

The United States Navy in the Mediterranean  
During the First World War  
and its Immediate Aftermath  
(1917-1923)

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*This paper provides an overview of the activities of the U.S. Navy from the entry of the United States into the First World War in 1917 through the immediate post-war years. It explains the rationale of the American government in limiting its Navy's roles, as an "associated power" to those that supported the missions of Britain's Royal Navy and, in the immediate post-war period, to humanitarian relief operations.*

To understand the operations of the United States in the Mediterranean during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, one needs first to understand the attitude to the war of the American government under the leadership of President Woodrow Wilson. Among other powers, American policy was distinctive and its distinctive features were reflected not only in American war aims, but also in the ways that the U.S. Navy operated its warships.

## Prelude

At the outbreak of the war in August 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared that the United States was neutral. Not only was it neutral in terms of international relations, Wilson and his administration insisted that American citizens should also be neutral in thought, word, and deed. Government officials, including retired officers, were not permitted to discuss the war. Most notably, when the country's world famous naval historian and strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, published a let-

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ter to the editor of the *New York Evening Post* in August 1914, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels rebuked the famous historian for arguing that Britain must fight Germany's militaristic aims and that the domination of Europe by any power was a danger to the United States<sup>1</sup>. Despite Mahan's protests that he had been making similar arguments in print for more than twenty years, Secretary Daniels forbade Mahan to publish more. Already in poor health, Mahan pen was stilled. He lived only few more months and died in December 1914.

Adhering to a strict policy of neutrality, President Wilson and his cabinet were determined to stay out of the war and to follow the long-standing American policy of non-involvement in European wars, even taking advantage of the situation and trading with both sides during times of conflict. For many Americans, the Atlantic Ocean seemed insulation against such a remote conflict. As the elected leader of a nation of immigrants, Wilson noted in 1914, "We have to be neutral since otherwise our mixed populations would wage war on each other"<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, Wilson saw the war as an opportunity for America to lead the world into a new world order with justice, freed of imperial conflicts. "Providence has deeper plans than we could have possibly have laid ourselves", he told his unofficial advisor, Colonel Edward M. House, in August 1914<sup>3</sup>. One of the things that Wilson thought that the United States could do most effectively was to provide humanitarian assistance to the civilian victims of the conflict. The U.S. Food Administration — later called the American Relief Administration — was headed by future President Herbert Hoover, who earned his initial fame through relief work in wartime Europe.

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1. ALFRED THAYER MAHAN, "Britain Must Fight, Declares Mahan". Items E103 and E104 in JOHN B. HATTENDORF and LYNN C. HATTENDORF, compilers, *A Bibliography of the Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan* (Newport: Naval War College Press, 1986); reprinted in ROBERT SEAGER II and DORIS MAGUIRE (eds), *The Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan*, vol. 3 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), pp. 698-700.

2. Quoted in GEORGE C. HERRING, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776. The Oxford History of the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 399.

3. *Ibid.*

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When it came to the armed forces and national security issues, Wilson refused for a long time to consider any form of preparation for war, even contingency planning for war. Part of his stance was a political one, as the opposing Republican political party was the group that gave the greatest support for the movement for military and naval preparedness. When the nation's military and naval leaders refused to be silent about the critical need to build up the Army and the Navy, Wilson suspended meetings of the Joint Army-Navy Board and forbade officers to give their opinion to members of Congress<sup>4</sup>. Initially, Wilson showed very little interest in naval matters and concentrated his efforts on his domestic social and economic "New Freedom" program.

At the beginning of 1915, as the administration began to look at the new Federal budget, they saw that the government's income was falling and that, like all other agencies, the budget for the Army and Navy would also need to be cut. Nevertheless, the political opposition's preparedness movement gradually began to have an effect on Wilson's thinking. The movement was even supported by film producers, who screened motion pictures such as "The Battle Cry of Peace" and "The Fall of a Nation" that depicted foreign troops invading the United States<sup>5</sup>.

