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## "These Navies and Armies and Kings and Things": Anglo American Cooperation in Anti-Submarine Warfare in World War I

Sean Naumes

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The United States entered World War I, one of the most destructive conflicts in human history, on April 6, 1917. The nation was almost completely unprepared for armed conflict, and this was especially true of the United States Navy which could not even fully man the craft that it had available. America's entry into the war also coincided with a major allied crisis caused by the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans which saw, at that time, German submarines sinking one in every four ships that left Britain's harbors.<sup>1</sup> However, within a short period of time, the U.S. Navy was working closely with Britain's Royal Navy to protect convoys and maintain the blockade of Germany that eventually help to bring about the armistice of 1918. Cooperation between the United States Navy and its Royal counterpart was extremely effective because it allowed the two powers to maintain the lines of communication between the Allies and the United States through the preservation of shipping tonnage which fueled the Allied economies and war effort. This begs the question why the cooperation between the U.S. Navy and Royal Navy anti-submarine

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Simpson, ed., *Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1918* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Published by Scholar Press for the Navy Records Society, 1991), 23.

activities was so successful during the relatively brief period of U.S. belligerency during the First World War. The answer, like any historical analysis, is quite complicated and involves the investigation of the relationships of the commanders and cabinet members and an examination of the material crisis facing the allies at the beginning of 1917. Despite the complicated nature of the eventual harmonious interactions exhibited by the British and Americans, it seems that the high levels of cooperation seen in the U.S. and British anti-submarine forces were primarily the product of diplomatic relations, severe allied losses, and a distinct lack of viable non-convoy related strategic options. This analysis of Anglo-American cooperation in anti-submarine warfare ends in December of 1917 with the establishment of full Anglo-American naval cooperation.

This paper investigates the underlying causes of the harmonious relationship that existed among the joint Anglo-American anti-submarine forces during the last years of the Great War. Therefore, it includes an examination of Anglo-American naval relations, before WWI, during American neutrality with the bulk of analysis concentrated on cooperation during hostilities.

### **U.S. -U.K. Relations Up to 1914**

Pre-war relations between the United States and Great Britain would not necessarily have indicated that the two nations would cooperate well as allies or even become allies in the event of a continental war. The United States and Britain had relatively cordial diplomatic and naval relations during the latter part of

the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but residual tensions over past conflicts such as the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the American Civil War lingered, especially among certain segments of the American public. The War of 1812 and the American Civil War were especially important in terms of naval and diplomatic relations during periods of U.S. neutrality. That is, because the war of 1812 was fought, officially, over the rights of neutral shipping and the Civil War almost saw Britain declare war on the Union over the Trent incident, negative feelings continued. With the opening of Japan in 1854, the United States joined other European nations, such as Britain, in imperial activities.<sup>2</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century the United States had major territorial holdings in both the Caribbean and the Pacific, such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Naval policy makers, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan, actually began to see the British Royal Navy as a buffer against the relatively new and rising naval power of Germany in the Atlantic and Japan in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> The years immediately before the Great War saw a relative calm between the United States and Britain and 1914 marked the centennial of peace between the two nations.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the diplomatic dance that began in 1913 introduced some of the main

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From the Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Richard W. Truk, *The Ambiguous Relationship: Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Burton J. Hendrick 1924, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*. Vol. 1. (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company), 274.

players that would shape Anglo-American relations and the two countries' harmonious cooperation of the anti-submarine campaign.

Walter Hines Page became the ambassador to the Court of St. James in March, 1913 and was immediately thrown into the whirlwind of European diplomacy and politics. Page would prove to be a key player in U.S. - Great Britain relations both before the U.S. entered the war and during the war. Page's experiences in Britain are a good example of how the two nations perceived each other before the war began. In his collected works, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*, Burton J. Hendrick includes Page's correspondence from 1913 and one letter to the President noted that the British, "Do not think of our people as foreigners."<sup>5</sup> However he also notes that the British, "think of our Government as foreign, and as a frontier sort of thing without good manners or good faith."<sup>6</sup> The British aristocracy did not seem to have a very high opinion of the Government of the U.S., and the war seemed to exacerbate this negative opinion. On the other side of the Atlantic, Americans' perception of Britain differed substantially depending on what group was queried. Page himself was an anglophile and believed that "Only the British lands and the United States have secure liberty. They also have the most treasure, the best fighters, the most land, the most ships- the future in fact."<sup>7</sup> Given his Anglo-centric leanings, Page wanted to create the best possible relationship between the United States and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 283.

