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The Battle of Jutland.

By FORE TOP in Review of Reviews.

This article is dedicated to the immortal memory of Commander Loftus Jones, Y.C., and the ship's company of the Shark. Great hearts in a little ship.

After one hundred years of scrutiny and analysis the incidents and the conduct of the Battle of Trafalgar are still to some extent a matter of conjecture and of argument. The same fate probably awaits the Battle of Jutland. We have not had the full story yet; we are never likely to get it. The central figures in the battle, Beatty and Jellicoe, are unlikely ever to commit the secrets of their hearts to paper; the records are faulty and incomplete, discrepancies of time and of position exist and cannot be corrected; the mass of data is too enormous to be effectively co-ordinated. For all these reasons much will for ever remain speculative and contentious. But apart from the professional and technical side of the matter, the fact remains that no very satisfactory broad account of the action has yet appeared, and so this article is an attempt to give a general outline of what took place in the North Sea on May 31st, 1916. Let us take a glance at the events leading up to that date.

During the month of May a good many plans of re-distribution of the various fleets and squadrons were taking place or under consideration, and consequently the Grand Fleet as a whole cannot be regarded, as being at its highest point of efficiency in view of disturbances caused by all this reorganisation. For instance, the whole of the Grand Fleet destroyer flotillas were being re-grouped and had never been exercised together.

At this time Jellicoe prepared a plan to try to bring the Germans out to fight. By sending some ships to cruise from the Skaw down to the Sound he hoped to lure out some enemy ships in pursuit which would fall into submarine and mine traps, while our battleships and battle cruisers would be waiting near at hand. By coincidence Admiral Scheer, in command of the German fleet, was meditating a move at the same time. Verden had just proved a terrible disappointment to the German people and they were calling for the fleet to do something to justify its existence and the money spent on it. Scheer made very bold plans. He would station his submarines of the bases of our Grand Fleet and then bombard Sunderland with his battle cruisers. When our ships came out to catch the battle cruisers they would fall among the submarines and those which escaped would pursue the German battle cruisers and be led by them into the arms of the German battleships waiting at a certain spot. These plans were frustrated by bad weather, and on May 30th had to be abandoned. The German battle cruisers under Admiral Hipper were, instead, ordered to cruise towards the Skagerrak while von Scheer followed him with the battleships.

The British system of intelligence was so good that by mid-day on May 30th the Admiralty was able to warn Jellicoe that a big German move was afoot. At 5 p.m. it was known that the whole German High Seas Fleet had received orders to go to sea; by 5.40 p.m. Jellicoe at Scapa and Beatty at Rosyth had been told of this, and by 10.30 p.m. the whole of the British Grand Fleet was at sea. The battleships under Jellicoe were proceeding to a position off the Skagerrak, the battle cruisers and the fast battle squadron (fifth) under Beatty were proceeding to a rendezvous some seventy miles to the southward of Jellicoe. So far, however, nothing had happened of a nature to indicate that all this was but one more of the numerous false alarms. At 2 p.m. on May 31st Beatty, in his flagship Lion, accompanied by Princess Royal, Queen Mary, Tiger, New Zealand, and Indefatigable, was some fifteen miles away from the rendezvous with his light cruisers eight miles ahead. Unknown to him Admiral Hipper, with the German battle cruisers, was fifty miles to the eastward, while fifty miles behind Hipper the commander-in-chief, Scheer, was following with the German battleships. Both Hipper and Scheer were in complete ignorance of the presence of our ships. It was a situation fraught with possibilities and had all gone well Scheer must have found himself brought to action with the whole of our Grand Fleet and with his retreat cut off. But now see what happened. One of Hipper's light cruisers, neither of which could see each other, sighted the same steamer, which was steaming in between them. The German light cruiser sent a destroyer to examine this steamer while our light cruiser went herself to do so. As they neared the steamer they sighted each other and the upshot was probably unlucky for us. Beatty, on receiving the signal, which was also passed to Jellicoe, "two enemy cruisers in sight," at once altered course to cut off their retreat and steamed away from his rendezvous with Jellicoe. It is permissible to believe that had that steamer not been sighted and had the British and German ships remained on their