### The United States Enters the War

During the first six months of 1915, Wilson's thinking changed significantly as he observed Japan present her Twenty-One Demands on the Republic of China in a move that attempted to extend Japanese control over Manchuria and the Chinese economy. On top of Japan's earlier seizure in 1914 of

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4. Naval History and Heritage Command. Operational Archives. Papers of Captain Tracy B. Kittredge. "A Comparative Analysis of Problems and Methods of Coalition Action in Two World Wars", For the International Relations Section, Annual meeting, American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 6-8 September 1956", p. 3. I am grateful to Dr. David Kohlen for providing me with a copy of this interesting analysis.

5. ARTHUR S. LINK, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 178.

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the German island colonies on the Pacific — the Mariana, Caroline, and Gilbert islands — Wilson saw Japan's continuing competition with the United States for influence in the Pacific region.

As a neutral, Wilson steadfastly opposed measures that interfered with America's neutral trade. He objected to the elements of the British economic blockade of Germany that hindered neutral trade at the same time that he objected to the German U-boat campaign, when it touched on Americans and American interests. In 1915 and again in early 1916, Wilson nearly took the United States to war in defense of neutral rights<sup>6</sup>. The major change in American opinion was created when the German submarine U-20 sank the Royal Mail Steamer *Lusitania* off the southern coast of Ireland on 7 May 1915. Of the 1,960 passengers and crew on board, only 38% or 763 survived. Among the 1,197 dead were 128 of the 159 Americans who had been on board<sup>7</sup>.

Woodrow Wilson's three diplomatic notes to Germany in protest over *Lusitania's* sinking condemned Germany's submarine warfare campaign in the name of "the sacred principles of justice and humanity"<sup>8</sup>. As Wilson's viewpoint grew stronger, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned when he thought Wilson's position was too provocative for a neutral. When Wilson received Germany's response to his third note, he and his administration had changed their views entirely about war preparation<sup>9</sup>. On 21 July 1915, Wilson suddenly took the initiative and instructed both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy to begin preparations draw up programs to strengthen the services. While Wilson's directive was warmly welcomed by the Navy, there was strong opposition in Congress, particularly among mid-Westerners and South-

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6. D. PEIFER, "The Sinking of the *Lusitania*, Wilson's Response, and Paths Not Taken, The Nye Committee and the Ghost of William Jennings Bryan", *Journal of Military History*, 79: 4 (October 2015), pp. 1025-1045.

7. The *Lusitania* Resource: History, Passenger & Crew Biographies, and *Lusitania* Facts: <http://www.rmsslusitania.info/people/statistics/>

8. Quoted in HERRING, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 402.

9. Note of July 21, 1915 to Germany in the *Lusitania* Case, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915 Supplement*, pp. 480-482.

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ern Democrats, who believed in American isolation from European involvement. As a result, the armament bill was slowed. It was not until the Battle of Jutland in May demonstrated that the Royal Navy might not be adequate to halt German advances at sea and, at the same time, suggested that battleships were superior to battlecruisers in combat that Congress finally agreed. Wilson signed the Naval Expansion Act on 20 August 1916, the largest naval authorization made in American naval history up to that time, providing for the construction of 156 new ships<sup>10</sup>. During the 1916 presidential election, Wilson's Democratic Party backed him with their campaign slogan "He kept us out of War".<sup>11</sup> Winning the election by a slim margin, Wilson redoubled his efforts to end the war, promoting ideas for a general peace that included a role for the United States as peacekeeper. He eloquently asked for "peace without victory" and to replace the balance of power with "a community of power" that recognized the equality of nations, large and small. As he saw it, there should be a new world order that would guarantee freedom of the seas, limit armaments, and ensure the rights of all national groups to form their own independent governments<sup>12</sup>. Britain responded to Wilson with a list of conditions that were unacceptable to the Central Powers and Germany began unrestricted submarine warfare. The massive bloodshed at Verdun served only to harden attitudes on both sides in Europe rather than to promote the peace that Wilson hoped to obtain. Although he still hoped that the United States could be the neutral mediator, rather than a belligerent, a series of events forced Wilson into taking sides in the war. In late February 1917, Britain provided the United States with the text of the telegram that British naval intelligence had intercepted and decoded from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman to the German Ambassador in Mexico. Anticipating that Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare would force the United States into the war, Zimmerman directed the Ambassador to

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10. ROBERT G. ALBION, *Makers of Naval Policy, 1798-1947*, edited by ROWENA REED (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980), pp. 222-223.

