appeared to Philip.

The logistical problems, though, remained daunting. The expense involved in Santa Cruz’s first estimates for a massive, full-scale invasion force proved sobering to the always cash-strapped Philip, and Parma’s less ambitious plan of ferrying thirty-five thousand of his troops across the channel seemed at least financially more feasible. In the end Philip and his advisors settled on a sort of compromise involving both Parma and his forces and a much smaller invasion force from Spain than Santa Cruz had originally envisioned.

In the event, even that smaller force proved very difficult to gather, a task rendered no easier by the death of Santa Cruz in the meanwhile, and by his replacement, as commander of the expedition, by the Duke of Medina-Sidonia. Medina-Sidonia had many virtues. He stood among the most wealthy nobles in Spain. He was an able and dedicated administrator, and like Philip himself, he was a man scrupulously attentive to honor and duty. He was also no particular seaman, was acutely aware of the difficulties he faced, and wanted no part of the job. But Philip insisted, and he reluctantly complied, confident, or so he suggested, that since the Spanish were so manifestly “fighting in God’s cause,” God would send the appropriate “miracle” to ensure their victory.

The Spanish confronted other difficulties, however. When in 1586 England got wind of the preparations underway, Elizabeth at last consented to the execution of Mary Stuart (in February 1587), thereby removing a major focal point for Catholic rebellion in England. And she sent Drake on another expedition to

impede the preparations. In April 1587, he mounted a successful raid on the Spanish port of Cadiz, hitting several other targets before his return home.

Beyond that, from the late 1570s on, Elizabeth's Treasurer of the Navy, a "merchant adventurer" and former sometime slaver named John Hawkins, had been at work equipping England with a new sort of ship developed with ocean warfare in mind. The ensuing "race-built" galleons were lower, faster, more seaworthy and stable, and a good deal more heavily armed than their seagoing Spanish counterparts. Philip did have ocean-going warships—unlike the galleys that had fought at Lepanto. He would hardly have been able to maintain his vast overseas empire otherwise. But they were relatively heavy and slow, designed more for entering and boarding, in the traditional Mediterranean style, than for long-distance gunnery duels between sailing vessels in open water. Indeed, up to this point, there had never really been a long-distance gunnery battle at sea between substantial opposed fleets. That, however, was what the English ships were designed for, and they were all the more effective in that role because of England's superiority in guns and gunnery—and because of the superiority of the carriages in which English guns were mounted, which made them much easier and quicker to reload than their Spanish counterparts. Even so, when the time came, the English would be outnumbered by Philip's fleet, and still more so, by the troops which it carried. Beyond that, since wooden ships are not easily sunk, and the outnumbered English were wisely most reluctant to close with their enemies, they had no readily ascertainable way of stopping the Spanish force once they encountered it. Nonetheless, they prepared to do their best.

The Spanish put to sea in May 1588 and found themselves wind-bound at the mouth of the Tagus in Lisbon until the end of the month. They thereafter spent two weeks beating against adverse winds at sea, and put in again in mid-June at Corunna, on the northwest Spanish coast, only to depart once and for all in late July when the winds at last turned favorable.

The English commander, Elizabeth's Lord Admiral, was the great noble, Lord Howard of Effingham, with Francis Drake, John Hawkins, and Martin Frobisher in support, and on July 29, the first English scouts made contact with the approaching Armada at the westernmost entrance to the English Channel off the Isles of Scilly.

By July 31, the English had worked their way out to sea from the main anchorage at Plymouth and the Spanish had formed their battle order. Like the Turks at Lepanto, the Spanish fleet adopted a crescent formation, the horns pointed toward the English fleet.

The Weather Gage and Fireships

A significant factor in all battles between sailing ships is the so-called "weather gage," that is, the "upwind" or into-the-wind position as opposed to the "downwind" or with-the-wind position. The weather gage is important because the ship that gains it can close downwind and close at will, whereas a ship downwind or "leeward" can only close by bearing up or tacking into the wind, a far more difficult matter for a wind-powered ship. To have the weather gage is, in short, to have the initiative. And the English did. They stood to the west of the Spanish—the Spanish, rather oddly, were closer to their putative

goal, Parma and the Spanish troops in Flanders, than the English. And the English wished it so, since then they could close to gunnery range to pound the Spanish, and nonetheless stay far enough away to avoid being boarded. And that is more or less what they did for a spectacular week and more as both fleets made their slow way down the Channel, often enough within sight of shore, until at last Medina-Sidonia anchored his fleet off Calais. Up to this point the English had had the best of things, but had not done much real damage. More worrying to Medina-Sidonia was the array of problems he faced in connecting with the forces of Parma, blockaded by the Dutch in ports scattered across the mainland Channel coast.

On the night of August 7, Howard offered his decisive stroke. He sacrificed his eight weakest vessels as “fireships,” a single man aboard each to get them headed in the right direction, set them alight, and then make his way off to safety in a dinghy. Wooden ships are hard to sink, but not so hard to burn, and the fireships caused chaos, as the Spanish scrambled to cut off and get out of the way. Which by and large they succeeded in doing, as the fireships drifted harmlessly by.

In the process, though, the Spanish fleet itself drifted with the wind and tide, and when dawn came, Medina-Sidonia found his ships dispersed, up-Channel, and downwind. He attempted to reform the fleet, and the English pressed on, making use of their usual tactics, and the Spanish fleet soon enough found itself in the North Sea with no way of getting back to their planned rendezvous with Parma as long as the wind held.

The wind veered and intensified, driving the Spanish further into the North Sea, where Medina-Sidonia at last decided to make his way homeward on a northerly course around Scotland and Ireland. There the fleet was scattered and battered by storms, and it was not until well into September that the first survivors made their way home. They straggled in for a month or more. Full casualty figures are not available, but of the 151 vessels that departed, only about half made it back to Spain. Medina-Sidonia, who had done his best, died shortly after his return. And Elizabeth continued as Queen of an ever-more-powerful and confident England.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What difficulties did Philip face in invading England?
2. Why was the weather gage a significant factor in naval battles?

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Howarth, David. *The Voyage of the Armada: The Spanish Story*. New ed. London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2001.

Other Books of Interest

Davies, R. Trevor. *The Golden Century of Spain 1501–1621*. Reprint. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

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Lecture 7: The Downs and the Dutch Wars

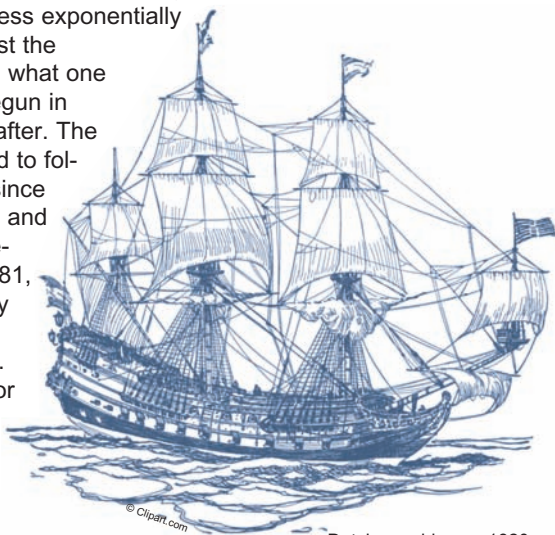
The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is C.R. Boxer's *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*.



The Spanish Armada had sailed in large part because of English support of the Protestant Dutch in their revolt against Habsburg overlordship in the Netherlands, and the immediate beneficiaries of the failure of the Spanish fleet were at least as much the Dutch as the English themselves. In the decades to follow, the United Provinces, as they called themselves, as opposed to *Las Provincias Obedientes* to the south in what is now Belgium, laid the groundwork of one of the most impressive and influential maritime polities of all time—to this very day an immensely prosperous commercial powerhouse, if no longer, in quite the same sense, a major world power in political or military terms.

The Dutch, particularly in the seaside provinces of Holland and Zeeland, had long engaged in seaborne trade of one sort or another, but it wasn't until 1572 when the so-called “sea-beggars” or “*Watergeuzen*”—patriotic, aggressively Protestant, part-time pirates, in effect—took Brill (aka Den Briel or Brielle) that they had anything much resembling a navy. Thereafter, though, things took off quickly, and in 1588 it was just such folks who had helped to keep Parma confined to the estuaries when the Armada sailed.

And during the 1590s and decades following, both Dutch naval power and commercial power more or less exponentially took off. The rebellion against the Habsburgs, depending upon what one chooses to focus on, had begun in 1566, 1568, or shortly thereafter. The United Provinces had agreed to follow a unified foreign policy since the Union of Utrecht in 1579 and had explicitly renounced allegiance to King Philip II in 1581, but it was not until the Treaty of Münster in 1648 that they gained universal recognition. But they had become a major power in their own right long before. As Peter Padfield puts it, during this period the United Provinces became in many respects



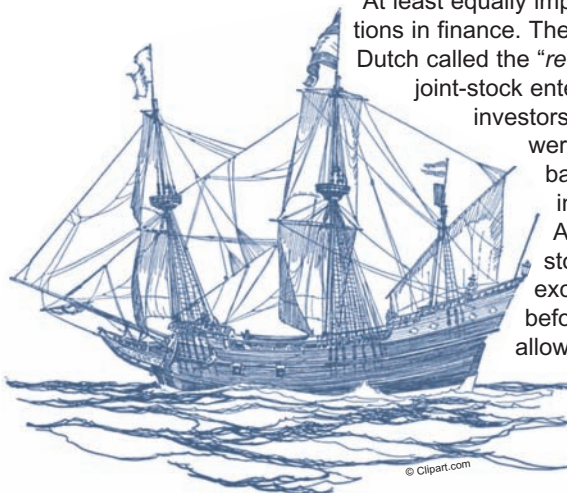
Dutch warship, ca. 1620s

the “harbingers of the modern West: they led the world in intellectual inquiry, the sciences and every significant technology” (80). And it was their financial and commercial strength above all that allowed them to do so. In the words of another scholar, C.R. Boxer, by 1648 “the Dutch were indisputably the greatest trading nation in the world with commercial outposts and fortified ‘factories’ from Archangel” in Russia “to Recife” in Brazil “and from New Amsterdam to Nagasaki” (29).

