



In Focus

Battle of Jutland: 100 Years Anniversary

The Battle of Jutland, which began on 31 May 1916, was the only major naval battle of the First World War,¹ and the only time that the German High Seas Fleet and the British Grand Fleet confronted each other.² The battle was fought in the North Sea, off the coast of Denmark's Jutland peninsula. The battle was "confused and bloody", with the British losing 14 ships and over 6,000 men, and the Germans losing eleven ships and over 2,500 men.³ After the battle both sides claimed victory.⁴ The German Fleet had inflicted greater losses on the British Fleet, but the Grand Fleet remained the dominant naval force after the battle. The British navy were able to secure its control of shipping lanes, allowing Britain to implement the blockade, which according to Nick Hewett of the Imperial War Museums, "contribut[ed] to Germany's eventual defeat in 1918".⁵

The British Government has announced that it will hold a series of commemorations to mark the centenary of the battle, including a number of events in the Orkney Islands.⁶

Naval Blockade

According to Louise Bruton of the British Library, in the years leading up to the First World War, Britain and Germany were engaged in a naval arms race; Britain had been the "world's dominant naval force since the Napoleonic Wars" but Germany "sought to contest that dominance".⁷ When the war began, Britain was "quick to capitalise" on its naval "supremacy" and geographical position by establishing a trade blockade of Germany and its allies. The Royal Navy's Grand Fleet, which was based at the Scapa Flow harbour in Orkney under the command of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, patrolled the North Sea, laid mines and cut off access to the Channel. The Grand Fleet curtailed the movement of the German High Seas Fleet and prevented merchant ships from supplying Germany with raw materials and food. Prior to the Battle of Jutland, there had been a number of smaller clashes between the two naval forces, including German U-boat attacks and raids on the British coast.⁸

The Battle of Jutland: 31 May–1 June 1916

The Battle of Jutland started on 31 May 1916, and lasted until the early hours of 1 June 1916. According to the Imperial War Museums, it was the "largest naval battle of the First World War".⁹ The battle involved 151 British warships and 99 German ships, and it was the only time that the British and German battle fleets confronted each other.

The German Commander-in-Chief of the High Seas Fleet, Admiral Reinhard Scheer, devised a strategy to divide the numerically superior British Fleet and destroy the Battlecruiser Fleet (BCF) without

engaging the main British Grand Fleet.¹⁰ The BCF was based at Rosyth, Scotland, and was commanded by Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty. The intention was to attack Beatty's force before the main British Grand Fleet could arrive to help.¹¹ However, Scheer did not realise that the British naval intelligence was reading his wireless signals, and was able to forewarn the British Fleet.¹² On 30 May 1916, British naval intelligence warned that Scheer was planning an operation in the North Sea the following day, and the Admiralty ordered the main British Fleet, led by Jellicoe, to sea.¹³

Admiral Scheer sent a scouting force, led by Vice Admiral Hipper, to "lure Beatty's ships out into the North Sea".¹⁴ Hipper's battlecruisers engaged with Beatty's force at Jutland, off the north coast of Denmark, on the afternoon of 31 May 1916. A fire fight ensued as Beatty chased Hipper, and was led towards the rest of the German High Seas Fleet.¹⁵ Beatty's force suffered early casualties in the loss of HMS Indefatigable and HMS Queen Mary, and in the damage to the flagship HMS Lion. Following the losses, Beatty turned to re-join the Grand Fleet.¹⁶ The Germans pursued him and were led into the path of Jellicoe and the entire British Grand Fleet.¹⁷ The High Seas Fleet and the Grand Fleet clashed throughout the afternoon until it became dark.¹⁸ During the night the High Seas Fleet made its escape, and by the early hours of 1 June the battle was over.

The British lost 14 ships and over 6,000 men, and the Germans lost eleven ships and over 2,500 men.¹⁹ According to Louise Bruton, both sides claimed the battle as a victory; "Germany had inflicted greater losses on the Allies than it had suffered itself and yet the High Seas Fleet was incapacitated while the Grand Fleet remained the dominant naval factor".²⁰ After the Battle of Jutland the High Seas Fleet did not attempt to engage the entire Grand Fleet again, and German naval strategy refocused on covert underwater operations.