11. HERRING, p. 407.

12. *Ibid.*

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work secretly with the Mexicans to prepare for this contingency. In the event the United States declared war, Germany proposed that an alliance be formed between Germany, Mexico, and Japan against the United States. As part of this, Germany would provide support for Mexico to reclaim its lost territories in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Germany's intent in this was to create a strategic diversion that would hinder the United States from supporting Britain and France, allowing the victorious forces coming from the Eastern Front to overwhelm the allies.

### Admiral Sims to London

The Mexican government was not enticed by the German proposal, thinking it unrealistic in military terms, but the fact that Germany made this proposal convinced Wilson and his Cabinet that Germany could not be trusted. In late March 1917, Wilson concluded that the only way for the United States to help establish a just, post-war world was to participate directly in the war effort to defeat Germany and, thereby, to gain a position in which the United States could influence the peace settlement. At this point before Congress had formally declared war, Secretary of the Navy Daniels summoned to Washington the new President of the Naval War College, Rear Admiral William S. Sims, and directed him to proceed immediately to London, where he was to have discussions at the Admiralty to plan how the U.S. Navy could be employed in the war. Daniels and Admiral Benson, who held the newly created post of Chief of Naval Operations, were suspicious of the British and did not want to provide any substantial direct support. Sims, however, had shown, years before, that his thinking paralleled Mahan's long-held views that only a coalition of free nations could prevent Germany from achieving victory<sup>13</sup>.

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13. J.B. HATTENDORF, "Changing American Perceptions of the Royal Navy since 1775", *International Journal of Naval History*, 11: 1 (July 2014). <http://www.ijnhonline.org/2014/07/01/changing-american-perceptions-royal-navy-since-1775/> On Sims, see ELTING E. MORISON, *Admiral Sims and the*

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Meanwhile with the U-boats continuing their attacks on merchant ships carrying Americans, President Wilson asked for a declaration of war against Germany “to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles”<sup>14</sup>. With an overwhelming majority of votes, Congress passed the declaration on 6 April 1917. In the following months, British and French military delegations came to Washington to discuss the potential contributions of American armed forces. In the course of these talks, they revealed a range of secret agreements that the allies had made for dividing among themselves the spoils of war. Wilson and members of his administration were deeply shocked. The United States had no such plans for achieving political goals of its own, only to achieve what they saw as the general good of mankind. Wilson agreed that the United States would send a limited number of forces to Europe, with the U.S. army units serving under French overall command to achieve French strategic military objectives, and the U.S. Navy, serving under British overall command to achieve British strategic maritime objectives<sup>15</sup>.

In London, Admiral Sims’s role in personal liaison developed into a large command — U.S. Naval Forces, Europe — with Sims rising in rank, first to Vice Admiral in 1918, and

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*Modern American Navy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942; Russell, 1968); WILLIAM S. SIMS, *The Victory at Sea* (New York: Doubleday, 1920; Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984); D.F. TRASK, “William Sowden Sims: the Victory Ashore”, in JAMES C. BRADFORD, (ed.), *Admirals of the New Steel Navy: Makers of the American Naval Tradition, 1880-1930* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990); BRANDEN LITTLE and KENNETH J. HAGAN, “Radical, But Right: William Sowden Sims (1858-1936)” in John Hattendorf and Bruce Elleman (eds.), *Nineteen Gun Salute: Case Studies of Operational, Strategic, and Diplomatic Naval Leadership during the 20th and early 21st Centuries* (Newport, R.I. and Washington, D.C.: Naval War College Press & Government Printing Office, 2010), pp. 1-10.

14. WOODROW WILSON, *War Messages*, 65th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Doc. No. 5, Serial No. 7264, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), pp. 3-8. See [http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's\\_War\\_Message\\_to\\_Congress](http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's_War_Message_to_Congress).

