



The ASC History Newsletter

100th Anniversary of World War I: Battle of Jutland



This
MONTH in
military
history ...

- 1776: The Battle of Harlem Heights
- 1779: The Siege of Savannah
- 1812: Seminole Indians ambush Marines in Florida
- 1846: US troops capture Monterey
- 1862: The Battle of Antietam
- 1918: Meuse-Argonne Offensive launched
- 1944: Octagon Conference
- 1944: Operation Market Garden
- 1950: US 8th Army breaks out of the Pusan Perimeter
- 1950: 5th Marine Regiment seizes Kimpo Airfield
- 1968: Special Forces camp at Thuong Duc attacked
- 1980: Iran/Iraq War began
- 1982: Peacekeeping troops arrived in Lebanon
- 2001: Attacks on the WTC, Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93
- 2006: Operation Mountain Fury in Afghanistan
- 2014: Airstrikes begin against ISIS

The Battle of Jutland was the largest naval battle of World War I and one of the most important sea fights in military history. The British Grand Fleet deployed 151 ships: 28 dreadnoughts, 9 battle cruisers, 34 cruisers, and 80 destroyers. The German High Seas Fleet numbered 101 ships: 16 dreadnoughts, 6 pre-dreadnoughts, 5 battle cruisers, 11 cruisers, and 63 destroyers. The British hoped the engagement would be another Trafalgar. The Germans hoped to gain world naval supremacy. Both sides were to be disappointed.

The battle took place from May 31-June 1, 1916, seventy miles west of Denmark's Jutland Peninsula. Admiral John Jellicoe commanded the British Grand Fleet, with Vice Admiral David Beatty commanding the British battle cruiser squadron. Admiral Reinhard Scheer commanded the German High Seas Fleet, with Vice Admiral Franz von Hipper leading the German battle cruiser squadron. Both sides wanted to lure the opposing fleet into a trap. The British and Germans hoped to use their battle cruisers to make initial contact, retreat towards their main body and then spring the trap. The Germans added submarines and Zeppelins to further degrade the British fleet. However, these would not play a role in the battle.

In the years after the battle, military historians have broken down the engagement into four distinct phases. May 31 1430-1700 hrs. British and German Battle Cruisers open engagement; May 31 1700-1800 hrs. British cruisers turn north to lure Germans; May 31 1800-2100 hrs. Main fleet battle; May 31 2100-June 1 1200 hrs. Night Action and German evasion.

During the initial engagement between both battle cruiser formations,

the Germans got the better of it. Three British battle cruisers (Indefatigable, Queen Mary and Invincible) were sunk and Beatty's flagship was hit in one of its turrets. The flagship stayed afloat by flooding its magazine before it exploded. It is at this point that Beatty turns to one of his officers and says in typical British fashion, "there seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today."

At this point, Vice Admiral Beatty turned his formation north to link up with the main British fleet and lure the Germans into Jellicoe's trap. The Germans obliged. At about 1830 hrs., the Germans finally realized the error of their ways when on the horizon the main British fleet appeared.

The British had pulled off the best possible formation for a naval fight. They were able to "Cross the T". This meant that the German streaming north in line were met by the British fleet sailing perpendicular in front of them. This enabled most of the British ships to fire a broadside attack from about 9 miles, whereas, the Germans could only return fire from their forward turrets.

At a disadvantage, the Germans succeeded in extracting themselves by having their destroyers lay down a smoke screen and cover their withdrawal with a torpedo attack. This phase of the battle was characterized by moves and countermoves. The Germans trying to get themselves into better position to engage the British, failing that, making it back to their base at Wilhelmshaven. The British continued to try and tempt the Germans into a general engagement. Once this was deemed impossible, the main British fleet tried to position itself between the German fleet and

its base. With darkness, the Germans slipped away.

The British did suffer higher losses than the Germans: 14 vessels (3 battle cruisers, 2 cruisers, and 8 destroyers) to only 11 German ships (1 battle cruiser, 1 pre-dreadnought battleship, 4 cruisers, and 5 destroyers). The disparity in tonnage losses was even greater. 111,980 for the British and 62,233 for the Germans. Casualties totaled 6,094 for the British and 3,058 for the Germans.

The Battle of Jutland demonstrated the German superiority of optics and night-fighting tactics as well as gunnery. The most detailed study of the gunnery in the battle concluded that the Germans fired every 20 seconds and the British every 30 seconds. Granted both sides were not very accurate with the British scoring hits only 2.75% of the time and the Germans only marginally better at 3.39%.

After the battle, German admiral Scheer claimed Jutland was a great German victory, however, this did not mirror reality. The long term effects favored the British. Their blockade of Germany continued as before, and the Germans never again risked their capital ships in a showdown battle. It was a German tactical victory, but a crushing strategic win for the British.

Increasingly, the German capital ships lay idle in port as their crews and junior officers were siphoned off for the U-boat war. For the German High Sea Fleet, the culmination of Jutland would mark a decline in their power, leading eventually to mutiny and the scuttling of the fleet at the end of the war.