Britain. Other segments of the population, most notably a large number of Irish-Americans, were suspicious of or outright hostile toward the British and Page went as far as to blame the Irish vote for the U.S. failure to establish a permanent embassy location in London.<sup>8</sup>

The most pressing issues that affected Anglo-American relations in the years leading up to the war were the two nations' interests in Central American and Mexico. The United States intensified its enforcement of the Monroe doctrine, which was the U.S. policy of preventing European intervention in the Americas, around the turn of the century, and many European nations were actively participating in South and Central American politics and trade.<sup>9</sup> Page mentions in a November 26, 1913 letter that he told a British aristocrat that "the only thing that had kept South America from being parceled out as Africa has been is the Monroe Doctrine and the United States behind it."<sup>10</sup> This concept of the British and Europeans in general did not bode well for cooperation on the part of the United States with any European nation, Great Britain included.

For their part, the British had been attempting to improve their foreign relations around the turn of the century. This was especially important for Anglo-American relations since, at that time, the United States was a growing power and the only English speaking nation outside of the British dominion.

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<sup>8</sup> Burton J. Hendrick 1925, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*. Vol. 3. (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company), 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Truck, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrick, vol. 1, 217.

Appeasing the United States was an important British diplomatic goal. This involved favors such as giving concessions to the U.S. when it came to Canadian border disputes.<sup>11</sup> Page recognized the British keenness to maintain good relations during the Mexican revolution dispute of 1913: he stated “they will not risk losing our good-will.”<sup>12</sup> Page was beginning to believe that power would eventually shift toward the United States and that Britain would soon rank second to the U.S. This enhanced Page’s campaign to gain Britain’s cooperation and mutual support.

Aside from official diplomatic relations, there was little in the way of political or military cooperation between the United States and Great Britain leading up to the war, or even during neutrality (1914-1917). One example of unofficial naval relations can be seen in the acquaintance of certain naval officers in both services due to common postings and in port visits. In his book, *Anglo-America Naval Relations 1917-1918*, Michael Simpson mentions the acquaintance of American Admiral William S. Sims and British Admiral, and later First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe as a good example of unofficial Anglo-American relations. Both men knew each other due to friendly interactions while they were both stationed in the Far East.<sup>13</sup> These ties would prove important in 1917 when Sims became the main U.S. flag officer in Britain. Official ties between the British and American navies were slim to

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<sup>11</sup> A. E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States, 1895-1903* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 123.

<sup>12</sup> Hendrick, vol. 1, 185.

<sup>13</sup> Simpson, 8.

none in 1913 but there was a simmer of possible naval cooperation that existed right before the volatile European continent exploded.

Anglo-American naval cooperation was never closer in the period before the war than in late 1913 and early 1914 when a British-American-German pact was being considered in order to vent pressure on the continent and redirect the arms race. Page noted in an August 28, 1913 letter to Edward M. House, Woodrow Wilson's trusted advisor, that, "If we could find some friendly use for these navies and armies and king and things- in the service of humanity – they'd follow us."<sup>14</sup> Winston Churchill, Sea Lord at the time, made a formal suggestion that the Germans and British engage in a "Naval Holiday" that would freeze capital ship building and foster cooperation between the two nations.<sup>15</sup> After some meetings, this was rejected by the Germans whose ship building program was dictated by law. Nevertheless, Page and Wilson believed in the "Naval Holiday" plan and "[b]y January 4, 1914, the House-Wilson plan had thus grown into an Anglo-American-German 'pact', to deal not only with "disarmament, but other matters of equal importance to themselves and the world at large."<sup>16</sup> All of this came to naught, however, with the beginning of the Great War, eight months later, on August 4, 1914.