15. KITTREDGE, “A Comparative Analysis”, p. 5.

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then to full Admiral in 1919. Sims saw his command as being an advanced headquarters of the Navy Department in Washington, with Sims dealing only with the Navy Department and, in turn, directing and coordinating the work of all the varied commands under his general direction. Each separate command reported to Sims for direction, materiel needs, supplies, plans, and recommendations for improving operational effectiveness. In this, one of the most important and innovative parts of his headquarters with the planning section which employed a number of highly talented officers and Naval War College graduates, many of whom would become famous two decades later as senior officers in the Second World War<sup>16</sup>. Sims's headquarters was the first major staff organization in the U.S. Navy and became a prototype for a counterpart in Washington after the war<sup>17</sup>.

Sims discussed the American naval role with representatives of the Allied navies. From this, he concluded that the most effective method for the U.S. Navy to participate was to use its forces to strengthen the weak areas in already on-going Allied naval operations. He felt that any attempt to operate American forces in separate areas or as distinctly American units would be wasteful and inefficient. Sims made arrangements with the foreign governments for U.S. Navy supplies and repairs, allowing U.S. Navy ships to put into any of the bases of

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16. Naval History and Heritage Command. Operational Archives. Papers of Captain Tracy B. Kittredge. "A Brief Summary of the United States Naval Activities in European Waters with Outline of the Organization of Admiral Sims' Headquarters." Prepared by the Intelligence Section of Admiral Sims' Staff for the Naval Committee of Congress on tour of inspection. 3 August 1918, p. 3. I am grateful to Dr. David Kohlen for providing me with a copy of this document. On this subject, see also U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library, *American Naval Planning Section London*. Monograph no. 7 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923); DAVID F. TRASK, *Captains and Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972) and MICHAEL SIMPSON, (ed.), *Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1919*. Publications of the Navy Records Society, vol. 130 (Aldershot, Hants: Scholar Press for the Navy Records Society, 1991).

17. JOHN B. HATTENDORF et al, *Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the Naval War College* (Newport: Naval War College Press, 1984), pp. 90-91.

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Allied navies in order to obtain urgent supplies, as if they belonged to that country's navy. American commanding officers signed the receipts for what supplies they received and these were passed through the appropriate channel within the Allied navy to their own headquarters, which then passed them to Sims's headquarters for auditing and reimbursement. At the height of activity in late 1918, there were U.S. naval forces based in Ireland, England, and Scotland, with the Grand Fleet in the North Sea, in the Azores, at Murmansk, Russia as well as at Gibraltar and in the Mediterranean.

### U.S Naval Forces at Gibraltar and in the Mediterranean, 1917-1918

The initial focus for the United States was in getting men and supplies to the Front in France and in combating the German submarine threat. The first thought of sending American ships to the Mediterranean area arose in July 1917, when the British naval attaché in Washington, Captain Guy Gaunt, telegraphed to the First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe, on 6 July 1917:

The following ships have been put forward with a view to being [? sent at once]. [Captain William V.] Pratt [Assistant Chief of Naval Operations] in favour. Admiral Benson [Chief of Naval Operations] told me that thought it a waste of ships but Admiral [Henry T.] Mayo [Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet] implied that he would support it. I told Admiral Benson I thought that they would be of great use: *USS Birmingham, Chester, Salem, Sacramento, Yankton, Nashville, Marietta, Machias, Castine, Wheeling, Paducah*<sup>18</sup>.

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18. The following sections is based on Vice Admiral ALBERT P. NIBLACK, USN, *Putting Cargoes Through: The US Navy at Gibraltar during the First World War, 1917-1919*, edited with an introduction by JOHN B. HATTENDORF. (Gibraltar: Caple Press, 2018). SIMPSON, p. 402, doc. 303, Gaunt to Jellicoe, 6 July 1917.

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Admiral Jellicoe cabled back the same day

Should be grateful if Gunboats *Sacramento*, *Yankton*, *Nashville*, *Marietta*, *Machias*, *Castine*, *Wheeling* and *Paducah* could be sent to Gibraltar where they would be invaluable for seeing convoys clear of the submarine area off the coast. Admiral Sims concurs<sup>19</sup>.

