



Prelude to World War I

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Admiralty Trilogy & Seekrieg Seminar



Introduction

- ◆ Due to time constraints, this will be a very brief overview of a very complex topic, the finer points of which are still being debated by historians.
- ◆ We will concentrate on those events which directly affected the North Sea arena.
- ◆ All of the major powers anticipated a short war.
- ◆ Except for Great Britain, the other powers saw war as a solution to their domestic problems.



Kaiser Wilhelm II and General Staff



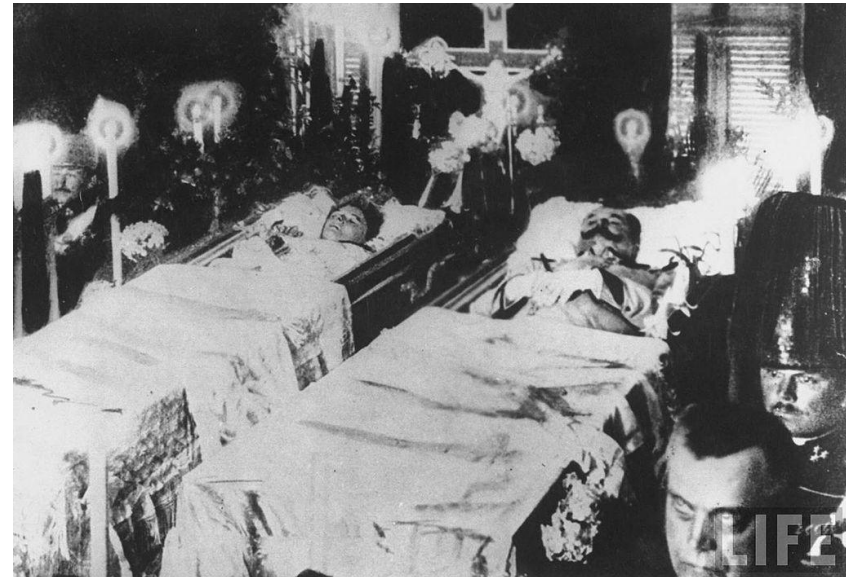
Entangling Alliances

- ◆ Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy) 1881
 - Italy uses the “defensive war only” clause to remain neutral in 1914.
- ◆ Franco-Russian Alliance 1894
 - Originally defensive only and aimed at England
 - “Balkan Inception” of 1911-12 makes any conflict in the Balkans a *casus foederis*.
 - Creates a geopolitical trigger along the Austro-Serbian border.
- ◆ Entente Cordiale (Britain and France) 1904
 - Resolves various colonial questions between Britain and France.
 - Germany’s actions had pushed Britain towards France.
- ◆ Anglo-Russian Entente 1907
 - Resolves various colonial questions between Britain and Russia.
 - Creates the “Triple Entente” of Britain, France, and Russia.



The July Crisis

- ◆ Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife are assassinated on June 28, 1914.
- ◆ Austria plans to use the assassination as a pretext to crush Serbia in a limited war, securing her southern border.
- ◆ Germany supports Austria, and seeks a short, sharp war to unify the population behind the Kaiser and shift the political spectrum to the right. (1912 Reichstag - very liberal)
- ◆ Russia supports Serbia to regain lost prestige and to restore the social order. Russia is also annoyed with Austria after Austria reneged on her promise to support opening the Dardanelles to Russian shipping.



Funeral for Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie

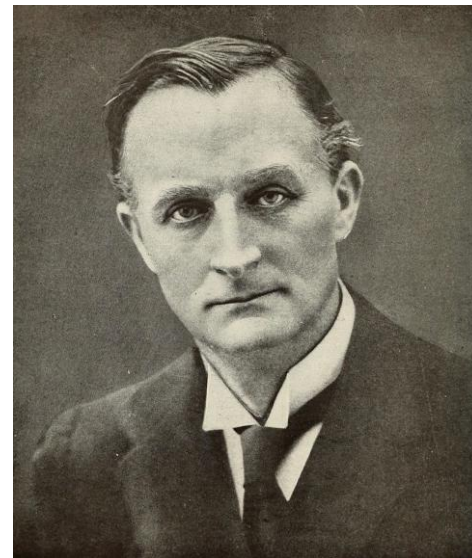


The July Crisis

- ◆ France urges Russia to be “firm” with Austria, and anticipating German support of Austria, hopes to regain the territory it lost to Germany in 1871 with a successful war.
- ◆ Britain fears the social consequences of the outbreak of war. Prime Minister Asquith and Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey are eager to support France, but most of the cabinet is more reluctant.