Dutch Dominance

Several factors contributed to their dominance. Before the Dutch revolt the financial powerhouse of northern Europe had been Antwerp, but Spanish religious policy had driven many merchants and traders north to Amsterdam, and the Dutch made sure they didn’t come to regret their choice by blockading the Schelde estuary, effectively closing Antwerp to seaborne trade. And they meanwhile launched a series of exceedingly far-reaching commercial ventures of their own. The most impressive of these was probably *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, which in astonishingly short order succeeded in muscling aside the Portuguese who had dominated trade in the area since the days of Vasco da Gama, winning an early signal victory over the Portuguese at Gibraltar in 1607 under Jacob van Heemskerck. As one result, much of what is now Indonesia remained under Dutch control until the Second World War.

Comparable in influence, if a bit later in foundation, was *West-Indische Compagnie* (WIC), chartered in 1621. The primary *foci* here were slaves and sugar—Portuguese operations in West Africa and Brazil—but the company had other successes, taking Curaçao in the West Indies, and founding Nieuw Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan, later, of course, to become New York. The company’s most striking early success, though, took place in Cuba in 1628, when Peit Heyn fulfilled the ambition of generations of privateers by taking the annual Spanish silver fleet.



Dutch merchant ship, ca. 1620s

At least equally important were Dutch innovations in finance. The key here was what the Dutch called the “*rederij*,” in effect an incipient joint-stock enterprise in which individual investors bought shares. The Dutch were also innovative in terms of banking and insurance, founding the Exchange Bank of Amsterdam in 1609 and a stock and commodity exchange, or bourse, the year before. All of these innovations allowed the Dutch to raise capital with unprecedented ease, and at unprecedentedly low rates of interest. Royal borrowers, like the Habsburgs, regularly defaulted. More

broad-based public debt instruments on the Dutch model could not afford to. And lenders reacted accordingly. All of this, quite clearly, had military as well as financial implications. For ships, as we noted very early in our first lecture, are expensive.

The Dutch benefited too from innovations in ship design. Even more than now, the coastal Netherlands were a land of shoals, sandbanks, and estuaries—with, then and now, the North Sea beyond—which put shallow-draft, seaworthy, reliable craft at a premium. Two particular varieties that they perfected were the “*sloop*,” the ancestor of what we now know as the sloop, and the “*fluyt*,” which comes into English as the “fly-boat” or “flute.”

So when the time came to fight at sea, the Dutch found themselves more than ready, despite their bizarre admiralty arrangements, in which each of five seaside provinces, including the powerhouses of Zeeland and Holland, had their own more or less independent navies. The “obedient” provinces of the Spanish Netherlands, once again, in effect modern Belgium, remained a target of French ambition, not only during the seventeenth century, but for a century and more to come. When, during the Thirty Years’ War of 1618 to 1648, French troops on the Rhine prevented Spanish reinforcements from making their way to the Habsburgs’ Netherlands domains, it became necessary to send them, if possible, by sea.

The Battle of the Downs

This was the immediate occasion for the Battle of the Downs in 1639. The Spanish admiral, Antonio de Oquendo, was on his way north in September with a fleet of forty-five to fifty warships (accounts vary) escorting some twenty-odd transports bearing some thirteen thousand troops. Sometime about mid-September (and here accounts seem to vary again), he was sighted by the self-taught and genial Dutch admiral Maarten Tromp. Initially, Tromp found himself very much outnumbered, he had fewer than twenty ships to Oquendo’s fifty, give or take, but Dutch gunnery was superior. Tromp’s ships were nimble, and driving through the fog line ahead—each ship following the one before—he was able to drive the Spanish fleet into anchorage on the wrong side of the Channel off the coast of Kent in the Downs. And there, more or less for a month, they remained, at a considerable disadvantage not only because the Dutch knew the shoals better, but because of the shallower draft of the Dutch ships.

The Downs were, in fact, technically neutral, English waters, and an English fleet under Sir John Penington did its best to keep order between the antagonists, going so far as to fire warning shots, which, when the time came, both sides ignored, at which point Penington, duty accomplished, left them to their own devices. The Spanish remained more or less bottled up in their anchorage for the better part of a month, and it was not until mid-October that the battle began again in earnest. By this time, though, Tromp was by no means alone. The other provincial fleets had seen fit to join him, and when the Dutch reengaged it was not with less than twenty ships but something more like one hundred. Beyond that, they had fireships. How many, again, is disputed, but twelve to sixteen or something like. The result was a Spanish disaster, which put an end to the great days of Spanish naval

power. The Dutch lost but a single ship, and the Spanish, by contrast, lost all but nine. Oquendo's flagship, *Santa Teresa*, indeed caught fire and blew up.

At which point the Dutch redirected their attention to a new antagonist. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in a historical curiosity which has been almost forgotten, the Dutch and English repeatedly considered combining into a single polity, and indeed, in 1688, during the "Glorious Revolution," it was the Dutch William III of Orange, along with his Stuart wife Mary, who became King of England. When they were not working together, however, and considering joining their powers, they were as often as not in competition, or, on occasion, open warfare. For though the Dutch became the first modern seaborne, commercial polity, the English envied their position, and soon answered with an East India Company and with banks and bourses of their own.

That led to no fewer than three naval Anglo-Dutch wars, in which, though England ultimately proved victorious, the Dutch did very well indeed. The great Dutch admiral of these contests was the redoubtable Michiel Adriaanszoon De Ruyter, who some authorities consider the most able naval commander who ever lived. He certainly impressed the English diarist Samuel Pepys, himself a navy man, and Clerk of the Acts to the Naval Board, who wrote disgustedly in 1664 after English-Dutch actions off the Guinea coast in West Africa that the English were "beaten to dirt Guinny by De Ruyter with his fleete." And worse was yet to come. On June 12, 1667, the darkest day in British naval history, De Ruyter sailed into the Thames estuary and up the Medway to the naval base at Chatham, where he captured the fleet flagship, the *Royal Charles*, and burned three other men-of-war. At the Treaty of Breda, England finally gained the New Netherlands—New Jersey and New York—but the Dutch, beyond all question, had proved their mettle at sea.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. How were the United Provinces the “harbingers of the modern West”?
2. Why did the Dutch ships have an advantage off the coast of Kent in the Downs?

Suggested Reading

Boxer, C.R. *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*. New York: Penguin, 1991.

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Lecture 8: Quiberon Bay

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Andrew Lambert's "The Dawn of Global Conflict 1739–63" in *War at Sea in the Age of Sail 1650–1850*.



The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was an unusually complicated and multifaceted conflict, involving at one point or another most of the European powers of the time, and including significant colonial conflicts in fields as far apart as Bengal on the Indian subcontinent and Lake George in what is now New York. The opening phase of hostilities took place in North America before the war was formally declared when Lt. Col. George Washington led the Virginia militia in a failed attempt to dislodge the French from Ft. Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio—now Pittsburgh—in 1754. In Europe, the war centered on Prussia after Frederick the Great led his troops into Saxony in August 1756 in what he considered to be a preemptive strike against Austrian efforts to regain Silesia, which Frederick had invaded sixteen years before. In short order Frederick found himself fighting not only the Austrians, but also the French, the Russians, and Swedes. At the battles of Rossbach and then of Leuthen late in 1757, Frederick answered the immediate threats, and English subsidies helped to keep Frederick's superlatively well-trained forces in the field until the resolution of the conflict with the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

Meanwhile, though, the wide-ranging colonial conflict between France and England continued apace, not only in North America, but in India as well, where in 1757 Robert Clive overcame the French settlement at Chandernagore and then defeated the Mughul nawab of Bengal at Plassey, winning effective control of the region for the British East India Company, which would dominate there for the next two centuries. Before the war was over, in 1761, Clive's counterpart, Eyre Coote, had likewise bombarded and captured the main French base at Pondicherry on the East Indian coast.

The English and French engagement during the battle for the French stronghold at Louisbourg.



New France No More

In North America, meanwhile, General Jeffrey Amherst with some nine thousand British regulars and Admiral Edward Boscawen with some forty ships succeeded in capturing the French stronghold of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, guarding the entrance to the St. Lawrence, in July 1758. A concurrent stiff repulse at Ticonderoga in New York, called by the French Ft. Carillon, where General James Abercrombie was sharply defeated by an outnumbered French force led by Major General Marquis Louis Joseph de Montcalm, postponed plans for investing Quebec, but even so both Montcalm and Quebec fell to General James Wolfe the following year. Montcalm and Wolfe were both killed in the conflict, but even so, France had effectively lost North America. Canada lay in British hands, and New France was no more.

It was in 1758, when their overseas difficulties became unmistakable, that the French decided to change tactics and concluded, in the words of Peter Padfield, that the best “way to save Canada” was “to mount an invasion of Great Britain” and to dictate peace terms from Westminster (202). This project, though, then, now, and always, involved gaining at least momentary naval superiority in the Channel. Otherwise the transports of any invasion fleet would find their way to the bottom sooner than the English shore. And gaining even momentary superiority in the Channel was no easy prospect.

The ensuing plan was accordingly complex, not to say baroque in its complexity. The French Mediterranean squadron based at Toulon was to join the main French fleet based at Brest near the westernmost tip of Brittany. Then, when easterly winds forced the blockading British well offshore, both squadrons were to sail down the coast to Quiberon Bay, near St.-Nazaire and the Loire estuary, where they would join a force of twenty-thousand troops and escort the transports north to the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, where the troops would disembark to cause panic and mayhem in the North. The escorting fleet would then sail around Scotland into the North Sea in order to rendezvous with another detachment of troops in Flanders, to be picked up at Ostende and landed on the Essex coast, therefrom to march to London.

The French, though, did have some advantages in their favor. French naval architecture was excellent throughout the age of sail, and the French “seventy-fours,” so called because they characteristically carried seventy-four guns, were particularly nimble and speedy, so much so, in fact, that at the behest of Lord George Anson at the Admiralty, the British eventually built their own copies of the captured *L’Invincible*. But equipment, even superior equipment, is useless without expertise, and here the English consistently had the advantage of the French. Chronically cash-strapped, the French had difficulty attracting and maintaining sailors—a problem compounded by the fact that during wartime, the British often captured and held a substantial portion of the sea-savvy French populace. Beyond that, blockaded as they characteristically were, the French didn’t get the sea-time the English did. Serving at sea month after month on a blockading squadron, taxing as it was, did wonders for a crew’s cohesion and seamanship.