A month later, the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff in London, Rear-Admiral A.L. Duff, R.N., was able to supply to the Senior Naval Officer, Gibraltar, Rear-Admiral Sir Heathcoat Grant, R.N., the details of the American ships to be based at Gibraltar, bringing the total from eleven to twenty-two<sup>20</sup>.

The first American warship to arrive at Gibraltar after the United States declared war was the gunboat USS *Sacramento* (Gunboat No. 19) on 6 August 1917. Two days later, USS *Birmingham* (Cruiser no. 2) arrived with Rear Admiral Henry B. Wilson, USN, on board. Wilson had already been in command of Patrol Forces, U.S. Atlantic Fleet since April 1917. To create a distinction that would allow an eventual separation of the Gibraltar command from Wilson's, the Navy Department in Washington ordered Wilson to take command of "U.S. Patrol Forces Based at Gibraltar", but separately named the new command as "Squadron Two, Patrol Forces, U. S. Atlantic Fleet"<sup>21</sup>. While Rear Admiral Wilson was creating the initial organization in Gibraltar under the direction of Admiral Sims in London and in cooperation with the Royal Navy, newly promoted Rear Admiral Albert P. Niblack was ordered to proceed from Washington to take up the command at Gibraltar, while Rear Admiral Wilson moved to take command of U.S. naval forces in France. Wilson departed Gibraltar on 23 October 1917, and Niblack arrived to take his place on 25

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19. SIMPSON (ed.), pp. 402-403, doc. 304, Jellicoe to Gaunt, 6 July 1917.

20. *Op. cit.*, pp. 403-404, doc. 305, Duff to Sir Heathcoat Grant, 9 August 1917.

21. WILLIAM N. STILL, JR., *Crisis at Sea: The United States Navy in European Waters in World War I* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 478-479; see also PAUL G. HALPERN, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994), pp. 394-395.

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November, after stopping in London for three days of briefing from Sims and the staff in London as well as additional meetings in Paris at the French Ministry of Marine. Eventually, the U.S. Navy at Gibraltar comprised forty-one vessels — mainly small vessels such as gunboats, revenue cutters, antiquated destroyers, and steam-powered yachts brought into naval service — manned by a force of officers and men that averaged 314 officers and 4,660 enlisted men<sup>22</sup>. Niblack described the arrangement, as follows:

As Rear Admiral in command, I was thus under the U.S. Force Commander in London, Vice Admiral W.S. Sims, but operated with the Allied naval forces under all kinds of signal systems, codes, orders, and agreements, the senior Allied naval officer present being in command of the combined forces for the time being. It was in effect one large “hat-pool” from which were drawn every day the available ships of all nationalities for escorts to convoys, and the senior officer present on the occasion took charge of the escort. The convoy system, was however, practically under the British Admiralty in London, the British Vice Admiral in Malta, and the British Vice Admiral at Gibraltar, who actually issued orders to the convoys originating or formed up in the immediate waters under their control. To the credit of all concerned, the system worked harmoniously, silently and without re-creations<sup>23</sup>.

The Strait of Gibraltar was a key location. The influential American naval historian Captain Dudley W. Knox, who had been on Sims’s staff in London succinctly noted that “Gibraltar was “the ‘gateway’ for more traffic than any other part in the world. Gibraltar was the focus for the great routes to and

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22. DUDLEY W. KNOX, “American Naval Participation in the Great War”, p. 3/13. <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/a/american-naval-participation-in-the-Great-War-with-special-reference-to-the-european-theater-of-operations.html>

23. NIBLACK, *Putting Cargoes Through*.

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from the east through the Mediterranean, and from it extended the communications for the armies in Italy, Saloniki, Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia”<sup>24</sup>. The forces based at Gibraltar were concerned with several problems: protecting Allied maritime traffic:

1. Approaching and departing the Straits of Gibraltar to and from the Azores, France, and the British isles;
2. In the immediate danger zone from German submarines in and around the Straits, and
3. Departing and approaching the Straits to and from North Africa, Italy, Malta, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Imperial German Navy had begun to deploy submarines to the Mediterranean as early as April 1915, at the same time as the British and French were involved in the Dardanelles campaign. Soon, they began to put into operation pre-fabricated submarines assembled at the Austro-Hungarian base at Pola in Istria in the northern Adriatic. These boats began the submarine warfare campaign against allies shipping in the Mediterranean. The Germans also began to construct additional larger boats at bases in the Adriatic. The threat from both the Austro-Hungarian Navy and the additional submarine reinforcements from Germany created a major naval strategic problem for the Allies in the Mediterranean. In order to try to control this threat in the Mediterranean, British, French, and Italian warships attempted various types of antisubmarine operations. Without an organized allied naval command, the three navies attempted to work in agreed-upon, complementary ways, but lacked the efficiency of central direction. The initial approach that the Allies favored was to try to control the gateway to the Adriatic by preventing the Austro-Hungarian battle force and submarines as well as the German submarines from reaching the main routes of the Mediterranean. In 1915, the Allies began to organize what came to be called the “Otranto Barrage”, a blockade operation across the 72-km wide Otranto Strait, with Allied na-

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24. KNOX, p. 3/13.

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val forces based nearby at Brindisi in Italy on the western end and on the Greek Island of Corfu at the eastern end. The main forces involved were small “drifters”, converted fishing boats, dragging nets to entangle submarines, destroyers, and patrol boats carrying depth charges, supported by naval aviation and major warships. The ships, sensors, and weapons that the Allies had available to them were inadequate to control the submarines effectively, although they were effective in keeping the Austro-Hungarian battle fleet from escaping from the northern Adriatic. Initially, when the United States entered the war on 6 April 1917, the country was only at war with Germany, and not Austria-Hungary. It was not until eight months later, on 7 December 1917 that the United States declared war on Germany’s ally. Thus, the American naval forces that had begun to arrive at Gibraltar in August 1917 were careful not to proceed too far into the Mediterranean. They took no part in the largest naval battle in the Mediterranean, when the Austro-Hungarian Navy, with their main base at Cattaro (Kotor), attacked the Allied forces at Otranto Barrage on 15 May 1917<sup>25</sup>.

However, in early 1918, American naval aviation bases were established at Pescara in the Abruzzo region on the eastern Adriatic coast and Porto Corsini near Ravenna. On 21, 22, and 23 August, American naval aircraft attacked Austrian aircraft and military works at Pola<sup>26</sup>. At the request of the Allied Naval Council, the United States sent three groups of the new 110-foot long submarine chasers to Europe, of which one was sent to Corfu under the command of Captain Charles P. Nelson. These vessels with gasoline engines and equipped with underwater sound-detection devices were a distinctive and innovative design that the U.S. Navy developed for antisubmarine work, producing a total of 441 of these between 1917 and 1919 for both the U.S. and Allied navies<sup>27</sup>. On 2 October

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25. PAUL HALPERN, *The Battle of the Otranto Straits: Controlling the Gateway to the Adriatic in World War I* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

26. KNOX, p. 11/13.

27. *Op. cit.*, pp. 9/13, 10/13. See also “The Subchaser Archives”, <http://www.subchaser.org/statistics>

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1918, Captain Nelson with twelve American submarine chasers from Corfu joined in the Allied attack on Durazzo (Durrës), Albania, a port that the Germans and Austrians were using to send supplies to their ally, Bulgaria. British and Italian cruisers bombarded the port and the shipping of the Central Powers that was anchored there, while destroyers and American submarine chasers were assigned to screen the heavy warfare ships from submarine attack. Submarine Chaser 129, commanded by Ensign Jacoby, attacked the submarine U-28 and Submarine Chasers 215 and 128 attacked U-31. The American naval command claimed to have sunk both submarines, based on their sightings of steel plates, surface oil, and bubbles<sup>28</sup>. Although severely damaged, both enemy submarines survived<sup>29</sup>. This was the largest Mediterranean naval engagement that the U.S. Navy participated in during the war.