*Herbert Henry
Asquith*



*Sir Edward
Grey*



Failed Deterrents

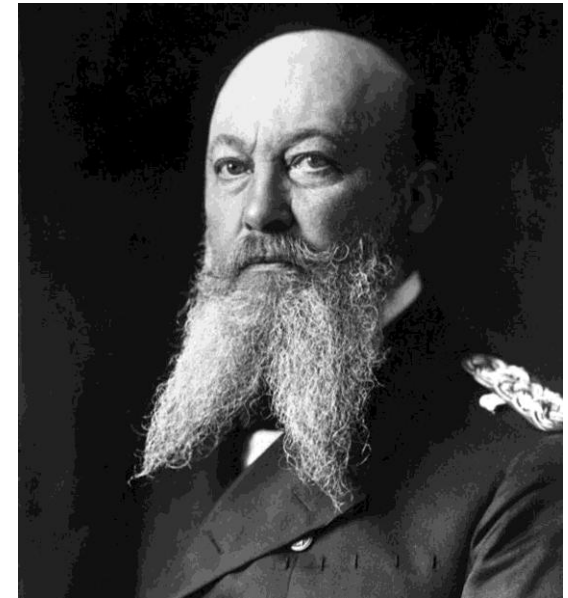
◆ Great Britain: Economic Warfare

- In 1914 55% of world ocean going steam tonnage is British-registered.
- In 1914 British firms control about 70% of the world's cable communications.
- In 1914 London dominates the mechanisms of world trade and finance
- Royal Navy planners had been developing war plans since 1907 to take advantage of these facts and destroy Germany's economy by comprehensive economic warfare.
- Prime Minister Asquith believes this “ultimate weapon” will discourage Germany from going to war – deterrence.
- The Royal Navy's plans were not implemented in 1914 due to objections from the Foreign Office and Board of Trade.



Failed Deterrents

- ◆ Prussian Junker aristocrats didn't know, understand or care about Britain's economic deterrence.
 - Britain assumed the Germans would naturally think like they did.
- ◆ Germany: The Fleet as Deterrent (*Risikotheorie*) – ADM Tirpitz
 - Germany's fleet should be large enough to cause significant damage to any "greater power" (i.e. Great Britain), even if defeated
 - Such damage would place the other power's colonies and trade at risk, leading the other power to suffer irreparable harm.
 - The prospect of such harm would deter the other power, i.e. Great Britain, from declaring war against Germany.
 - Possession of a powerful fleet would make Germany more desirable as an ally.
 - This proved completely fallacious in August 1914.

