

ENGLISH 1302: U.S. HISTORY (HONORS).

Anyone who watches the History Channel knows the appeal of a well-made history documentary. This class divided into 10 two-person teams to produce a 70-minute documentary of World War I. Each team selected a topic. One team member wrote a 650-word script. The second person collected images, shot interview footage, and recruited “voices” to read historical excerpts. Additionally, person number 2 procured music and sound effects.

To facilitate production, teams constructed storyboards. Storyboarding is a Hollywood technique that matches each segment of script to a particular scene. Each team met with me for 7 hours to join imagery, moving footage, audio, and script in the movie-making software Final Cut Pro X. The Dreadnought script comes to life beautifully in a movie that includes 6 clips of moving footage, 27 stills, 8 sound effects, 3 musical scores, and 3 historical “voices.”

Andrea and Kate recount the battleship engagement known to history as the Battle of Jutland (1916). The script narrates the battle and concludes with strategic analysis of Jutland’s outcome. A live interview with a Rice University Navy ROTC professor reinforces the narrative at critical junctures. A unique feature of this video was video animation charting the ships’ tactical movements that graphically showed what “crossing the T” meant. Also, riveting footage shows a British warship capsizing and exploding.

The video that the students created that accompanies the script may be accessed at <https://sites.google.com/site/livingstonhomepage/wwi-page>

–Craig Livingston

THE DREADNOUGHTS: NAVAL POWER

A Video Documentary Clip and Script
by
Andrea Clark and Kate Fabian

Transition from Previous Segment

Sea power supplied the trenches. A strong navy could cripple an enemy or strengthen an ally.

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The Royal Navy, a symbol of pride and power, glorified Great Britain through maritime dominance that lasted centuries. Bigger than its competitors, the British

navy could fight at sea or blockade an enemy coast. However, Germany's naval building program threatened Britain's era of supremacy with new battleship innovations to confront the Royal Navy. An arms race began leading up to the navies clashing at Jutland in 1916.

In 1906, Britain completed a revolutionary new ship design that elevated the Royal Navy's intimidating demeanor to new heights. This new ship, named *HMS Dreadnought*, was fast, heavily armored and had all big guns, making all other warships obsolete.ⁱ Such a powerful build made it the archetype for a new line of ships. The German Kaiser joined in a naval arms race against Britain to prevent his enemy from obtaining the upper hand.ⁱⁱ While Britain emphasized their numbers, Germany focused on their quality of guns, armor and ship stability.ⁱⁱⁱ

Expert Interview

Lietutenant Jason Fite, Rice University Navy ROTC, talks about the greater power and protective armor of German ships though British battlecruisers had an edge in speed.

By 1914, Britain took the numerical lead in this arms race with 38 ships and Germany tailing with 24.^{iv}

Stationed in the North Sea, the Grand Fleet established a blockade that prevented any trading from reaching Germany.^v This blockade suffocated Germany of resources and crippled it with a severe depression. Germany had to break free to survive.

Reinhard Scheer, the German Admiral of the High Seas Fleet directed the offensive. The ratio of ships had the Germans at a disadvantage, preventing a successful all-out assault. Therefore, Scheer planned on luring out the British Navy in pieces. In 1916, the two forces clashed at the Battle of Jutland.

German destroyers under Franz von Hipper's command initiated the battle by luring part of the Royal Fleet away from the pack and towards the main force of the High Seas Fleet. Admiral Richard Beatty of the British Navy took the bait and signaled his battlecruisers to steam after the ships. Once sighted, Hipper opened fire and devastated Beatty's thinly armored battlecruisers, causing massive damage and sinking several of his ships.^{vi}

Rapidly losing battlecruisers, Beatty witnessed the destruction of *HMS Queen Mary* and made the renowned statement [read by historical voice actor]: "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today."^{vii}

The sinking of *Queen Mary* alone caused over 1,200 deaths.^{viii} Such a disaster resulted from bypassing anti-flash precautions to increase rate of fire.^{ix}

Beatty's only hope to prevent further destruction was to turn north towards Admiral John Jellicoe's dreadnought fleet. Both Hipper and Scheer followed Beatty seeing an opportunity to "cross the T" of the German line of ships and rain massive firepower upon them.^x All in all, Jellicoe's dreadnought force overwhelmed the Germans, dealing damage and causing the High Seas Fleet to flee to its base.