And a final factor. Though the French ships were relatively spacious (to the very limited extent that any sailing ship could be considered spacious), and though the French were relatively well-fed, they lacked the institutionalized

concern for cleanliness and hygiene that came to characterize the British service and paid the price in crews beset by typhus and dysentery.

Scurvy was a problem for both sides, but more severe for the British, since as a vitamin-deficiency disease, scurvy didn't arise until a crew had been weeks or months away from fresh food. A sustained sea blockade, for obvious reasons, posed particular problems in this regard, which Lord Anson and Edward Hawke, the commander of the squadron imposing a close blockade on Brest, sought with success to answer by sending fresh fruit and vegetables and fresh beef (on the hoof) to the fleet.

“With All Glory Possible”

The close blockade of Brest was accordingly as close as Hawke could make it until in November a sustained westerly gale, which threatened to drive him ashore on the Breton lee coast, forced him to lead his ships out to sea, and eventually, into harbor for shelter. On November 14, the wind shifted to the north and east, and Hawke again put to sea. The French, meanwhile, had taken advantage of the wind, and of Hawke's temporary absence to put to sea themselves, hoping at last to meet up with their transports to the south.

The French plan was a long shot even under the most favorable circumstances, and by the time the French commander, Vice Admiral Maréchal Hubert Brienne, Comte de Conflans, put to sea, the odds had grown longer still, since in August Admiral Boscawen had intercepted the French Toulon squadron as it passed Gibraltar, driving some ships ashore, some out to sea, and capturing others, thereby preventing their planned rendezvous with the main squadron at Brest.

Nonetheless, Conflans proceeded, ruefully promising that if intercepted by Hawke, he would fight “with all glory possible”—as indeed, when the time came, he did.

As Hawke headed south, he was informed that the French had indeed departed, and he bypassed his previous station off Brest in pursuit. By November 20, he had caught up, both the French and the English squadrons driving toward the entrance to Quiberon Bay in a now rising westerly gale. Hawke had left a few ships in the area to keep an eye on the transports, and it was these, lying ahead of him, that Conflans first sighted, and he split his own squadron in pursuit, leaving a detachment behind to check on sails which had been reported behind him to westward. These, of course, were Hawke's main fleet, proceeding line abreast straight ahead, packing as much sail and more as the rising wind would bear.

When Conflans realized what was behind him, he gave the order for his own ships to run into the bay, on the assumption that in such weather no one would drive into an unfamiliar, shoal-ridden, rock-bound lee shore in pursuit. He misjudged his man. Hawke ordered a “general chase” and, as he wrote in his post-battle dispatch, “crowded after” Conflans “with every sail” his “ships could bear.” Hawke's assumption, as the short, overcast November day drew to its close, was that, reliable charts or no, where the French could go, he could follow. And he did.

Leading the chase for the British was captain Richard Howe in a captured French seventy-four, the *Magnanime*, and as Howe's leading group overtook and opened fire on the rearmost ship of the French fleet—another seventy-four, the *Magnifique*—Hawke in his own flagship, the *Royal George*, gave an order that would resonate in British naval history, "Engage the enemy as close as possible."

Conflans, meanwhile, had made his way into the Bay, assuming that his ships would all get in before the British could overtake them. Finding that this was not so, he ordered those already safe within to turn about to help their beleaguered brothers. All parties then met in a confused general mêlée in the offing as darkness fell. It was rough going all around. Two French ships, in the squally weather, went under when they heeled over and their lower gunports filled, a result, as the British took it, of the inexperience of their largely Breton crews, since the British faced the same weather with open gunports and survived.

At last full night fell, and in such unfamiliar and dangerous waters, Hawke gave the order to anchor, and at length most of the surviving French did so as well. Eight French ships were able to work themselves out during the dark hours that followed and made for Rochefort; another ran aground trying to escape into the Loire estuary. Conflans himself in his flagship, the *Soleil Royale*, likewise ran aground while seeking refuge, and Conflans had the flagship burned. All in all, of twenty-one French ships involved in the action, three were sunk, two were captured, and one was burned. The rest were dispersed and thereafter as subject to blockade as before. The invasion plans were, of course, abandoned, and Britain remained mistress of the sea—and ruler of Canada. Hawke's casualties, in his own squadron of twenty-three, were two ships driven onto shoals during the night and roughly three hundred sailors lost.

The year 1759 was when the British empire came into its own, and despite the loss of the more southerly American colonies during the American war to follow, the British would remain the world's dominant power, certainly through 1914, if not, indeed, through the early 1940s, then to cede the precedence only to their equally Anglophone American cousins.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why were French crews often beset by typhus and dysentery?
2. Why did Conflans believe that Hawke would not follow him into Quiberon Bay?

Suggested Reading

Lambert, Andrew. "The Dawn of Global Conflict 1739–63." *War at Sea in the Age of Sail 1650–1850*. The Cassell History of Warfare. Gen. ed. John Keegan. London: Collins, 2005.

Other Books of Interest

Eggenberger, David. *An Encyclopedia of Battles: Accounts of 1,560 Battles from 1479 B.C. to the Present*. New York: Dover, 1985.

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Lecture 9: Trafalgar

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Adam Nicolson's *Seize the Fire: Heroism, Duty, and Nelson's Battle of Trafalgar*.



Trafalgar is, quite simply, the most celebrated naval battle ever fought and among the most far-reaching and decisive in its effects. For the British, in particular, and all the more so for the “Senior Service,” or the Royal Navy, it lives on as a crystallizing moment of sharp-hued cultural self-definition. This is what we are and who we are.

It is no accident that the central public space in London is named after an otherwise relatively obscure cape on the Atlantic side of Gibraltar in Spain. The weather-beaten ships that Napoleon never saw until his career was over and he was on his way to exile on St. Helena—and which according to Albert Thayer Mahan, author of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, more than any other factor ensured his demise—here had their finest hour.

The Greatest Admiral Who Ever Lived

And so too, of course, Horatio Nelson, their commander, and by general, if not universal consensus, the greatest admiral who ever lived, and to this day one of the most admired of British heroes. No naval battle has been more closely studied—“another Trafalgar” has been a goal of naval commanders ever since, as “another Cannae” of their landbound counterparts. And no naval commander has been so esteemed as an exemplar of naval virtue, of general, superlative command practice, as Nelson himself. On all sorts of levels, Trafalgar was important.

Nelson himself was the sixth child of a Norfolk parson, better connected on his mother's side than on that of his father, and he entered the Navy at the age of twelve, more or less standard practice for officers-to-be, on a ship commanded by his maternal uncle. He rose rapidly through the ranks, a lieutenant while still in his teens, and a post-captain at twenty. He was conspicuous for courage and ability right from the outset, losing the sight in his right eye in action at Corsica in 1794, and serving with special distinction at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent under Sir John Jervis, later Lord St. Vincent, in 1797, where his decision to disobey orders and act on his own initiative in breaking from the line of battle to head off part of the Spanish fleet was instrumental in securing the victory of fifteen British ships of the line over twenty-eight Spanish. At age thirty-nine, he became a rear admiral as a result.

Later that year, Nelson lost his right arm in action at Tenerife in the Canary Islands, but recovered in time to lead a stunning victory against the French at Aboukir Bay near Alexandria in the so-called “Battle of the Nile” in August of 1798. Shortly thereafter, in Naples, he encountered one of the celebrated

beauties of the age, Lady Emma Hamilton, the young wife of the elderly British Envoy, Sir William Douglas Hamilton (1730–1803)—he was some thirty-five years older than she was. Nelson, though already married, found himself infatuated, and their ensuing love affair lasted for the rest of Nelson's life, producing a daughter, Horatia, who lived until 1881. Emma's husband tolerated the arrangement, and may even have encouraged it, but others were less impressed, and the Admiralty appears to have decided, for a variety of reasons, that it would thereafter be best to make use of Nelson's talents by ensuring that he was at sea as much as possible. And at sea Nelson continued to do superlatively well, famously, and more or less literally, turning a blind eye to orders to disengage at Copenhagen in 1801, which proved yet another British naval victory.

War of the Third Coalition

Strife with France and with Napoleon came to a momentary halt with the Peace of Amiens in 1802, but neither Napoleon nor his enemies expected the truce to be long-lasting. By May of 1803, France and England were at war again in the so-called "War of the Third Coalition," which ultimately included England, Austria, Russia, Sweden, and Naples. Britain as usual provided substantial cash subsidies for her allies, who did the bulk of the fighting on land, and contented herself for the most part with seaborne operations, which in the year 1803 began to take on a particular urgency.

For Napoleon had decided to engage his British problem head-on with an invasion, and as all Europe knew, any invasion by Napoleon was no laughing matter. At least early on, he was clearly in earnest. The Army of England that he gathered at Boulogne and regions nearby was immense, well more than 150,000. He started improving the local docking facilities in the very month when the British declared war, and by July he had placed orders for some thirty-four hundred transports, his preparations funded in part by revenue from the recent Louisiana Purchase by the young United States.

The British were concerned, but at the Admiralty at least, by no means panicked. As John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent famously observed, "I do not say the French will not come; I only say they will not come by sea." And the Navy did its best to make sure that they didn't. Vice Admiral Sir William Cornwallis, younger brother of the Lord Cornwallis who had commanded at Yorktown, undertook the blockade of Brest. Lord Keith was dispatched to keep an eye on the Dutch, now more or less firmly within the Napoleonic orbit. And Nelson was dispatched to the Mediterranean to contain the French squadron at Toulon.

Napoleon, now emperor as of 1804, continued to tinker with a series of elaborate plans for uniting his various fleets and bringing them, at the decisive moment, to the Channel coast to protect his transports as they made their way to England. That necessarily meant either drawing off or defeating the various British squadrons on blockade, and to his naval commanders, if not to Napoleon himself, neither project seemed particularly feasible or inviting. The French problem was much what it had been for the past century—their ships were first-rate, their sailors weren't. And the problem was compounded during the Napoleonic era by the fact that naval officers had suffered dispro-

portionately during the preceding Revolution. As the French had demonstrated even before Napoleon took command, on the ground a good deal can be achieved by a *levée en masse* and simple *élan*. But energy and enthusiasm, in and of themselves, don't work as well at sea. There you need expertise, and that the French lacked. And their more or less reluctant new Spanish allies even more so. Spanish ships were better even than the French, probably the best warships afloat at the time. But their crews, though game and courageous, were ill-fed, ill-trained, and, often enough, ill simply.