Commemoration Events

On 31 October 2015, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, John Whittingdale, announced that there would be a series of commemorative events in the Orkney Islands on 31 May 2016 to mark the centenary of the Battle of Jutland.²¹ Mr Whittingdale stated that the commemorations would be an opportunity "for the country to come together to honour those who had lost their lives during the Battle of Jutland", to recognise the "pivotal role that the Royal Navy played in the war effort", and to "remember the sacrifice" of the people of Orkney. The commemorative events will include a service at St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, followed by a ceremony at the Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery at Hoy. The Government announced that there would also be a series of other events to mark the centenary of the Battle of Jutland. These include:

- A wreath-laying ceremony at sea on Jutland bank by British and German ships.
 - The opening of HMS Caroline in Belfast as a museum and visitor attraction.
 - The laying of commemorative paving stones to commemorate the four Victoria Cross recipients from the Battle of Jutland.
 - The commemoration of Jutland casualties buried in Sweden, Norway and Denmark.
 - Commemorative events at naval memorials in Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham.
 - Commemorative activity in Germany in Wilhelmshaven, where the German High Seas Fleet was based, and at the Laboe Naval Memorial in Kiel.²²
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Additional Information

Key Documents

- British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016
- Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016
- Imperial War Museums, '[Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016
- Imperial War Museums, '[Who Were the Key Personalities in the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016
- Imperial War Museums, '[A Guide to British Ships at the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Government Plans to Commemorate the Battle of Jutland](#)', 13 October 2015
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Descendants Invited to Jutland Centenary Commemorations](#)', 11 December 2015
- The National Archives, '[Battles: The Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 24 May 2016

Parliamentary Debates and Questions

- Debate on 'Battle of Jutland Centenary', [HC Hansard 25 May 2016, cols 650–60](#)
- House of Commons, '[Written Question: World War I: Anniversaries](#)', 19 February 2016, 27351
- House of Commons, '[Written Question: World War I: Anniversaries](#)', 26 January 2016, 24203
- House of Commons, '[Written Question: World War I: Anniversaries](#)', 26 April 2016, 35603
- House of Lords, '[Written Question: Battle of Jutland: Flags](#)', 18 April 2016, HL7728

Press Articles and Comment

- Mark Tran, '[British and German Navies to Mark Battle of Jutland](#)', *Guardian*, 13 October 2015
- *Telegraph*, '[Battle of Jutland: The North Sea Reveals its Secrets](#)', 23 May 2016
- Maev Kennedy, '[Royal Letters to Go on Display at Battle of Jutland Centenary Exhibition](#)', *Guardian*, 30 May 2016
- David Keys, '[German WWI Warships Rediscovered in Portsmouth Harbour After Lying Forgotten for Decades](#)', *Independent*, 24 May 2016
- *Economist*, '[The Great War at Midpoint: A Most Terrible Year](#)', 2 January 2016

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- ¹ British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ² Imperial War Museums, '[A Guide to British Ships at the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ³ Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ⁴ British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ⁵ Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Government Plans to Commemorate the Battle of Jutland](#)', 13 October 2015.
 - ⁷ British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ⁸ Imperial War Museums, '[A Guide to British Ships at the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ⁹ Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁰ Imperial War Museums, '[Who Were the Key Personalities in the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹¹ Imperial War Museums, '[Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹² Andrew Lambert, 'John Rushworth Jellicoe', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹³ Imperial War Museums, '[Who Were the Key Personalities in the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁴ *ibid.*
 - ¹⁵ British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁶ *ibid.*; and Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁷ Imperial War Museums, '[Who Were the Key Personalities in the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁸ British Library, 'The War at Sea', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ¹⁹ Imperial War Museums, '[What Was the Battle of Jutland](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ²⁰ British Library, '[The War at Sea](#)', accessed 23 May 2016.
 - ²¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Government Plans to Commemorate the Battle of Jutland](#)', 13 October 2015.
 - ²² *ibid.*; and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, '[Descendants Invited to Jutland Centenary Commemorations](#)', 11 December 2015.

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