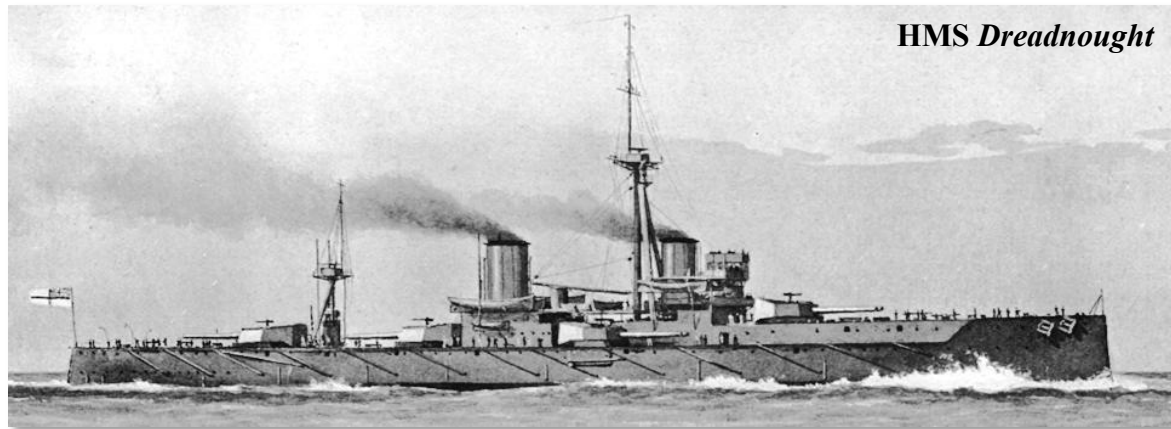


Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz



The Naval Race

- ◆ Began in 1900 after the passage of the German Second Fleet Law.
- ◆ Intensified from 1906 on with the arrival of HMS *Dreadnought*.
- ◆ Reaches a peak with the “Naval Scare of 1909”.
- ◆ The Fleet Acts and Tirpitz’s risk fleet theory created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and tension between Germany and Great Britain.
 - Britain’s reactions only fanned the flames.
 - British-French agreement that France would patrol the Mediterranean, leaving Great Britain to deal with North Sea and the Channel.
 - Fisher’s repeated threats to “Copenhagen” the German Fleet.





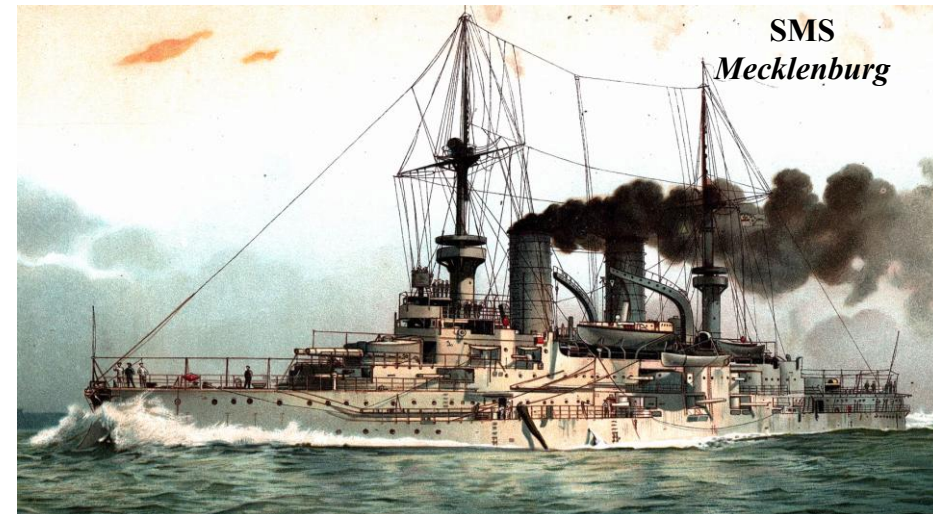
German Fleet Acts

◆ First Fleet Act

- Passed 10 April 1898. Covered the period through 1903
- Called for building 7 additional battleships and 2 additional large cruisers.
- Battleships and coastal ironclads to be replaced after 25 years
- Large cruisers to be replaced after 20 years
- Small cruisers to be replaced after 15 years.

◆ Second Fleet Act

- Passed 14 June 1900.
- Doubled the number of battleships.
- Coastal ironclads rated as battleships for replacement purposes.





German Fleet Act Amendments

◆ First Amendment (1906)

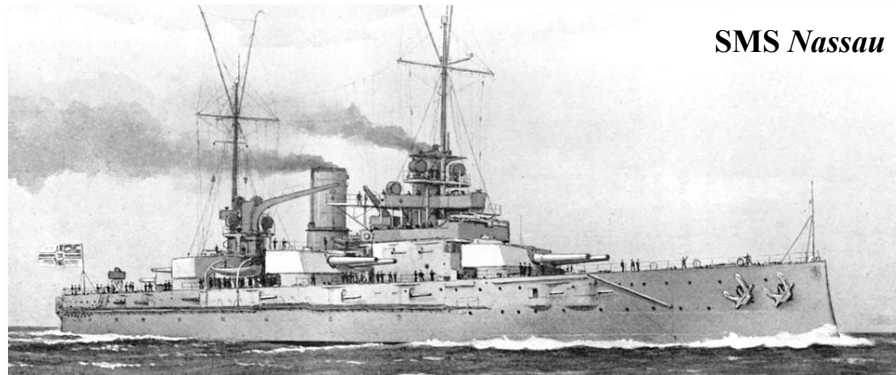
- Adds 6 large cruisers and 48 torpedo boats.
- Building rate to be two battleships and one battlecruiser per year.