Napoleon, though, was nothing if not self-assured, aggressive, and confident, and he was not a man who responded well to complaints about difficulties. The 1805 version of the plan called for the Brest and Toulon squadrons, somehow or other, to shake the British, break out of the blockade, and then set off and cause as much trouble as possible in the West Indies, to draw the British away from their stations in response. Then, once the British were committed, both French squadrons were to sprint back across the Atlantic, and working together, to cover the cross-Channel invasion before the British caught up to stop it. In the event, blockaded by Cornwallis, Vice Admiral Honoré Ganteaume at Brest was simply unable to get out. But Pierre-Charles Silvestre de Villeneuve, commanding the Toulon squadron, took advantage of favorable weather not only to escape Lord Nelson, but to rendezvous with Spanish Admiral Don Frederico de Gravina at Cadiz, and with a now-combined fleet to depart for the West Indies in early April.

Nelson at first was at a loss to discover when Villeneuve had gone, and it was not until May that he received firm word of where he was headed. Nelson set off in pursuit at once, quickly gaining on Villeneuve and his fleet despite their four-week or so start. Once Villeneuve found out that Nelson too was in the West Indies, he departed for home. Villeneuve had in fact managed to escape at Aboukir Bay, an experience which, to all appearances, left him with a healthy respect for Nelson's prowess, and once again Nelson followed in pursuit.

On the way home, though, Villeneuve and his fleet were intercepted at Cape Finisterre in northwest Spain on July 22 by Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Calder, but in the fog Calder managed to capture only two Spanish ships, the rest of the combined fleet escaping to Vigo and to Ferrol, again in northwest Spain.

Villeneuve's orders were still to do what he could to complete a Channel rendezvous, but in fact it seems that by this point Napoleon had come to recognize that the project was not working out, and by late August the French army had departed the Channel coast and was on its way eastward to confront the forces of the other major members of the coalition, the Austrians and the Russians—which they in fact did late in the year first at Ulm, and then, on December 2, at Austerlitz, near Brno in what is now Moravia, where Napoleon won one of his greatest victories.

Napoleon accordingly ordered Villeneuve, who had meanwhile transferred his fleet to Cadiz, to proceed with the fleet back to the Mediterranean. But once again, the British waited outside. Napoleon had meanwhile received communications with a general commanding the troops attached to Villeneuve's fleet, which sharply questioned Villeneuve's courage and competence. Napoleon decided to replace him with Vice-Admiral François Rosily,

and when Villeneuve got wind of this on October 18, he put to sea. It took a while for the combined fleet to work its way out, and it was not until October 21 that the fleet encountered the British off Cape Trafalgar between Cadiz and Gibraltar. Villeneuve's fleet of thirty-three outnumbered Nelson's twenty-seven, and Nelson was outgunned and outmanned as well, but nonetheless, confident of his men's superior seamanship, gunnery, and morale, Nelson was eager for the clash to come.

As his own actions both at Cape St. Vincent and at Copenhagen suggest, Nelson valued and encouraged understanding and initiative in his subordinates. That was a major part of the charismatic "Nelson touch" that made him so effective as a commander.

Alongside the Enemy

In the days before the battle, he invited his commanders to dine in his own cabin where he explained to them his plans. His strategy was to attack the French and Spanish line in two columns, sailing line ahead into their combined broadsides, in order to cut off the van, to break the line, and in general to provoke a ship-on-ship *mêlée* where his gunners could prevail at close range. That end in view, when the time came, he put his strongest ships at the head of the line to bear the brunt of incoming fire, he himself leading one column in the *Victory*, feinting at the van, and then striking at the center, and Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood in the *Royal Sovereign* striking at the rear. To make sure that his crews would recognize one another in the smoke and stress of battle, he also had his ships painted in what came to be known as the black and yellow "Nelson Chequer." And finally, recognizing the difficulty of seeing signal flags in battle and wishing to encourage initiative, he



An illustration depicting Admiral Lord Nelson just after having been wounded aboard the HMS *Victory* during the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson's final words (as related by *Victory*'s Surgeon William Beatty, based on the accounts of those who were with Nelson when he died) were, "Thank God, I have done my duty."

suggested that, whatever happened, “No Captain can do very wrong if he places his Ship alongside that of the Enemy.”

The battle took place on a day of light wind and heavy swell—which would work to the advantage of the more experienced British gunners—and the fleets advanced toward each other very slowly. The column leaders were under fire for nearly an hour without being able to respond as they drifted ever closer to the combined fleet. As the minutes passed and the moment of contact approached, Nelson decided, as witnesses later put it, “to amuse the fleet with a signal,” which became the most famous ever hoisted: “England expects that every man will do his duty.” As the fleets grew closer, he hoisted again, anticipating an approaching storm, and in expectation of victory—“Prepare to anchor” after action is concluded. And finally, and laconically, “Engage the enemy more closely.”

Collingwood’s line engaged about noon. About forty-five minutes later, under airs so light the *Victory* could barely maintain steerage way, Nelson cut between Villeneuve’s flagship, the *Bucentaure*, and the *Redoubtable*. Within a half hour or so, Nelson was mortally wounded, hit by a sharpshooter on the mizzen mast of the *Redoubtable*. The shot passed through his lung, nicking the pulmonary artery, and lodged in his spine. He was taken below, where over the next few hours his lungs slowly filled with blood.

Meanwhile, though, the British fleet fashioned a signal victory, and before he died Nelson learned of his triumph. Of the thirty-three French and Spanish engaged, eighteen were lost, and four were captured later off La Coruña. The British lost no ships at all.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What challenges did Napoleon face in bringing together his fleets to the Channel Coast?
2. What were the characteristics of the “Nelson Touch”?

Suggested Reading

Nicolson, Adam. *Seize the Fire: Heroism, Duty, and Nelson’s Battle of Trafalgar*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Other Books of Interest

Black, Jeremy, ed. *The Seventy Great Battles in History*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

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Lecture 10: Tsushima

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Richard Hough's *Naval Battles of the Twentieth Century*.



If Trafalgar was the most decisive of major fleet actions in the age of sail, giving to Britain something not unlike undisputed hegemony at sea for the better part of a century, it was also the last full-scale battle between sailing fleets. For Britain at the time was not only the maritime, but also the industrial leader of the world, and over the course of the next century, maritime technology, and, indeed, technology in general, were to undergo revolutions in their own right, which would transform society from top to bottom and the naval world, of course, with it. Steam power, steel construction, armor-plating, breech-loading cannon, and explosive ordinance, new techniques in navigation and communication, these and other factors would in many respects change the world of ships and sailors all but out of recognition over the course of the nineteenth century. Navigation, seamanship, and leadership remained central, as before, but modulated into a new key in a world of boilers, coaling stations, telegraphy, and long-range gunnery. Nowhere was industrialization more speedy and more pronounced than in Japan.

The Tokugawa Shogunate had dominated Japan since shortly after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, when Tokugawa Ieyasu overcame his rivals and assumed *de facto* supreme power, and for centuries the Shogunate quite deliberately made Japan a world unto itself. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, after the arrival of United States Commodore Matthew Perry in his "*kurofune*," or "Black Ships," in 1853, the Western powers forced a series of treaties opening Japan to trade. The demise of the Tokugawa Shogunate followed thereafter in the Meiji Restoration of 1867, reempowering the new emperor Meiji on behalf of a more or less behind-the-scenes ruling oligarchy. Japan's military and industrial backwardness in comparison to the Western powers was, for understandable reasons, a source of great concern to the Meiji leaders, and they did everything in their power to rectify the situation as fast as they could. Within a generation or so, they had succeeded, adopting, in naval affairs, the practices of the predominant Royal Navy as a model.

Russo-Japanese War

By the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, as a result of these heroic efforts, Japan was the proud possessor of an up-to-date industrialized army and a navy to match, both invigorated by the enduring cultural residue of the displaced samurai culture that dominated Japan before the restoration. The war itself began as a result of conflicting imperial ambitions centered in Manchuria. The Russians, in 1891, had begun construction of the Trans-

Siberian Railway, to extend from St. Petersburg on the Baltic to Vladivostok on the Pacific. A time-saving trans-Manchurian spur, the Chinese Eastern Railway, cut through to Harbin and on to Vladivostok through Manchuria, then a part of the waning Chinese Empire, and a region that Japan considered part of her own sphere of influence. The Russians meanwhile had leased the Liaotung (or Dairen) peninsula on the Yellow Sea, just to the west of what is now North Korea, and established an ice-free naval base at Port Arthur, at the very tip of the peninsula. Japan considered Korea as well to be part of her sphere of influence, and indeed annexed Korea in 1910, after the war was concluded. The ensuing tensions led Japan to cut off diplomatic relations with Russia on February 6, 1904. Two days later—before declaring war—they launched a surprise naval attack on the Russian fleet anchored at Port Arthur.

The attack was not as damaging as it would prove to be a generation later at Pearl Harbor. Japanese torpedo boats proved less effective than her torpedo planes and dive bombers would later become. But they did succeed in damaging some Russian ships and the following day succeeded in sinking two Russian ships anchored at Inchon, in Korea.

In a bloody series of campaigns, for the most part fought in Korea and Manchuria, some featuring the trench warfare, barbed wire, and machine guns that would mark the Western Front a decade later, the Japanese showed their military mettle, generally getting the better of their Russian counterparts, but unable to win a decisive victory. The Japanese, meanwhile, maintained control of the nearby seas, thereby hampering Russia's efforts, and in October 1904, Russia decided on the desperate expedient of detaching the Russian Baltic Fleet to the Far East, a journey of nearly nineteen thousand miles. The decision posed immense logistical problems. Great Britain, at this point, enjoyed a worldwide network of coaling stations to service the fleet, but Russia had nothing of the kind—and the British, in any case, though non-combatants, favored their Japanese naval protégés. Russia worked out a deal with the Hamburg-Amerika Line. And the journey from the Baltic to Vladivostok would take months. Vice Admiral Zinovy Petrovich Rozhdestvensky's smaller ships made their way through the Suez Canal, but his larger ships made the longer journey around West Africa and the Cape, all the while suffering not only from the tropical heat and humidity—to which the Russian sailors were predictably and entirely unaccustomed—but from the coal stored everywhere possible, including ventilation shafts, to minimize refueling difficulties. The morale of Tsar Nicholas's sailors was unreliable at the best of times—the regime was already suffering from the political disaffection that would explode and sweep it away a few years later under Lenin—and the long voyage took its toll.