The pre-war diplomatic stint of Walter H. Page proved to be very eventful in that it saw the development of a greater understanding between the United States and Britain and it almost resulted in a

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<sup>14</sup> Hendrick, vol.1, 278.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 280-281.



triple alliance of the United States, Britain and Germany by the beginning of 1914. However, 1913 also showed that the United States still viewed Britain with suspicion and that many influential persons in Britain did not completely understand the United States. Finally, this period saw the development of relationships between Page and important British leaders such as Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, and Admiral Sir John Jellicoe which would help Page steer Anglo-American relations through the minefield of neutrality and later cooperation.

### **The Problem with Neutrality, 1914-1917**

Diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the United States entered one of their rockiest periods since the American Civil War with the outbreak of the First World War and the subsequent British long-range blockade of Germany, a strategy that involved British interference with neutral shipping. Page summed up the position of the United States well in an August second letter to his family which stated that “The United States is the only great power wholly out of it. The United States most likely, therefore, will be able to play a helpful and historic part at its end.”<sup>17</sup> This remark obviously shows that the United States under Wilson was more interested in being a neutral peace broker than belligerent. The letter may also reveal that Page realized early on that the U.S. could benefit from early neutrality in the Great War if it then joined toward the end of the conflict. Hendrick makes an important note after this section and that was the fact

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

that, "By this time Page and the Foreign Secretary had established not only cordial official relations but a warm friendship."<sup>18</sup> This is an important development because Page's friendship with Grey gave him a better grasp of the British situation and British perceptions.

The Allied blockade of the Central Powers, which began in August of 1914 and lasted until the end of the war, caused a great deal of tension between the United States and Great Britain.<sup>19</sup> The blockade was seen as an infringement on the rights of neutral shipping by the Americans, whereas the British considered the blockade their main weapon against Germany and the means by which they would either win or lose the war. Advancements in naval technology, such as the mine, submarine and torpedo, rendered the old doctrines of close-in blockades untenable so the Royal Navy embarked on a long-range blockade which involved stopping ships before they came anywhere near neutral or belligerent ports along the North Sea.<sup>20</sup> In his book, *The End of Neutrality*, John W. Coogan explains that British administration faced a great dilemma because they "could see no way to intercept such shipments without blatant violations of international law."<sup>21</sup> In his article in the *North*

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>19</sup> The major Allies from 1914 to 1917 consisted of Britain, France, Russia, Japan and Italy. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "World War I," accessed March 20, 2013, <http://0-www.britannica.com.sculib.scu.edu/EBchecked/topic/648646/World-War-I>.

<sup>20</sup> John C. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Right, 1899-1915* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 156.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

*American Review*, “Sea Rights and Sea Power: The British Embargo”, Edward S. Corwin, a contemporary lawyer, explained that an actual blockade required control of the waters around an enemy port and the equal treatment of all neutral nations. Neutrality was violated by the British because they neither had control of the waters immediately around German ports nor did they treat all neutrals equally, given the fact that they were unable to do anything about the Baltic trade.<sup>22</sup> The British government tried to avoid this issue by never actually declaring an effective blockade and by using the continuous voyage doctrine.

The main dispute revolved around the classification of different cargoes. The Hague Conference in 1907 and the Declaration of London in 1909, which was a codification of the Conference’s guidelines, defined the materials that could be considered contraband and those items which could not be seized.<sup>23</sup> The declaration separated cargoes into absolute contraband, which was condemned by its military utility, conditional contraband, which could only be condemned based on its final destination, and free list items, which could not be prevented from entering any territory.<sup>24</sup> The Declaration of London was eventually signed by Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, the United States and the Netherlands.<sup>25</sup> Due to pressure from the United States, Great Britain accepted some tenets of

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<sup>22</sup> Edward S. Corwin, “Sea Rights and Sea Power: The British Embargo,” *The North American Review* 204 (Oct. 1916): 519.

