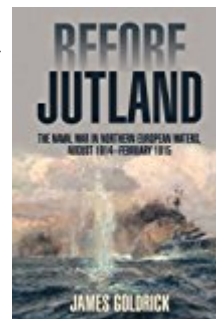


James Goldrick. *Before Jutland: The Naval War in Northern European Waters, August 1914-February 1915.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2015. Illustrations, maps. 400 pp. \$44.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-59114-349-9.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

James Goldrick's *Before Jutland* is a substantially reworked and expanded version of his *The King's Ships Were at Sea: The War in the North Sea, August 1914-February 1915* (1984). *Before Jutland* does more than simply revise his original book, however: it includes an operational history of the fighting in the Baltic Sea as well as the North Sea. In the author's own words, "Indeed, my inclusion of the Baltic in this edition comes from a recognition that neither the British nor the Germans' North Sea activities can be fairly assessed without giving due weight to this theater of operations" (p. 4). Goldrick's intent is to create a narrative of the first six months of World War I in the North and Baltic Seas, weaving traditional operational history into a larger picture of the war at sea, explaining not only what happened but also why it happened, how it happened, and how the events of that period reverberated throughout the rest of the war and beyond.

The first six chapters are devoted to setting up the strategic framework of the British, German, and Russian fleets immediately prior to the

war, opening with a set piece on the German naval review that occurred on June 24, 1914. These chapters emphasize the character and force composition of each of the three fleets; briefly introduce some of the main historical actors; and explain some of the unique environmental factors that made fighting in northern waters so different from, for example, naval warfare in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. The remaining ten chapters, accompanied by a conclusion, depict the events of August 1914 to February 1915 in those theaters in a roughly chronological order. Goldrick attaches great importance to the Royal Navy's battle with the High Seas Fleet in the North Sea, but not to the exclusion of fighting in the Baltic. Given his period, a focus on this theater, particularly the battles of Heligoland Bight and Dogger Bank, is eminently reasonable.

Goldrick's greatest strength is the ability to deftly integrate the accounts of battles and fighting and the consequences of those actions on key commanders and the unfolding of the war in general. Chapter 9, on Heligoland Bight, is noteworthy.

thy for explaining why the British and German commanders acted as they did, including how they positioned their own ships and reacted to the actions of the enemy. He does a superb job of capturing the confusion of battle, demonstrating how the misinterpretation or loss of signals caused the British to turn what could have been a significant victory into a much more minor one. The author describes the immediate aftermath of the battle as well, showing how the British, on the one hand, tried to address the fundamental and systemic errors that plagued British communication, and how the Germans, on the other hand, shifted their own tactical and strategic priorities to overcome the numerical and technological advantages that the Royal Navy possessed. As Goldrick rightly points out, the German problems were far more difficult to correct because they did not stem purely from inefficiency, incompetence, or simple bad luck: they required Germany to reconceptualize and retrofit the High Seas Fleet. The defeats at Heligoland Bight and Dogger Bank also convinced Germany to seek unconventional methods to challenge British maritime supremacy, specifically the brief unrestricted submarine warfare campaign that began in February 1915.

The biggest weakness of *Before Jutland* is the coverage of the Baltic campaign. The author admits that his strength and primary focus is the Royal Navy in the introduction. However, that does not preclude Goldrick from effectively examining the German fleet's activities as well. The book devotes little space to the Baltic in general or the Russian navy in particular: only two of the book's chapters, totaling twenty-four pages, cover the Baltic Sea in great detail. The introductory chapter on the Russians—chapter 4—is a scant five pages. Other chapters include mentions of the Baltic Sea, but only in the context of how it affected operations in the North Sea. For example, a paragraph in chapter 12 (on the Scarborough Raid) notes that German deployments to the Baltic initially convinced the British high command that the next major German offensive was ticketed for

the Baltic Sea, until intercepted wireless communications proved otherwise. It is undoubtedly true that the Baltic Sea was not a major theater in the first six months of the war; one of the most important campaigns, the German attack on Riga and the Russian Baltic coastline, began in the spring of 1915, outside of the book's timeframe. The climate in the Baltic Sea also prevented significant naval warfare for much of Goldrick's chosen period. Those mitigations argue more for the complete exclusion of the discussion of the Baltic Sea rather than a lackluster discussion of the theater and the problems that faced the Russians.

Goldrick's scholarship is sound, relying on published primary sources and a broad selection of secondary literature. There is some foreign-language literature—German and a smattering of French—but on the whole he relies mostly on English-language material, chiefly British. He also effectively uses archival material throughout the United Kingdom and official government documents where available, with an extensive bibliography at the end of the book to help readers locate materials on the British or German navies. The reader looking for English-language material on the Russian Imperial Fleet may be disappointed, although this is largely due to the scarcity of such literature rather than glaring omissions.

Overall, *Before Jutland* is an excellent title for anybody who wants to understand naval warfare in the North Sea during World War I. Goldrick avoids overly complex descriptions of the naval operations that occasionally scare away the general reader, instead channeling his efforts into making a polished narrative. The maps are superb and accompany the prose beautifully, as do the photos. His style is very even handed, praising commanders when such praise is due and condemning them when it is not. The style is clear, crisp, and easy to read, accessible for high school, undergraduate, or graduate students. Specialists of British or German naval warfare may not find anything groundbreaking, but the book is still

worth their time as a way to conceptualize some of the key arguments in their chosen fields. The book also acts as a fair introduction to Russian naval warfare in the Baltic, if accompanied by other more substantive works, such as Lawrence Sondhaus's recent *Great War at Sea: A Naval History of the First World War* (2014) or the somewhat older but still excellent *A Naval History of World War I* (1994) by Paul G. Halpern.

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