Torpedoes appear at the time to have had a reputation as a wonder weapon (though in the event mines proved more deadly), and after the attack at Port Arthur, the Russians were much concerned that sympathetic European powers might have allowed Japanese torpedo boats secret access to their ports. As a result, they were a little jumpy and, fearing a Japanese attack, succeeded in withstanding what they took to be an assault by British fishing boats in the North Sea. The resulting damage so irritated the British that it took some nimble negotiation to keep the Royal Navy on the side.

A Wrong Decision

All in all, it was a difficult trip, but as they approached Korea and Japan on the last lap of the journey, it seemed they might make Vladivostok after all. Admiral Heihachiro Togo, though, was waiting for them. As he closed in on home waters, Admiral Rozhstvensky faced a choice. He could sail through the Straits of Tsushima between Korea and Kyushu, or he could sail eastward around Japan, cutting in toward Vladivostok farther north, either between Honshu and Hokkaido or between Hokkaido and Sakhalin. For two reasons he chose the seemingly riskier former course. The northern straits were treacherous, and if he chose the longer route, he would once again have to recoal. He made for Tsushima. It proved to be the wrong decision.

Early on the morning of May 27, 1905, Admiral Togo received word that Russians had been sighted in “square 203” of the grid that Japanese intelligence had plotted to track them, and by 1:30 that afternoon the two fleets were within sight of each other, the Japanese steaming southward, the Russians to the north. The fleets seemed more or less equally matched. Rozhstvensky had eight battleships at his disposal, four of them of the latest type, and nine cruisers, one of them armored. Togo, by contrast, had only four battleships, but twenty-four cruisers, of which eight were armored. And he enjoyed a wide advantage in smaller craft, nearly sixty destroyers and torpedo boats to the Russians’ nine. Working to the Russians’ further disadvantage, after seven months or more in tropical waters, their ships were fouled with underwater seagrowth and no match for the Japanese in speed. Potentially more decisive still, the Japanese were practiced gunners, the Russians far less so.

Taking these factors into account, at the outset of the battle Togo ordered a daring move, having first flashed a signal to his fleet that seems deliberately to have recalled Nelson—transmuting Nelson’s Trafalgar hoist in a distinctively Japanese key: “The fate of the empire rests upon this one battle, let every man do his utmost.” He then ordered the fleet to loop line ahead through a 180-degree turn within range of the Russian guns to bring his own course parallel to that of Rozhstvensky’s northward-bound fleet. The gambit succeeded. As Ronald H. Spector observes, “Russian fire, though rapid, was not very accurate,” and Togo thereafter was able twice in succession to “cross the Russian T,” subjecting the line-ahead fleet to his broadsides. Early on the Russians were able to match the Japanese in accuracy, if not in rate of fire, but as the battle progressed and the superior Japanese gunnery and munitions began to tell, Russian fire became more erratic, and the battle became a rout.

Wooden warships, as we have already noted, were by no means easy to sink. Modern steel-hulled ships, however, once authoritatively breached, went down not just quickly, but often catastrophically. And that is what happened to the Russians. By the time the battle was over, Togo and his fleet had succeeded in destroying or capturing thirty-one of the thirty-eight Russian ships engaged, all the battleships among them, in the process killing nearly five thousand Russian sailors and capturing another six thousand, among them the wounded and incapacitated Admiral Rozhstvensky himself. Two Russian battleships, in fact, were sunk with a loss of all hands, and another with but a

single survivor. Japanese casualties, by contrast, were three small ships lost and 117 killed. It was, according to British historian Sir Julien Corbett, “the most decisive and complete naval victory” on record, and Togo became a national hero.

The terrible news, when it reached St. Petersburg, further destabilized the regime, and Russia was eager to negotiate a settlement, which was in fact achieved at the Treaty of Portsmouth, mediated United States President Theodore Roosevelt in New Hampshire a few months later. There was, henceforward, no doubt about Japan’s status as a major modern power, particularly formidable at sea, and the woes of Tsar Nicholas continued.

And on a more narrow, tactical level the long ranges at which the battle had been fought suggested that capital ships might minimize, if not dispense with, secondary armament, and focus instead upon big, long-range, and potentially ship-killing guns. The first of this new breed was in fact a Japanese ship already under construction at the time of Tsushima. The type specimen, though, was First Sea Lord Jackie Fischer’s HMS *Dreadnought*, completed in 1906, which, so it was bruited, rendered all existing battlefleets obsolete at a stroke. One result was a fierce naval arms race between Britain and Imperial Germany, and that will take us to our next lecture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. What prompted the Russo-Japanese War in 1904?
2. What daring move did Admiral Togo employ against the Russians?

Suggested Reading

Hough, Richard. *Naval Battles of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Overlook, 2001.

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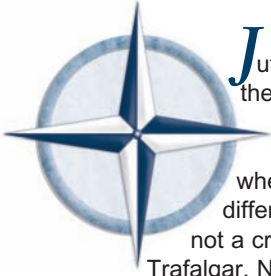
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Lecture 11: Jutland

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command*.



Jutland, in a sense, was the Trafalgar that wasn't. Both the British and the Germans anticipated a decisive battle on Nelsonian lines in the North Sea between their respective state-of-the-art dreadnought fleets. But when, on May 31, 1916, the time came, the result was different than either the British or the Germans expected—not a crushing defeat or a glorious victory for either side. No Trafalgar. Nor, for that matter, a Tsushima. Instead the result was something far more inconclusive, a tactical draw, more or less, which left the situation fundamentally unchanged, save, perhaps, for the more certain knowledge that a Nelsonian war-winning or war-losing battle simply wasn't in the cards, at least in the North Sea. The Germans, indeed, inflicted more casualties than the British in terms both of ships and of men lost. But at the end of the battle, they retreated, and were, indeed, fortunate to escape, leaving the strategic victory, such as it was, to the British Grand Fleet. Winston Churchill famously suggested that the British commander, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, was the only man who could lose the Great War "in an afternoon." He didn't. But neither did he win it in a matter of hours. Instead, the Grand Fleet remained a "fleet in being," and the in-effect distant blockade conducted from the main British base at Scapa Flow in the Orkney's off the bleak north coast of Scotland continued ever-more-tightly to choke off Imperial Germany's access to the raw materials and foodstuffs needed to maintain the German war effort. In a long-term sense, the British fleet won by doing nothing. Not very exciting or glamorous work, not the sort of thing of which legends are made. But for all that, by no means ineffective. In the end, no Trafalgar was needed to do the work that needed to be done.

Cautious Maneuvering

The case had seemed otherwise, though, during the great naval arms race which had done much to poison relations between England and Germany over the course of the previous decade, and indeed since the 1890s when Naval Minister Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, with the German Navy League behind him, had persuaded the Reichstag to pass a bill providing funding for a battleship fleet to challenge that of Britain. By the time war broke out the fleet had been effectively built, and Germany boasted twenty-three dreadnought battleships. The British, in the meantime, had built thirty-two of their own, some of them, indeed, constructed to slightly different specifications and designated as "battle cruisers." The latter were designed for speed, though their armament more or less matched that of their heavier cousins. They

gained in speed by skimping in armor, the theory being that they could make use of their swiftness to keep out of range of potential threats all the while making use of their own heavy guns.

Both fleets expected to tussle soon after hostilities began, most probably near the German North Sea coast in the so-called "Heligoland Bight," but as the weeks passed, nothing much happened. What significant action there was, was nearer Santiago and Buenos Aires than near Hamburg or Bremen. Vice Admiral Count Maximilian von Spee, commanding the German Asiatic Squadron, first destroyed Rear Admiral Christopher Craddock's cruiser squadron off the coast of Chile and then was destroyed himself by the better-armed squadron of Vice Admiral Charles Doveton Sturdee off the Falklands.

Rear Admiral Franz von Hipper had a battle cruiser squadron of his own and on several occasions took it out in hopes of luring a part, but only a part, of the Grand Fleet into the jaws of the German main force, which could there-upon even the odds. But again, nothing much was accomplished. The Germans were cautious, and the English didn't bite. By a series of accidents, however, among them a chest from a sunken torpedo boat dredged up by a fishing trawler, the British had gained access to German naval and diplomatic codes, and were accordingly able to track naval communications and, in effect, to read German orders in something not far from real time. Thus, when Admiral Reinhard Scheer at last steamed out with the High Seas Fleet, heading north toward the Skagerrack off the Danish peninsula of Jutland early on the morning of May 31, 1916, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe had already departed with the main body of the Grand Fleet from Scapa Flow to rendezvous with Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty, commanding the detached battle cruiser squadron that had departed from the Firth of Forth in hopes of intercepting Scheer and his fleet and at last bringing the German navy to a decisive battle.

Into the Fray

Admiral Hipper's scouting force of five battle cruisers, five light cruisers, and thirty destroyers steamed about fifty miles ahead of the main body of the High Seas Fleet, which consisted of no less than sixteen dreadnoughts, six older battleships, and an assorted array of lesser ships. At about 2:00 PM, still steaming to rendezvous with Jellicoe, Beatty made contact with Hipper's scouting group. Beatty's own force consisted of six battle cruisers and four new *Queen Elizabeth*-class battleships, accompanied by fourteen light cruisers and twenty-seven destroyers. Once Hipper made contact, he altered course to lead Beatty into the High Seas fleet. This was, of course, precisely the scenario for which the Germans had hoped. Beatty turned and followed, hoping to cut off what he took to be Hipper's retreat.

In short order, Beatty's flagship, the *Lion*, took three hits, knocking out one of her turrets. Shortly thereafter, about 4:15 PM, the battle cruiser *Indefatigable* took two hits, which provided the first unmistakable indication that the design compromises in armor by which battle cruisers had purchased their speed would prove more costly than had been anticipated. A magazine explosion blew the *Indefatigable* out of the water. Half an hour later, the *Queen Mary* suffered a similar fate, losing all but twenty of a crew of nearly thirteen hundred, and prompting Admiral Beatty's classically stoic

and understated comment, “There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today.”

Because of signaling problems, during this first phase of the fighting, Beatty’s new battleships were not engaged, and his battle cruisers more or less had to fend for themselves, but as his more heavily armored ships at last closed in and opened fire, the tide of battle began to shift. But by now both Beatty and Hipper had drawn near Scheer and the main fleet, and when he realized as much, Beatty in his turn changed course and assumed what had been Hipper’s role, seeking to lure both Scheer and Hipper toward the main British force.