courses, oblivious for some time of the presence of each other, that we might have brought the Germans to action under far more favourable conditions than we actually did. Beatty continued his efforts to cut off the retreat of the enemy which our light cruiser had sighted, but it is important to note that until 3.20 Beatty and Hipper were mutually unaware of the presence of each other and were thinking, as also was Jellicoe, that it was a mere affair of outposts between light forces. But at 3.20 Hipper sighted Beatty's battle cruisers fourteen miles away, and at 3.30 Beatty sighted Hipper. Hipper at once turned tail, hoping to draw Beatty after him towards Scheer's battleships. Visibility was bad; range-finding was difficult in similar conditions which made distances appear greater than they were. Deceived by this Beatty held his fire, so sacrificing the great advantage of our guns of heavier calibre. The Germans must have been greatly relieved by our not opening fire much earlier than we did. Finally, our battle cruisers opened fire at 3.45 at what was believed to be 15,000 yards, but was probably not more than 16,000. We had lost a great opportunity of beginning well, and well begun is half done, as we were to find out.

War is a series of little mistakes leading to missed chances, and another occurred now. Beatty was in a superiority of one ship over his opponent. He ordered two of his ships to concentrate their fire on the German flagship while each of the others fired on the enemy. The signal was wrongly understood and for ten minutes one German ship was not fired at at all! The range rapidly decreased, but we did very little damage to the enemy, and the German shooting was better than ours at this moment. By four o'clock the action was raging and the German fire was fast and effective. It was at this moment that Lion received a hit by which she would probably have been sunk save for the gallantry of a marine officer, Major Harvey, who, mortally wounded and with both his legs shot off, passed an order to flood the magazines of his turret, and so saved a fatal explosion. For this action he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. At this moment also Indefatigable was struck by three shells, the explosion penetrated to her magazines; in a moment, with her crew of over 1,000, she was gone. The ships were never better than at this time and in the confusion of smoke and flame, with the water roaring up all round the ships as the shells fell, few can have had a clear perception of what was happening. Beatty turned slightly away, until at 4.5 he was out of range of the enemy.

At this moment Admiral Evan Thomas, commanding the fifth battle squadron—the fast battleships, Bismarck (flag), Valiant, Warspite, and Malaya—sighted Hipper's battle cruisers for the first time and opened fire on them. The shooting of this superb squadron was magnificent, and nothing but the inferior quality of our shells saved the German battle cruisers, for they were hit repeatedly. Praise is, as a rule, invidious, but it would be wrong to withhold it in this instance from the Flag-Captain of the fifth battle squadron, A. W. Craig, an officer of the calmest courage and of the highest intellectual capacities, to whose personal initiative and unremitting energy the unexampled firing of this squadron was due. It was a great loss to the Navy when he retired shortly after being promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral. At 4.17 Hipper had closed the range and opened fire on our battle cruisers once more. Two of his ships concentrated on Queen Mary, a salvo struck her, and in a flare of red flame and black smoke she disappeared, taking with her a ship's company of 1,266 souls. At this point the Germans had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams: in the short space of half an hour they had sunk two of our battle cruisers and suffered no loss in doing so. But their fire was deteriorating under the attack of the fifth battle squadron. Up to this time it must be recollected that Beatty was in complete ignorance of the presence of Scheer with the German battleships. But now, at his astonishment these battleships were reported in sight. The signal must, at first, have seemed incredible to him, but two minutes later his eyes confirmed it as the vast German armada came into view. There was only one thing to do, and he did it—he shaped course at once, and at full speed, to the northward to join Jellicoe. The fifth battle squadron followed with him; there was a running fight, the fury of which gradually abated until our ships had run out of range, while the Germans followed them up in ignorance of Jellicoe's presence. Jellicoe was twenty-three miles away in his flagship Iron Duke, and had with him, as well as his battleships, three battle-cruisers led by Admiral Hood, as well as cruisers, light cruisers, and destroyers. In addition to the ships of the fifth battle squadron he had twenty-four Dreadnoughts and six super-Dreadnoughts led by Scheer. His gun armament ranged from 12-inch to 16-inch while the German armament had nothing greater than 12-inch. The German torpedoes were, as he believed, though it is doubtful, superior, and the German ships enjoyed better protection. These considerations induced in Jellicoe a determination not to come to close range

with the enemy until by his superior gunfire he had established a dominating position. The first reports of the enemy which Jellicoe received at 2.20 had led him to believe that nothing more than light forces were afoot. It was not until 3.55 that he learned that Beatty was in action with battle cruisers and he then ordered Admiral Hood to join Beatty.
(To be continued.)

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