<sup>23</sup> Hendrick, vol. 1, 375.

<sup>24</sup> Marion C. Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Coogan, 8.

the Declaration of London to maintain good relations with neutral trading partners who feared trade disruption. But, this acceptance came with modifications that would eventually lead to a complete abandonment of the Declaration.<sup>26</sup> The British managed to avoid a potentially catastrophic run-in with the U.S. over trade by paying for all blockaded cargoes.<sup>27</sup> Hendrick states that "Great Britain now proposed to purchase cargoes of conditional contraband discovered on seized ships and return the ships themselves to their owners and this soon became established practice."<sup>28</sup> Eventually everything not in the absolute contraband category was declared conditional contraband by Great Britain. In her book, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916*, Marion Siney contends that "No particular attempt was now made to determine whether a consignment of conditional contraband was destined to the armed forces or governmental department of the enemy: designation to hostile territory was enough to secure its condemnation."<sup>29</sup> The Wilson administration took issue with this position at first, but the U.S. eventually let the issue fade away, on the advice of Page, and because of issues concerning submarine warfare such as the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915 and the torpedoing of the *S.S. Sussex* on March 24, 1916.<sup>30</sup> These events created a great deal of tension between

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<sup>26</sup> Hendrick, vol. 1, 384.

<sup>27</sup> Siney, 129.

<sup>28</sup> Burton J. Hendrick 1925, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*. Vol. 2. (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company), 63.

<sup>29</sup> Siney, 132.

<sup>30</sup> P.K. Kemp, ed., *History of the Royal Navy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 204.

the United States and Germany and led to the German claim that it would abandon unlimited submarine warfare until February 1, 1917, under the “Sussex Pledge”.<sup>31</sup>

One result of the early long range blockade of Germany was the “*Dacia* incident” which was probably the most dangerous incident for Anglo-American naval relations during American neutrality in World War I. This crisis, brought on by an attempted breach of the Allied blockade by a ship under a United States registry, was the type of event that could have brought the United States and Great Britain closest to war. In January, 1915, the British long-range blockade was threatened by a group of German-American investors who decided to take advantage of U.S. regulations regarding registry and asylum-seeking ships in order to purchase a former German merchant ship, the *Dacia*, and send the vessel to Germany loaded with cotton.<sup>32</sup> This was clearly an attempt by U.S. nationals to push the Wilson administration to refuse to recognize Britain’s long-range blockading activities. Hendrick notes that “Above all the *Dacia* involved the great question of the use of British sea power.”<sup>33</sup> And, Simpson notes that for the United States problems with the blockade revolved around neutral rights and freedom of the seas.<sup>34</sup> These two positions almost collided in the first months of the war and could have made cooperation in any area extremely difficult.

The solution to this momentous issue came in the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Hendrick, vol. 3, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>34</sup> Simpson, 26.

form of the American Ambassador himself. Page worked tirelessly to maintain the good relations that had existed between the United States and Britain right before the war. Due to his relationship with Grey, Page was able to suggest that the French Navy pick up the ship when it entered the English Channel since the United States still entertained strong sympathies for the French.<sup>35</sup> This was a stroke of genius since it partially diffused the tension that had built up between the United States and Britain and the Allies were able to prevent the blockade from being breached. However, the whole incident brought up many considerations about sea power and international law. This was especially true when it came to the letter of the law and enforcement. Britain agreed to follow the tenets of the Declaration of London with modification but it very quickly began to violate this agreement. No neutral government actively challenged this besides the odd call for its cancelation.

This incident also reveals that the possibility of an Anglo-American conflict or war in the early years of WWI was very real and made all the more probable by the fact that the U.S. was both the most powerful neutral nation and heavily committed to freedom of the seas.<sup>36</sup> The lack of major conflict may have been due to the fact that Britain paid for most cargoes that were detained, and the submarine campaign represented a new and legally challenging development in naval relations and law. The dispute over the blockade and freedom of the seas would have an important impact on the early strategic cooperation between the British

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<sup>35</sup> Hendrick, vol. 3, 236.