At this point another British battle cruiser squadron entered the fray, detached by Jellicoe to reinforce Beatty, and the rising rate of fire convinced the Germans that they had in fact encountered the main British fleet. That was not what they had bargained for, and they altered course.

Jellicoe, meanwhile, was still not certain precisely where High Seas Fleet was, only receiving the requisite signals about 5:40 PM, at which point he redeployed at once, coming into contact at last slightly ahead of the German column—and between the High Seas Fleet and home. Meanwhile, though, yet another British battle cruiser, the perhaps misleadingly named *Invincible*, was hit and exploded, leaving this time six survivors (British battle cruiser design was indeed fatally flawed; twenty-five years later, in the Denmark Strait, between Greenland and Iceland, the *Bismarck* sank yet another, HMS *Hood*, effectively with a single salvo—the survivors here totaled three).

But Scheer’s fleet too was under heavy fire, and he knew what he was up against. He ordered his fleet to turn about and retreat into the fog and mist. Jellicoe was tempted to pursue, but hesitated, in part because of his widely shared but erroneous belief that the German ships were equipped to drop mines to prevent just such contingencies. Instead, he tried to intercept Scheer’s route back to friendly waters. After yet another German change of course, though, the two fleets collided again, and Scheer ordered a battle cruiser and destroyer attack to cover his next attempt at withdrawal. This time it worked, and Jellicoe at last turned off. As darkness fell, both fleets heading southward, Jellicoe was still closer to Scheer’s home port than the German fleet, but in the darkness, Scheer slipped behind him, tangling with the light cruisers and destroyers stationed to the rear of the main British battle fleet as he cut through, but avoiding the big guns. By early the next morning, Scheer was out of reach, making his way through the protective minefields off the German coast.

Unsatisfying Events

Both the Germans and the British were frustrated. The High Seas Fleet had sunk three battle cruisers, three smaller armored cruisers, and eight lesser vessels, and had drowned or incinerated some six thousand British sailors. The British had sunk one battle cruiser, one old battleship, and a total of nine light cruisers and destroyers. German personnel losses were a bit more than twenty-five hundred. On that basis, the Germans could—and did—declare victory. But strategically very little had changed. The British blockade was unbroken, and the plan of hitting and destroying a significant part of the

Grand Fleet in isolation had failed. The British, though, were, if anything, more unsatisfied still. Jutland was no Trafalgar, even if the High Seas Fleet had retreated, and even if it was still effectively bottled up in home waters. That was a pre-Trafalgar, not a post-Trafalgar situation. In subsequent years, Beatty was questioned for remissness in signaling, Jellicoe for failing to pursue, and Scheer for deciding to retreat. The only major commander or sub-commander to escape significant recrimination in the aftermath was Admiral Hipper, who had done pretty much what he was supposed to.

Jutland would prove to be the only full-scale battle ever fought between dreadnought fleets, and it proved for both sides a disappointment. Battleships were the cutting-edge weapon of the time, very expensive and very impressive, and a great deal had been expected of them. They inspired a deep, almost aesthetic, affection and awe, not only in sailors, but to a surprising degree, among civilians. They looked the way a warship, a capital ship, was supposed to look, and they spoke to the imagination in a way that submarines and even what would prove to be the new capital ship, the asymmetrical and unseemly floating airfields that would come to dominate later on, did not. And they would maintain a real, if diminished, usefulness in a supporting role as a fire support and floating offshore artillery platform for generations to come. But after Jutland, as became clear sooner even than one might have supposed, the heyday of the battleship was past.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. How did the British dreadnought “battle cruisers” hope to make up for their lighter armor?
2. What criticisms did the major commanders receive following Jutland?

Suggested Reading

Gordon, Andrew. *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996.

Other Books of Interest

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Spector, Ronald H. *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

Lecture 12: The Battles of the Atlantic

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Ronald H. Spector's *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*.



Unable to break the British blockade with the High Seas Fleet, the Germans had recourse to other methods, designed to subject Britain to comparable pressures, which both in World War I and in World War II came at least within sight of succeeding. The *unterseeboot* proved in the event a very effective weapon, and the British and their allies had to call upon all of their ingenuity to counter it.

World War I

Though inventors had been working upon submersibles of one sort or another for more than a century by the outbreak of the Great War, it was only during that conflict that it assumed any real military prominence. And if the German High Seas Fleet, constructed with such enthusiasm as naval-minded Germans looked forward to “*Der Tag*,” to the glorious “day” when they would at last defeat the British fleet, in the end the fleet proved a disappointment in contesting for control of the seas. German submarines did very much better—despite the high political, and ultimately the high military cost of employing them. All sides were well aware of what was at stake. Admiral Sir David Beatty, the British battle-cruiser commander at Jutland, observed in January 1917 that “the real crux lies in whether we blockade the enemy to his knees or whether he does the same to us.” Admiral Scheer came to the same conclusion within a few weeks of Jutland: “A victorious end to the war . . . can only be looked for by the crushing of English economic life through U-boat action against English commerce” (both quoted in Spector).

The U-boats did their formidable best. The intensity of the U-boat blockade, though, waxed and waned in accordance with the wider political and military situation. Germany first began attacking merchant ships without warning in February 1915, when the Western Front was already deadlocked. It was on May 7, 1915, that U-20 sank the Cunard liner *Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland, thereby killing 1,198 people, 785 of them civilians, and 139 United States citizens. The United States was outraged and very nearly declared war, and by September 1, Germany agreed to refrain from attacking merchant shipping without warning and to do what it could to allow merchant sailors and passengers to escape. But the distant British blockade remained unrelenting, the Western Front remained deadlocked, and shortages at home grew more acute. By March 1916, the Germans were pressing again, only to back off once again to political pressure in early May.

By the end of 1916, though, shortages in Germany had grown acute, and pressure from the high command forced a change in German policy. On January 9, 1917, Germany announced that unrestricted submarine warfare would resume in February. The high command was under no illusion as to what this was likely to mean. They deliberately took a calculated risk, hoping that they could drive Britain out of the war and win it before American intervention, which the resumption of unrestricted submarine attacks rendered a near certainty, became effective enough to turn the tide. In the end, they came close to succeeding. In the spring of 1918, the Allies were teetering on the brink. But they held, and in the end prevailed.

In February 1917, with fewer than one hundred submarines at sea, the Germans managed to sink 540,000 tons of shipping. In March they did better still, sinking 594,000 tons. And in April, even better than that, sinking a staggering total of 860,000 tons, so that one out of four ships departing from Britain could anticipate a one-way voyage. These were unsustainable losses, and Admiral Fischer's question, "Can the Army win the war before the Navy loses it?" took on an urgent force.

But then the tide turned. For one thing, the United States at last entered the war on April 6, 1917. And for another, the British Admiralty at last acceded to suggestions from Admiral Beatty and Admiral William S. Sims, the American naval representative in London, and more to the point, no doubt, from British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, that a seemingly antiquated practice from the Napoleonic era be revived, that of sailing in convoys. To many at the Admiralty this seemed like folly—to gather ships together would only give the U-boats easier targets. But it didn't work out that way, in large part because, as Winston Churchill observed, on an oceanic playing board, a convoy is not much easier to find than a single ship, and convoys, by definition, have at least some protection from escorts.

In any case, the first trial convoy departed from Gibraltar on May 10, 1917, and its success was such that the practice was soon adopted wherever feasible. Losses at sea went down at once, still substantial, about 300,000 tons of shipping per month until June 1918. And that rate of attrition, painful as it was, could be withstood.

Successful U-boat captains, like their counterparts in the Pfalzs and Fokkers over France, became popular heroes. But even for them it was a dangerous game. Casualty rates for the U-boat service were nearly 40 percent, and then as now, submarine warfare does not leave many wounded.

World War II

Twenty-odd years later, in World War II, the situation for Britain was even more desperate. Not so much because the Germans were sinking more shipping. On a month by month basis, they often weren't. But because, when the situation became most acute, Britain was fighting without allies save the Commonwealth nations. And when in 1941, first the USSR and then the United States joined the United Kingdom in the fight, Russia, in desperate peril in her own right, was in no position to help and America, having spent two years doing its best to stay out of the conflict, needed time to gather its resources.

When the war began, on September 1, 1939, German submarine commander Karl Dönitz had only fifty-seven submarines at his disposal, not all of them fit for ocean service. The British and Americans, meanwhile, had developed, if not entirely perfected, the undersea detection device known to Americans as “sonar” and to the British as “ASDIC.”

U-boat attacks succeeded in sinking the aircraft carrier *Courageous* and within Scapa Flow itself, U-boat ace Kapitänleutnant Günther Prien sank the battleship *Royal Oak*, but until the fall of France in June 1940, commerce losses to U-boats were relatively light. From mid-1940 on, however, the Germans were able to make use of Vichy ports on the Bay of Biscay, much closer to the main shipping lanes, and British losses began to mount, to roughly 80,000 tons a month early in the year to 375,000 tons in June, just under 300,000 a month through October. The German intelligence service was at this point reading British code, and the Germans were mounting multiple-submarine “wolf pack attacks” on British shipping. Indeed, from June 1940 to June 1941, the British lost more than 4,000,000 tons of shipping, with 1,800,000 lost in Allied and neutral fleets.

The British once again made use of convoys, with substantial Canadian help, and after Franklin D. Roosevelt won his third term in November 1940, increasing American help as well, even before Pearl Harbor, but even still British imports had fallen to roughly two-thirds their previous levels by January 1942.

The British gained substantial assistance, however, from the celebrated Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park. The British took intelligence very seriously and recruited some of the best minds in Britain, among them Alan Turing, one of the fathers of modern computing, to work on cryptography, and at its peak, Bletchley Park drew on the skills of some ten thousand workers. They got a break when in May 1941 an “enigma” code machine was recovered from the German U-110. This allowed the British, from May to December, to reroute convoys to avoid U-boat wolfpacks whose location had been decrypted. Likewise helpful was the U.S. decision during the summer, again, well before Pearl Harbor or any American declaration of war, to help escort convoys through the western portion of their trans-Atlantic journey.