The casualties were dramatic. Germany lost 11 ships and over 2,500 sailors. Britain suffered even more: 14 sunken ships and over 6,000 dead.^{xi} The Germans

claimed victory for inflicting such heavy British losses. German Admiral Scheer declared [read by historical voice actor]:

We have been able to prove to the world that the English Navy no longer possesses her boasted irresistibility. ^{xii}

Controversially, Britain declared triumph for maintaining the blockade.^{xiii} In the words of Admiral Jellicoe [read by historical voice actor]:

Victory is judged not merely by material losses and damage, but by its results... the High Sea Fleet never again, up to the end of 1917, - ventured much outside the 'Heligoland triangle' ... This is hardly the method of procedure that would be adopted by a Fleet flushed with victory and belonging to a country which was being strangled by the sea blockade.^{xiv}

Expert Interview

Lietutenant Jason Fite, Rice University Navy ROTC, tells viewers that the tactical victory of the High Seas Fleet did not translate into strategic advantage. Despite a 2-1 kill-rate at Jutland, the German navy spent the rest of the war in port.

Indeed, the Germans displayed their superior naval technology with long-range armor-piercing shells, stronger reinforcement and accurate guns.^{xv} Though Britain boasted a greater number of ships, their quality wasn't up to par with German craftsmanship. The previously indisputable Royal Navy realized her weaknesses as the German fleet proved its power. However, the German High Seas Fleet remained in port the rest of the war and did nothing again to challenge Britain's strategic advantage.

Notes

ⁱ "HMS Dreadnought 1906," *Royal Navy*, online at <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk> (accessed February 18, 2014).

ⁱⁱ Dan Cruickshank, "A New Enemy," BBC, 2011, online at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/invasion_ww1_01.shtml (accessed February 10, 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ Castello Di Brazzà, "The Risk Theory and the Tirpitz Plan," online at www.castellodibrazza.com (accessed February 20, 2014).

^{iv} Chris Trueman, "The Naval Race 1906 to 1914," *History Learning Site*, http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/naval_race_1906_to_1914.htm (accessed February 11, 2014).

^v Robert Massie, *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany, and the Winning of the Great War at Sea* (New York: Random House, 2003), 513.

^{vi} Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 593.

^{vii} John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare*, (New York, Viking, 1989), 128.

^{viii} "Battle of Jutland-Losses," *Great War Primary Documents Archive*, January 16, 2000 (accessed February 10, 2014. <http://www.gwpda.org/naval/jutlos.htm> (accessed February 9, 2014).

^{ix} Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 667.

^x "Crossing the T" was a naval maneuver that involved the broadside of a ship crossing the bow of an enemy ship. The ship presenting its broadside (top of the T) had a firepower advantage because it could swivel all the turrets against the other ship, which could only fire its forward guns.

^{xi} Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 665.

^{xii} "After the Battle-Chapter 11a, "Germany's High Sea Fleet in the World War," Chapter 11, "After the Battle," *The War Times Journal*, online at <http://www.richthofen.com/scheer/scheer11a.htm> (accessed February 11, 2014). German Translation: *Wir haben dieser Welt zeigen können, daß die Englische Flotte nicht länger so unüberwindlich ist, wie man immer meinte.*

^{xiii} Massie, *Castles of Steel*, 665.

^{xiv} John Simkin, "Battle of Jutland," Spartacus Educational, online at <http://spartacus-educational.com/FWWjutland.htm> (accessed February 10).

^{xv} Keegan, *Price of Admiralty*, 136, 154.