<sup>36</sup> Simpson, xii.

and the United States once the latter joined the war.

In 1916 Wilson led a campaign to bring about peace in an exhausted Europe. After the Sussex Pledge of May 4, 1916, he tried to secure some sort of peace on the continent. Hendrick notes that “Mr. Wilson was bent on keeping the United States out of the war; he knew that there was only one certain way of preserving peace in this country, and that was to bring the war itself to an end.”<sup>37</sup> However, he also knew that “the pledge was a temporary measure and that it would be violated as soon as it became clear that the talks would achieve results.”<sup>38</sup> This perception proved true, and the German Government, convinced that it could bring the war to a swift conclusion, announced that it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1, 1917.<sup>39</sup> This ended the peace drive that Wilson had pursued during Germany’s adherence to the Sussex Pledge. Despite the threat of German attack on merchant vessels after the first of February, the Wilson Administration moved slowly toward belligerency. Sir Cecil Spring Rice, the British Ambassador in Washington, suspected that this was a tactic to get the country, which was still grappling with isolationism, on board with the idea of war when he wrote in a January 1917 cable that “ ‘It is the evident desire of the President to avoid any appearance of a war conducted in cooperation with the Allies.’ ”<sup>40</sup> United States diplomatic relations with Germany were broken

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<sup>37</sup> Hendrick, vol. 2, 148.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>39</sup> David F. Trask, *Captains and Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relations 1917-1918* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1979), 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

on February 3, 1917, "but he [Wilson] spent a number of weeks exploring the possibility of armed neutrality. It was a step beyond strict neutrality but short of full belligerency."<sup>41</sup> As a last step before a declaration of war, Wilson signed an executive order on March 9, 1917 to arm all merchantmen to see if armed neutrality would be possible.

The Navy Department slowly began preparing for a possible conflict with the Central Powers. The British desperately sought to establish cooperation with the U.S. Navy. On March 23, 1917, Ambassador Page wrote to the Secretary of State Robert Lansing to convince the U.S. government of Britain's willingness to cooperate in both wartime strategy and the crafting of peace. Page mentioned the British willingness to cooperate when he stated that "The British Government will heartily fall in with any plan we propose as soon as the cooperation can be formally established."<sup>42</sup> Page also stated the need for an American naval representative in London when he wrote that "Knowing their spirit and their methods, I cannot too strongly recommend that our Government send here immediately an Admiral of our Navy who will bring our Navy's plans and inquiries."<sup>43</sup> The Ambassador also enticed the Secretary of State with one item the United States wanted from Britain, which was information, when he stated that "he [the representative] would have all doors opened to him and a sort of special staff appointed to give him the results and methods of the whole British Naval work

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>42</sup> Simpson, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 16.



since the War began.”<sup>44</sup> This communication to Washington showed how willing the British were to gain the confidence and cooperation of the United States. By this time the British were desperate for naval reinforcement since their ships were spread thin and their trading lifeline was threatened.

A day after the Page letter, Wilson seemed to have made up his mind to enter belligerency against Germany and her Allies. On March 18, 1917 three U.S. ships were sunk without warning, and it seems that this major violation of contemporary naval codes and laws was one of the main factors that pushed the United States toward war.<sup>45</sup> The President was apparently looking to the future when, on March 24, he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, and stated, “The main thing is no doubt to get into immediate communication with the Admiralty on the other side through confidential channels until the congress has acted and work out a scheme for cooperation.”<sup>46</sup> The Admiralty seemed to have sensed the change in attitude in Washington, and on March 29, 1917 informed the British Commander-in-Chief North America and West Indies, Admiral Sir Montague Browning, that the U.S. would be provided with facilities to operate against submarines on the Irish coast.<sup>47</sup> On the same day the naval attaché that Page and the Admiralty had suggested be sent to Great Britain departed for London. He was Admiral William Sowden Sims, who would play a major role in

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 18.

organizing and executing the anti-submarine war in Europe. In a March 29 communication one of the British officials in the United States reported that, "Sims who is detailed for London in strictest secrecy and sails incognito 31 March is I think a very good man."<sup>48</sup> This was an extremely important moment because one of the most important players in Anglo-American cooperation in anti-submarine warfare had just been dispatched and his reputation preceded him.