Nevertheless, convoy losses were still substantial, particularly in the so-called mid-ocean “air gap” between Newfoundland and Ireland, out of the range of air-cover until early 1943.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, when America entered the war, Dönitz transferred his efforts to American waters, where over the next eight months, despite the coastal convoys introduced in April, U-boats succeeded in sinking 400,000 tons of shipping per month, focusing particularly on tankers. In July, however, the German submarine fleet returned in force to the mid-Atlantic. And the next few months, up until March 1943, were to prove the high point of German success. The “air gap” remained in force through the winter of 1942–43, and to compound the Allies’ problems, German intelligence had not only broken Allied codes, but in February 1942 the Germans had introduced a new cipher, which Bletchley Park was not able to decipher until November, when they received materials captured from U-559. Dönitz at this point had more than 350 U-boats at his disposal and was able to detach one hundred or

more on patrol at once and to form wolf-packs that numbered up to forty. Up until March all this proved very effective, and convoys or no, the Allies were losing 500,000 and more tons of shipping per month, as at a peak, more than two hundred U-boats were swarming the sea-lanes.

And then, very quickly, the tide turned. In April 1943, the Allies lost 253,000 tons of shipping. In May, 206,000. And in June, only 28,000. What made the difference, above all, was the closing of the “air gap.” In August 1942, the first B-24 long-range bombers became available. But more important still was the introduction of “escort carriers,” small aircraft carriers laid down on merchantman hulls designed to provide convoys with essentially on-site air support. The British built the first, HMS *Audacity*, late in 1941, and by 1943 they were present in decisive numbers. The formation of “hunter-killer groups,” composed of destroyers, destroyer escorts, and escort carriers, helped. Better radar helped. And Bletchley Park, of course, helped. But it seems to have been the escort carriers that helped most.

In any case, serving on a U-boat, always dangerous, soon became near suicidal. By the end of 1943, the Germans lost 237 U-boats. In the first half of 1944, they lost 130 more. By the end of the war, they had lost more than 780, and out of the roughly 42,000 men who served in the U-boat service, by war’s end, 28,000 were dead and another 5,000 or so captured. Even such losses as these, though, were not enough to put an end to the threat entirely. When the European war ended, there were still U-boats on station, and the Germans had indeed developed more advanced submarines that would have posed real problems for the Allies had the Germans been able to produce them quickly enough and in sufficient numbers. Much the same thing happened, of course, with other aspects of German technology—at war’s end the newest German tanks, aircraft, and rockets were unprecedentedly sophisticated and effective. But by then it was too late.

All told, in the Second World War, German U-boats accounted for roughly 2,700 ships and roughly 175 warships. They destroyed, in the end, more than 14,000,000 tons of Allied shipping. In that regard, though not in themselves the war-winner that the Germans hoped for, they proved about as effective as any sort of warship ever.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why did Germany resume unrestricted submarine warfare on January 9, 1917?
2. How did the Allies close the “air gap” in 1943?

Suggested Reading

Spector, Ronald H. *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

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Lecture 13: The Battle of Midway

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Gordon W. Prange, Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon's *Miracle at Midway*.



Never before or since, perhaps—not since Darius chose to flee from Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela some two millennia before—was there so pronounced a change of fortune, so dramatic a shift in the balance of power, in so short a span of time as in the decisive six minutes or so at the Battle of Midway. Before 10:00 AM west of Midway on the morning of June 4, 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy reigned supreme in the Pacific, and the United States, despite its overwhelming industrial and financial potential, had yet to take its place as clearly the most powerful nation on the planet, perhaps the most powerful ever on the planet. By 10:45, for those with eyes to see, the situation had changed absolutely. It was that quick.

When the *Dauntless* dive-bombers from the USS *Enterprise* banked from the clouds over the Japanese carrier force under Admiral Nagumo, the obsolescent torpedo bombers from the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, cursed with inferior torpedoes, had already made their gallant but fruitless attacks, suffering casualties of very close to 100 percent and inflicting no damage whatsoever. The dive-bombers did considerably better.

Nagumo had already launched carrier strikes against Midway itself, under the happy misapprehension that no American carriers were in the area. As he sought to refuel his planes he learned otherwise and decided to rearm with anti-naval weapons in order to confront the new threat. As a result, his carrier decks were strewn with fuel lines and ordinance as his air-crews sought to make the change. And to compound his problems, most of his air-support fighters found themselves at low altitudes after their deadly pursuit of the American torpedo bombers, who by the nature of their own craft, had to attack at near wave-top levels. Within a matter of minutes, three of his carriers were in flames, his own bombs, torpedoes, and aviation fuel contributing to the inferno. Neither his flagship, the *Akagi*, nor the *Kaga* or the *Soryu*—Pearl Harbor veterans all—survived the day. *Akagi* and *Kaga* were victims of the *Enterprise*, the *Soryu* of dive-bombers from the *Yorktown*. By nightfall, indeed by noon, the United States fleet ruled the Pacific, and Japanese plans and hopes were in shambles. And by 5:00 PM or so in the evening, the fourth Japanese carrier, the *Hiryu*, was burning as well, to sink at last the following morning.

It was, in all sorts of ways, a defining victory for the Americans—a victory whose long-term cultural impact was matched only by the Union one-two punch in July 1863 at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. America became at a stroke

the leading world power, and did so as a result of what would eventually be characterized as the “American way of war,” relying on intelligence, technology, and firepower—as opposed to a stoic willingness to sustain casualties—in order to triumph where triumph was possible.

The American Way of War

The decisive stroke at Midway was delivered by fewer than one hundred men, fewer, as a matter of fact, than thirty. But it took a fleet, and indeed a nation, to get them there at the right time with the right equipment and the right training. Helicopter gunships, aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, cruise-missiles, long-range bombers—even atomic weapons. Where such methods work, America has done well. The United States has consistently been willing and able to expend overwhelming financial and technical resources in pursuit of victory. It is American lives, and since World War II, to the extent possible, the lives of civilians, and indeed, of enemy combatants, that U.S. forces seek to spare. Not, perhaps, to the extent that they should. Many Americans are reluctant to see the nation engage in any sort of military action. But by historical standards, more than most. Where technology can do the job, that is what Americans tend to prefer. And in this sense, Midway was the prototype.

When the Japanese mounted a surprise attack against the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the combined Japanese fleet, and Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of the carrier task force that actually delivered the attack, inflicted heavy casualties in particular on the traditional battlefleet, sinking or damaging eight U.S. battleships. The carriers assigned to the Pacific Fleet, though, escaped the attack, and as the success of the carrier-based Japanese planes suggested, carriers had since World War I displaced battleships as the most important ships in the fleet. The Japanese meanwhile and in very short order swept through the Philippines, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. The British bastion of Singapore surrendered in February, and for the moment at least Japan reigned supreme from Borneo to the Central Pacific.

Yamamoto, who had studied at Harvard and who knew the United States well, was not optimistic about Japan’s long-term prospects even so. And sure enough, by early May 1942, a United States force including the carriers *Lexington* and *Yorktown* was able to deflect a planned Japanese invasion of Port Moresby in New Guinea with a view toward striking at Australia. The Japanese sank the *Lexington* at the ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea, and badly damaged the *Yorktown*, in the first sea battle ever fought entirely by air. Neither fleet, indeed, had so much as caught sight of the other. But Japan had to call off the planned invasion, and suffered heavy damage to the *Shokaku*, one of the six fleet carriers that had participated in the Pearl Harbor raid.

Japanese interwar naval planning, unsurprisingly, had long hoped to lure the United States Fleet into something as much as possible like a Tsushima-style decisive battle, and in the next phase in Japan’s operations that is what Yamamoto hoped to accomplish. He launched a more or less diversionary

strike at the Aleutians stretching southwest of Alaska and a major strike at Midway, at the far western end of the Hawaiian chain in the central Pacific. This time, unlike in the Pearl Harbor operation, he himself accompanied the Japanese fleet, hoping to catch and destroy whatever American ships responded to the strike at Midway. The carrier force, as before, was under the direct command of Vice Admiral Nagumo.

No More Surprises

At Pearl Harbor, of course, notoriously, the Americans had been taken by surprise. Not so at Midway, and it was indeed the triumphs of the American code-breaking team led by Commander Joseph Rochefort that laid the groundwork for the American triumph. The American overall commander, Admiral Chester Nimitz, was accordingly privy to the Japanese plans, and he, in turn, prepared a surprise.

When the Japanese launched their opening strikes on Midway island early on the morning of June 4, 1942, they did not know of any United States carriers in the area, and indeed, were under the impression that the seriously damaged USS *Yorktown* had been sunk. Not so. She had staggered home from the Coral Sea and been almost miraculously repaired within two days by ferociously concentrated work to the extent that she was seaworthy enough to take part in the upcoming battle along with two other U.S. fleet carriers, the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet*. Nimitz's first choice for sea-command at Midway was Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, but he, for medical reasons, was unable to take up the command, and Nimitz replaced him with Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, with Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher in command of the *Yorktown*.

At the time of Nagumo's first strike, the American force lay northeast of Midway. Midway-based search planes found Nagumo's fleet, and at 7:00 AM Admiral Spruance decided to launch an attack at long range, hoping to catch Nagumo while he was recovering planes from his Midway strike. By 8:30 Fletcher had launched as well.

First to strike at the Japanese fleet was *Hornet's* Torpedo Squadron Eight, shortly followed by the squadron from the *Enterprise*. None scored a hit and all of *Hornet's* squadron and ten of fourteen from the *Enterprise* were shot down. Very shortly thereafter, the *Yorktown* squadrons arrived, having had less difficulty finding the fleet. Their torpedo squadron too scored no hits, losing twelve of fourteen. And then, all at once, the turnaround as the *Dauntless* dive-bombers struck.

Before being hit later in the day, the *Hiryu* launched two strikes that crippled the *Yorktown*, which finally sank on June 7. But by then the main Japanese fleet was gone—the four fleet carriers destroyed, the Japanese main fleet itself in retreat. It was for Japan a devastating and almost totally unexpected defeat. For the rest of the war they would be forced to fight ever more desperately on the defensive.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why was Yamamoto not optimistic about Japan's long-term prospects?
2. How did codebreakers help to lay the groundwork for a U.S. victory at Midway?

Suggested Reading

Prange, Gordon W., Donald M. Goldstein, and Katherine V. Dillon. *Miracle at Midway*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982.

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Lecture 14:

Endgame: The Battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Evan Thomas's *Sea of Thunder: Four Commanders and the Last Great Naval Campaign, 1941–1945*.



