

Jellicoe on the Grand Fleet.

A Scathing Indictment of Politicians.

Seldom, if ever, has the commander-in-chief of naval or military forces given to the public so candid and illuminating a story of his war experiences as is found in the 500-page volume, written by Admiral Jellicoe and published by the George H. Doran Company of this city, under the title "The Grand Fleet." This book produced a positive sensation upon its first publication in London—as well it might; for the British people learned for the first time upon how slender a thread, in the first few months of the war, hung the fate, not merely of the British Empire, but of the whole Allied cause.

The work has been spoken of as an "apologia"; written for the express purpose of defending the author against criticisms of his strategy and particularly of his tactics in the famous battle of Jutland; but we are free to confess that a careful reading of the book has left no such impression upon our mind. Rather we carry away the impression of a straightforward story, told with characteristic "sailorman" frankness, of the day-by-day experience of the fleet, as viewed from the position of its commander-in-chief. Had the Admiral been writing a private diary of the war, he could scarcely have been more frank in his statements of defects in strategy that had evidently been imposed upon him from without, or in his revelation of the unpreparedness, both of the Grand Fleet and of its naval bases in the North, for a stupendous task with which it was so suddenly confronted.

And reading between the lines, those of us who follow the course of naval affairs in the United States, are able to place the blame for unpreparedness where it belongs. It was not the fault of the Jellicoes, the Percy Scotts, and the Beattys of the British navy that the Grand Fleet, short of destroyers, short of submarines, short of scout-cruisers, short of up-to-date range-finders and search-lights, was ordered to Scape Flow, an utterly unprotected base open to destroyer and submarine attack—no more their fault than it was the fault of our own Dewees and Simses and Flukes that our battleship fleet was less than one-half of its proper and necessary strength, and that the fleet we possessed was woefully short of scouts and destroyers, and had no battle-cruisers whatsoever.

So long as naval appropriations are made the sport of the politicians, a great naval power like the United States or Great Britain will be continually faced with the possibility of disaster. And so long as a politician like Churchill can force a Grand Fleet to do its coaling in an open and undefended harbor opening onto submarine-infested waters, or bring strong pressure upon that fleet (as Churchill actually did) to engage in such a mad venture as a bombardment of the Heligoland forts, the morale, even of the high command, will be disturbed and their sureness of themselves and their strategy shaken.

It is amazing to learn how slight was the superiority in capital ships and how decided the inferiority in destroyers and light cruisers of the British to the Germans in the North Sea during the early months of the war. Being the blockaded fleet, the Germans could elect to come out when every ship of the High Seas Fleet was in perfect shape. The British, due to continual cruising in one of the stormiest of seas, always had some ships undergoing repair or repairs. Thus Admiral Jellicoe tells us that towards the close of October the Grand Fleet was considerably weakened, apart from the fact that it had developed condenser defects: "Iron Duke" had similar troubles; the "Orion" had to be sent to Greenock for examination of the turbine supports, which appeared to be defective; the "Conqueror" (all of these it should be noted are dreadnought battleships) was at Devonport refitting, and the "New Zealand" was in dock at Cronbury. The "Erin" and "Agincourt," having been newly commissioned, could not yet be regarded as efficient; so that the dreadnought fleet consisted of only 37 effective battleships and five battle-cruisers. The German dreadnought fleet at the time comprised 15 battleships and four battle-cruisers with the "Blücher" in addition. Everyone will agree with the Admiral when he says, "The margin of superiority was therefore unpleasantly small in view of the fact that the High Seas Fleet possessed 38 destroyers and the Grand Fleet only 42."

Admiral Jellicoe says that he often wondered why the Germans did not make greater efforts to reduce the British strength in capital ships by destroyer or submarine attacks on the British bases during those early days. "They possessed," he says, "in comparison with the uses for which they were required, almost a superfluity of destroyers, certainly a superfluity as compared with ourselves, and they could not have put them to a better

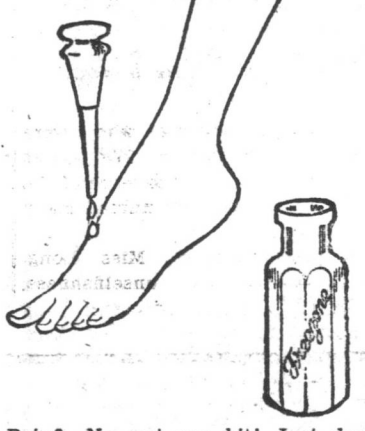
use than in an attack on Scape Flow during the early months of the 1914-1915 winter."

Speaking of the frequently-made suggestion that the Grand Fleet should make an attack upon the High Seas Fleet at anchor in its homeport, he says: "They not only possessed the most powerful and ample artillery defences, but we know also that the Germans had a very efficient mining service, and we were justified in assuming that they had protected their naval bases by extensive mine-fields. We, on the other hand, were entirely unprovided with this particular form of defence."

Taken altogether, it is evident that the Germans missed their great opportunity at this very time. How they failed to know of conditions at Scape Flow is puzzling, to say the least. The Zeppelins should have provided this knowledge. The Admiral's own suggestion is that "it may have seemed impossible to the German mind that we should place our fleet, upon which the Empire depended for its very existence, in a position where it was open to submarine or destroyer attack." Reading between the lines it is very evident that Admiral Jellicoe and his staff were not responsible for the selection of Scape Flow as the naval base in those perilous days.—Scientific American.

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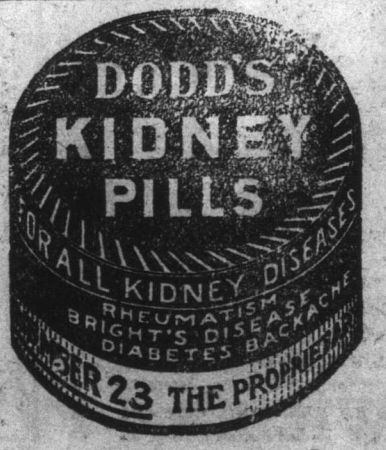


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