The United States declaration of war on Germany came on April 6, 1917 and the nation was immediately hurled into the heart of a world conflict that it neither understood nor was prepared for. Secretary of State Robert Lansing's argument for belligerency may have been the most persuasive for the President since he suggested that "continued neutrality would mean a loss of future influence in world affairs."<sup>49</sup> Throughout the conflict in Europe the U.S. administration and even members of the U.S. naval command, such as Admiral Benson, had dreamed of the United States being the arbitrator that would bring an end to the madness. By March of 1917 they had come to realize that the only way to gain a spot at the negotiation of the peace was to bring about the end of the war.<sup>50</sup> When it declared war, the administration devoted itself completely to the prosecution of the conflict.

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<sup>48</sup> Simpson, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Trask, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Simpson, 9.

### **Establishing Cooperation in Anti-Submarine Warfare, April 1917-December 1917**

The beginning stage of U.S. belligerency, which lasted from April to July 1917, saw the entrance of the United States into the war and a massive push to shore up the Allies after the military hardships of 1916 and against the possibly fatal threat of the German submarine campaign to the war effort in Europe. The Allies, and the British especially, were in rough shape due to the heavy shipping losses caused primarily by German submarines. Allied shipping had lost 500,000 tons in February, 500,000 tons in March and 200,000 tons in the first ten days of April.<sup>51</sup> This meant that the U-boats were sinking roughly a quarter of all ships leaving Britain.<sup>52</sup> The most disturbing fact for the Allies, however, was that only ten per cent of the tonnage was being replaced by production.<sup>53</sup> The United States' preparedness was also a major concern for its British ally. The British expected massive reinforcements from the United States, but the U.S. fleet was in no position for full mobilization. Near the eve of the U.S. entry into the war the Navy was unprepared, with "only 10 per cent of its ships fully manned and only one-third were ready for service."<sup>54</sup> The fleet contained an impressive 74 destroyers which could have been used for anti-submarine work, but only 54 of them were actually modern and capable of anti-submarine activities.<sup>55</sup> Also, it was not until

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<sup>51</sup> Trask, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Simpson, 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

March 23 that Daniels was ordered to "add 87,000 men to the Navy."<sup>56</sup> The fact that President Wilson was still hopeful for a peaceful solution to the conflict with Germany and his insistence on armed neutrality prevented the Navy from preparing until very close to the actual declaration of war. However, the United States Department of the Navy had begun cooperation with the Royal Navy on March 20, 1917, and by March 24 a general plan of integration was drawn up which emphasized the establishment of U.S. anti-submarine forces in Southern Ireland.<sup>57</sup> It should be acknowledged, however, that "no mature plans were concentered nor consolation had taken place with the European Allies before April 6."<sup>58</sup> The Germans were doing well in this period, and they continued to grow their submarine fleet to put pressure on the Allies. There were around 120 submarines in service with the German Fleet and this number was rising by about nine a month, given construction and casualties.<sup>59</sup> This meant that submarine threat would only be growing in the critical months ahead. Everything the British tried failed to have an impact on the rising toll of shipping.<sup>60</sup>

When Sims arrived in London on April 7, 1917, the Admiralty, under First Sea Lord Jellicoe, immediately began bringing their American naval representative up to speed on the situation in Europe. The British were very eager to establish contacts with the U.S. Navy and make it aware of the danger in the western approaches

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<sup>56</sup> Trask, 51.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Simpson, 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

to the British Isles. In his first cable to Sims, Jellicoe reveals how glad he was to be working with an officer whom he knew; he stated that “I feel sure that we shall be able to establish close co-operation between the two countries so far as naval matters are concerned.”<sup>61</sup> This first encounter boded well for Anglo-American cooperation against submarines in Europe. Two days after receiving Sims, Jellicoe sent out a memorandum to the April 10 Hampton Roads conference in the United States which enumerated the necessary steps for defeating the submarines, including protecting merchant vessels, sending anti-submarine reinforcements, and bringing captured German merchant vessels unto the service of the Allies.<sup>62</sup> The Hampton Roads conference was considered a success, and the United States agreed to send 6 destroyers to the Irish coast, although it would take time for the U.S. Navy to get going.<sup>63</sup> The early diplomatic mission that Britain sent to the United States proved to be a key part in getting that nation on a war footing, but later it would take U.S. missions to Europe to bring the two nations into complete cooperation in anti-submarine activities.