The Battle of Midway turned the tide, but the Imperial Japanese fleet remained a formidable and a uniquely determined adversary, and it was not until late in 1944, even with a now-overwhelming preponderance of force, that the United States was at last able to neutralize the threat in the Battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf. For reasons, in large part, of interservice rivalry—and due in no small part to the demands, not to say the ego, of General Douglas MacArthur—the United States forces approached the home islands of Japan in a two-pronged assault. General MacArthur made his way back from his refuge in Australia through the Southwest Pacific, working toward the Philippines, to which he had famously promised to “return” after his departure early in the war. And Admiral Nimitz oversaw a Navy and Marine Corps drive through the Central Pacific. By mid-1944, the Marines and Navy were ready to assault the Marianas, most notably Guam, Tinian, and Saipan, from which the new U.S. Army Air Corps B-29 bombers would be able to mount air attacks on the Japanese homeland.

A U.S. Advantage

During the drive across the Pacific, Admiral Nimitz had developed the practice of alternating Admiral Raymond A. Spruance and Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey Jr. as commanders of campaigns, as the Fleet and the Corps made their way from island to island across the Pacific. For the Marianas landings, it was Admiral Spruance in command. American forces, two years after Midway, enjoyed an overwhelming preponderance. Instead of three carriers, as at Midway, fast carrier Task Force 58 commander Vice Admiral Mark Mitscher had fifteen, the battleworn old *Enterprise*, six new top-of-the-line *Essex*-class carriers, and eight new light fleet carriers. Beyond that, he had more than nine hundred aircraft at his disposal, many of them new F6F Hellcat fighters, faster, more heavily armed, and vastly better armored than the Japanese Zero that had dominated earlier in the war. And his aircrews and airmen were well-trained. The United States had a considerable advantage over Japan here on two counts. First, throughout the war, Japan was severely strapped for fuel. America’s oil embargo was, indeed, one of the major reasons that Japan had launched the Pearl Harbor attack in the first place—in order to gain a more or less free hand in taking the oil fields in the Dutch East Indies before the embargo so diminished her reserves that she would not be able to fight at all. And as a result of such shortages, once the superbly trained Pearl Harbor veterans were gone, the Japanese could

ill-afford the fuel to train replacements. Second, it had been American policy from the outset to rotate out experienced and skilled pilots in order to train their replacements. The Japanese kept them where they were. Until at last they were no more. As a result, over the course of the war, the caliber of American flight crews remained constant, or indeed, improved. That of the Japanese declined sharply. At the beginning of the war, Japanese naval flight crews were the equals or the superior of any in the world. By the end of the war they could barely fly. And losses mounted accordingly.

That is, in fact, one reason why before the war was over the Japanese resorted to “shinbu” or “kamikaze” units. By that time their pilots were so ill-trained that they had very little chance of inflicting significant damage with conventional arms by conventional methods. Indeed, their chances of even returning from missions alive were daunting. “Shinbu” attacks were much more effective. Survival rates, for obvious reasons, were minimal, but the damage inflicted vastly exceeded what could then be done by conventional means. A quarter or more of kamikaze pilots managed to hit something as they went down, and one in thirty or so managed more or less to sink ships single handedly.

As the Marianas invasion fleet got underway, though, kamikazes still lay in the not-too-distant future, and Admiral Spruance’s first responsibility was to cover the landings themselves. Opposing the American forces, in addition to the Japanese units ashore—who in the event fought ferociously and very nearly to the last man—was a formidable Japanese force, with Carrier Division 1, three carriers and four-hundred-odd planes strong, under the command of Vice Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo. His hope had originally been to compensate for his inferiority in naval aircraft by fighting in areas where he could draw substantial support from land-based craft, but the threat to the Marianas was severe enough that he had to engage where contact was possible, hoping for whatever help might be available from Tinian and Guam.

The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot

When the United States fleet first learned of Ozawa’s whereabouts—then about eight hundred miles from Saipan—Admiral Mitscher wanted to steam to engage, but Admiral Spruance overruled him. His first duty was to cover the landings. Ozawa faced no such responsibilities, and on the morning of June 19, he launched four strikes against the American fleet. The result, for Japan at least, was disaster. The new American fighters intercepted the Japanese fifty or more miles from Task Force 58, shooting down many, and of those that survived, many more were downed by anti-aircraft fire. The attacks inflicted virtually no damage on the fleet, and managed to shoot down twenty-nine planes. The Japanese lost more nearly ten times that number, and with them, virtually all of their experienced remaining pilots. Thus the Battle of the Philippine Sea, or more irreverently, the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.”

It was not until about 4:00 PM the following day, however, that the American fleet got a firm fix on where Ozawa was. About 275 miles off, at extreme range, as things turned out. Mitscher nonetheless ordered a strike, hoping to take out Ozawa’s carriers—his own wish, of course, all along. As matters turned out, Ozawa’s fleet was even farther off than anticipated, and it was only just before nightfall that the striking force made contact. They did some damage, sinking a

light carrier and damaging others, but nothing like what they hoped for. And now very low on fuel, they had a long flight back to their carriers. It was at this juncture that Mitscher gained the deep and permanent regard of his aviators by ordering his task group to turn on the lights, searchlights and all, in order to help them find their way back, flying in effect on fumes as they were. This was a dangerous choice. Wartime fleets traveled blacked-out at night to discourage submarine attack, but that risk Mitscher was willing to run. More than a third of his pilots had to ditch or crashed on deck, but almost three-quarters of those were eventually recovered.

Spruance's fleet had effectively protected the landings and had in the process nearly wiped out the Japanese air arm, but nonetheless the Japanese carriers escaped, and from that day to this, there have been critics who thought that Spruance was too cautious and that Mitscher was right—Task Force 58 should have taken off after Ozawa at the first opportunity and done all they could to eliminate his fleet.

Among those critics, if discretely so, was Admiral Bill "Bull" Halsey, who took over the fleet for the next phase of the advance. In the fall of 1944, General MacArthur at last got his chance to return to the Philippines (over the objections of the naval high command, who thought the exercise an unnecessary distraction from the main efforts directed at Japan proper). Halsey's central mission, nonetheless, was to support the American landings to take place in late October on the Philippine island of Leyte.

Unfinished Business

Contesting this without effective naval airpower was a real problem for the Japanese and in response they came up with a complicated and ingenious plan termed Sho-1. It involved a three-pronged assault. The central idea was for Admiral Ozawa's now more or less toothless carrier force to lure Halsey away from the landings, simultaneously launching two strong surface-warfare fleets from Linga Roads near Japanese-held Singapore to break up the landings once Halsey was gone.

One fleet, under Vice Admiral Nishamura Shoji, reinforced by another steaming from the Inland Sea in the Japanese home islands, was to sail through the Surigao Strait between Leyte and Mindanao to the south. The other, stronger fleet was to thread its way to the north of the long island of Palawan, through the central Philippine archipelago, and then through the San Bernardino straight between Luzon and Samar to the south, and finally southwards past Samar to Leyte Gulf.

The main American naval force, now designated the Third Fleet, stood to the north off Samar, under the immediate command of Halsey and the ultimate command of Admiral Nimitz at Pacific Fleet Headquarters. The invasion, however, was under the command of General MacArthur, who also commanded a fleet of his own, the Seventh Fleet, led by Vice Admiral Thomas Kincaid, who was stationed to the south, near the Surigao Strait.

Admiral Kurita had a rough journey. On his way from Borneo past Palwan he lost his flagship, the *Atago*, and another cruiser to American torpedo attacks. The next day American air attacks sunk the super-battleship *Musashi*, and for the moment Kurita reversed course to pull himself out of range.

Ozawa, to the north, was meanwhile attempting to lure Halsey in his direction and away from the San Bernardino Strait. About 5:00 in the afternoon, American search planes spotted him. Halsey had also learned of Kurita's retreat. And he made his decision. He would go after Ozawa and complete the business that Spruance had left unfinished. Early in the day, when Halsey was still looking for Ozawa and expecting to encounter Kurita, he formulated a plan for four battleships, with assorted cruisers and destroyers, to pull out from his fleet and remain behind as "Task Force 34," should he make contact with Ozawa and depart with the remainder of his fleet. A later dispatch noted that Task Force 34 was not to be formed until Halsey ordered.

When he made contact with Ozawa, however, and ordered the fleet to steam north, he left no Task Force 34 behind. Not having received Halsey's later dispatch, though, through a variety of signaling mix-ups, neither Kincaid nor Nimitz was aware of the fact. Both assumed that Task Force 34 remained in place guarding the outlet to the San Bernardino Strait.

In the ensuing Battle of Surigao Strait, Kincaid's forces more or less destroyed the fleet of Admiral Nishamura. But Kurita, meanwhile, again reversed course, passed through the now-undefended San Bernardino Strait, and made his way south to Leyte.

As dawn broke off Samar, all that remained between Kurita's still formidable force of four battleships, six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and Leyte was "Taffy 3," a group of escort carriers, with supporting destroyers, and destroyer escorts, under the command of Rear Admiral Clifton T. Sprague, hopelessly outmanned and outgunned. Nonetheless, in a series of actions as heroic as any in U.S. naval history, they succeeded in persuading Kurita that he had encountered a battle group vastly stronger than in fact it was. About 9:30 PM he withdrew.

Halsey, meanwhile, succeeded in sinking three almost planeless carriers, the *Chitose*, the *Zuihō*, and the *Zuikaku*, the last of the Pearl Harbor veterans, and Mitscher at last sank a fourth, the *Chiyoda*. Halsey himself, meanwhile, stung by what he took as a sharp rebuke from Admiral Nimitz for failing to detach Task Force 34, and thus leaving the San Bernardino Strait open, was angrily and belatedly pursuing Kurita. But to no avail. The battle was effectively over. Spruance perhaps was too cautious, Halsey perhaps a bit rash—or so sailors of Taffy 3 may well have had occasion for thinking.

Even so, the Battle of Leyte Gulf—or the various battles of Leyte Gulf—spelled the end of the Imperial Japanese Fleet as an effective fighting force and remains, on some accounts, not only the largest, but the last full-scale naval battle ever fought.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Why did the Japanese resort to kamikaze pilots by the end of the war?
2. What criticism was leveled at Admiral Raymond A. Spruance?

Suggested Reading

Thomas, Evan. *Sea of Thunder: Four Commanders and the Last Great Naval Campaign, 1941–1945*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

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