In the Atlantic, Channel, and the North Sea, the adoption of convoy operations after May 1917 proved to be a very effective countermeasure to the German submarine threat. In April 1917, Britain's ally, Japan, sent a squadron of destroyers and a cruiser which effectively assisted with the convoy operations in the Mediterranean, but as Admiral Niblack noted,

...the convoy system was apparently less effective in the Mediterranean than in the Atlantic... due to the narrowness of the Mediterranean, whereby the choice of routes was so restricted; the slowness of the cargo ships; and the relatively inferior character of the escort ships, which were the older and less effective ships, the newer and more efficient ones being used in the Atlantic and Channel<sup>30</sup>.

On 29 October 1918, American naval forces in the Mediterranean learned that Austria-Hungary was about to sign an armistice and that the German submarines in the Adriatic were refueling and preparing to attempt to make their way back to Germany through the Strait of Gibraltar. All available Ameri-

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28. KNOX, p. 10/13.

29. HALPERN, *A Naval History of World War I*, p. 176.

30. NIBLACK, *Putting Cargoes Through*.

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can vessels were gathered at Gibraltar, including seven submarine chasers that had just arrived from the United States via the Azores; eleven more came with the destroyer USS *Parker* from Plymouth, England. Within hours of their arrival, they were deployed in offensive barrage lines with British naval forces that totaled thirty ships. The German submarines successfully passed through the Strait. On 9 November, two days before the armistice with Germany, the pre-Dreadnought battleship HMS *Britannia*, escorted by the destroyers HMS *Defender* and USS *Decatur* were off Cape Trafalgar, entered the Strait after a passage from South Africa, when *UB-50* attacked and sank *Britannia*<sup>31</sup>.

When the war ended, the American naval effort, which had begun only 18 months before, had not yet reached its full potential. The U.S. Navy's development of the naval mine and its wide use in the North Sea Mine Barrage showed that it appeared to be a more effective anti-submarine weapon than the floating barrage using trawlers with antisubmarine nets. The U.S. Navy was in the process of bringing its naval mines into use for the Otranto Barrage and, in order to prevent the development of a German submarine base at Constantinople, plans were being made to lay a mine barrage across the Aegean, from the mainland of Greece to the island of Samos, using the intervening islands to advantage. When the war ended, construction had just begun on an American mine warfare base at the French naval base at Bizerte, Tunisia. This base was intended to support both the Otranto and the Aegean mine barrages<sup>32</sup>.

### U.S. Naval Operations in Support of the Post-War Settlement, 1919-1923

On 11 November 1918, the American naval forces in the Mediterranean received the news that the Armistice had been

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31. KNOX, p. 10/13.

32. *Op. cit.*, p. 8/13.

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signed and this was immediately followed by orders to cease hostilities. Plans for demobilization were made and all of the operating forces were ordered to return to the United States as rapidly as possible, except USS *Nahma* which was on duty in Constantinople; the *Buffalo*, retained as flagship and repair-ship at Gibraltar with four large destroyers; and the cruiser *Birmingham* with the destroyers *Gregory*, *Luce*, *Stribling* and *Israel*, assigned to the Adriatic in connection with the surrender of the Austro-Hungarian Navy<sup>33</sup>. The two separate situations that the U.S. Navy was involved in the immediate post-war years had much to do with President Wilson's objectives for the peace and arose directly from the peace terms. Both occurred nearly simultaneously, although the Adriatic operations began and ended somewhat earlier than those in Turkish waters.

*Operations in the Adriatic*<sup>34</sup>. — In September 1918, Austria-Hungary had addressed a peace note to the United States, but President Wilson was suspicious of its sincerity and rejected it. In the following month, Austria-Hungary joined Germany in requesting a peace on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. By this time, Wilson had already recognized the Czech National Council and was sympathetic to Yugoslav national aspirations to the point that the opportunity for autonomous development that Wilson's Tenth Point had asserted to the peoples of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was no longer enough. Wilson had already gone further and had tacitly recognized the intention to dissolve the Austro-Hungarian Empire, even as its authority and military capabilities were rapidly dissolving. Unaware that the armistice was to go into effect after a 24-hour hiatus, the Austrian Army laid down its weapons as the

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33. NIBLACK, *Putting Cargoes Through*.