◆ Second Amendment (1908)

- Replacement age of all ships decreased to 20 years.
- All new large cruisers mandate to be battle cruisers.
- Building rate to be three battleships and one battlecruiser per year.

◆ Third Amendment (1912)

- Building rate to be one battleship and one battlecruiser per year.
- A second battleship can be added in alternate years.





Building Programs

| Year | Great Britain | Germany |
|------|---|--|
| 1906 | 3 Bellerophon | 2 Nassau 1 Bluecher (BC) |
| 1907 | 3 St. Vincent | 2 Nassau 1 Von der Tann (BC) |
| 1908 | 1 Neptune 1 Indefatigable (BC) | 3 Helgoland 1 Moltke (BC) |
| 1909 | 2 Colossus 4 Orion 2 Lion (BC) | 1 Helgoland 2 Kaiser 1 Moltke (BC) |
| 1910 | 4 King George V 1 Queen Mary (BC) 2 Indefatigable (BC) for colonies | 3 Kaiser 1 Seydlitz (BC) |
| 1911 | 4 Iron Duke 1 Tiger (BC) | 3 Koenig 1 Derfflinger (BC) |



Building Programs

| Year | Great Britain | Germany |
|------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1912 | 5 Queen Elizabeth (1 gift) | 1 Koenig 1 Derfflinger (BC) |
| 1913 | 5 Revenge | 2 Baden 1 Derfflinger (BC) |
| 1914 | 3 Revenge 1 Queen Elizabeth | 1 Baden 1 Mackensen (BC) |



*5th Battle Squadron
(Irotokeo.Jr)*



Building Costs

| Ship | Cost (pounds) | Ship | Cost (Reichsmarks)* |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|
| King Edward VII | 1,472,075 | Deutschland | 24,253,000 |
| Bellerophon | 1,800,000 | Nassau | 36,916,000 |
| Invincible | 1,700,000 | Von der Tann | 36,523,000 |
| Colossus | 1,700,000 | Helgoland | 43,579,000 |
| Orion | 1,900,000 | Kaiser | 44,997,000 |
| Indefatigable | 1,600,000 | Moltke | 42,603,000 |
| King George V | 2,000,000 | Koenig | 45,000,000 |
| Lion | 2,100,000 | Derfflinger | 56,000,000 |
| Queen Elizabeth | 3,000,000 | Baden | 49,000,000 |

*One British pound = 20.43 German Reichsmarks



Naval Expenditure

| Year | British Naval Estimates (£000) | German Naval Estimates (RM000) | Equivalent German Naval Estimates (£000) |
|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1904-5 | 36,860 | 206,555 | 10,125 |
| 1905-6 | 33,152 | 231,483 | 11,347 |
| 1906-7 | 31,472 | 245,753 | 12,033 |
| 1907-8 | 31,251 | 290,833 | 14,259 |
| 1908-9 | 32,181 | 337,708 | 16,554 |
| 1909-10 | 35,734 | 410,701 | 20,132 |
| 1910-11 | 40,419 | 426,204 | 20,892 |
| 1911-12 | 42,414 | 444,153 | 21,772 |
| 1912-13 | 44,933 | 461,983 | 22,646 |
| 1913-14 | 48,733 | 467,364 | 22,910 |



Conclusion

- ◆ The causes of World War One are an extremely complex subject which continues to be hotly debated to this day.
- ◆ In 1914, most of the powers were not averse to war, seeing it as a solution to their domestic problems.
- ◆ The system of alliances guaranteed that any limited war would expand into a global conflict.
- ◆ The suspicion created by the Anglo-German Naval Race guaranteed that Britain would side with France and Russia if war broke out.