34. The following section is based on the 99-page, unpublished study in typescript by Dr. A.C. Davidonis of the Princeton University History Department: *The American Naval Mission in the Adriatic, 1918-1921*. Administrative Reference Service Report No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, Administrative Office, Office of Records Administration, September 1943). Copy in the Naval War College Library, Shelf number VA52.A24 No. 4.

## *The United States Navy in the Mediterranean*

Italian Army moved forward and captured some 300,000 prisoners and much boot in that period. Meanwhile, the area that Austria-Hungary had ruled along the Adriatic had been divided into various territories, but during the war a very active group of local political leaders had promoted unification of these territories into a single state. These leaders formed a national council and declared a union to form the state of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Emperor Karl I of Austria and Karl VI of Hungary granted the former Austro-Hungarian Navy to the Yugoslav Council. This was a direct affront to the Italian, who had expected to receive the Navy as part of the spoils of war, although it recognized that mutineers in the fleet on 30 October had already hoisted the Croat flag to the warships' mastheads. The United States fully supported the nationalist aspirations of the Yugoslavs and their right to their homelands along the Adriatic, but France and Britain had previously agreed with Italy in the Treaty of London signed on 26 April 1915, before the United States had entered the war, which promised Italy the coastal areas of the Adriatic that had been held by Austria-Hungary. This was the price that the Allies had agreed to bring Italy into the war<sup>35</sup>.

On 5 November 1918, the Allied Naval Council in Paris met to discuss how to carry out the terms of the Austro-Hungarian armistice. For this purpose, a committee of naval officers was established and directed to meet in Venice to take the necessary steps. With the approval of Admiral Benson, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Sims ordered Rear Admiral William H. G. Bullard to the Adriatic to work with the three other members of the committee from Britain, France, and Italy. Since the Austrian-Hungarian Navy had already been transferred to Yugoslavia, it was no longer in Austria's power to deliver it to the Allies as the armistice had stipulated, leaving the committee in a quandary. Italy moved her army to entrench herself in the former Austro-Hungarian lands and to halt the Yugoslav nationalist movement. In opposition to this and to maintain the spirit of Wilson's Fourteen Points,

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35. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-14.

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the United States Navy occupied a hundred miles of the Dalmatian coastline to protect it for Yugoslavia. This occupation lasted until September 1921.

*Turkish Waters*<sup>36</sup>. Following the Turkish armistice signed in Mudros Bay, Lemnos, the Allied powers occupied the forts on the Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The United States had played no part in the war against Turkey and although Turkey had severed its diplomatic ties with the United States, the American government decided not to resume relations immediately. In January 1919, Rear Admiral Mark L. Bristol was ordered to Constantinople as senior U.S. Naval Officer, Turkish Waters, which included the Aegean east of longitude 21° E. Bristol's duties were initially diplomatic and dealt with the administration of food and relief supplies in the region. On 11 May, American naval forces under Bristol arrived at Smyrna and joined other Allied forces there in delivering the city to Greece. In August 1919, Bristol was named president of the International Commission of Inquiry into Greek Occupation. Later, he dealt with the situation in Armenia and the arrival of refugees from Russia. In 1922, American ships returned to Smyrna to guard American interests and evacuate more than 250,000 Greek refugees as Turkish forces entered the city. By 1924, the political situation had stabilized and the American naval forces were withdrawn, but Admiral Bristol remained in Constantinople until 1927, when the Navy ordered him to China, where a similar situation was developing.

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36. The following section is based on the 32-page study in typescript by Dr HENRY P. BEERS, *U.S. Naval Detachment in Turkish Waters, 1919-1924*. Administrative Reference Service Report No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, Administrative Office, Office of Records Administration, June 1943). Copy in the Naval War College Library, Shelf number VA52.A24 No. 2. A version appeared in *Military Affairs*, vol. 7: 4 (Winter 1943), pp. 209-220. See also, WILLIAM R. BRAISTED, "Mark Lambert Bristol: Naval Diplomat Extraordinary of the Battleship Age", in JAMES C. BRADFORD (ed.), *Admirals of the New Steel Navy*, pp. 331-373.