Sims was quickly integrated into the Admiralty’s headquarters in order to give the U.S. the best possible feel for the dire shipping situation. Sims’s unprecedented access to British information is reflected in his cable to Daniels on April 19, 1917. Sims told the Admiralty that he needed complete access to all the information pertaining to the naval

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> Trask, 63.

situation, and this was granted.<sup>64</sup> Sims notes his exclusive status in the Admiralty when he states that "I have daily conferences with the First Sea Lord, both at his office and residence, and also have been given entire freedom of the Admiralty and access to all Government Officials."<sup>65</sup> The fact that Sims was provided so much access and attention seems to indicate that the British may have been feeling somewhat desperate and were willing to do whatever was necessary to obtain the reinforcements needed in their anti-submarine operations. This is a great example of how necessity, created by severe shipping losses, was a major driving factor in the establishment and growth of Anglo-American cooperation. Sims also emphasizes what would come to be one of the most important concepts of the cooperation: "the critical area in which the war's decision will be made is in the eastern Atlantic at the focus of all lines of communication."<sup>66</sup> At this point Sims knew that everything would hinge on keeping the sea lanes safe and preventing the Allies from being cut off by the submarines. Much of the coming months would be spent trying to convince the Navy Department in Washington of this vital requirement. This important cable was preceded by others which raised the alarm in the United States, such as his April 14 cable which stated that "To accelerate and insure defeat of the submarine campaign, immediate active cooperation absolutely necessary" and that this required "Maximum number of destroyers be sent, accompanied

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<sup>64</sup> Simpson, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

by small anti-submarine craft.”<sup>67</sup> This cable also reveals how desperate the British were to bring the United States into the war which made them extremely accommodating and spurred cooperation.

In early May 1917, Admiral Sims was placed in command of the contingent of Destroyers that had arrived in Queenstown, Ireland on May 4.<sup>68</sup> The relationship that developed between the commander of the Queenstown base, Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, and Sims would prove to be one of the most unique and constructive of the naval war. Sims’ initial encounter with Bayly did not bode well for their time together in Southern Ireland and Sims remembered in an August letter to Captain Pratt, the Naval Department’s Chief of Staff, that “when Bayly came to the Admiralty I was invited of course to meet him in Admiral Jellicoe’s office. On that occasion he was as rude to me as one man can well be to another.”<sup>69</sup> Sims described how Admiral Jellicoe had been horrified by Bayly’s behavior and even noted that “when he had gone Admiral Jellicoe apologized to me, and said that he would remove the Admiral if I thought it was necessary.”<sup>70</sup> Sims said that it would not be necessary but this episode reveals just how willing the British were to ensure that the U.S. presence in the western approaches was established. This is a perfect example of necessity facilitating close cooperation.

On May 4, 1917 the first flotilla of U.S. destroyers arrived in Queenstown and Sims soon followed to take

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>68</sup> Trask, 77.

<sup>69</sup> Simpson, 251.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

command of the U.S. contingent. This trip proved extremely important because both the U.S. commander and the flotilla made a fine first impression. Sims reported on the arrival of the U.S. contingent in a May 11 cable to Daniels, when he stated that "speaking generally, the impression made by our officers and our ships has caused very favorable comment both at their base and in the Admiralty."<sup>71</sup> The warm reception that the Destroyer crews received and the state of their ships and fighting spirit did a lot to foster positive relations between Anglo-American forces in the most important sector of naval war. Sims made sure that the flotilla under his command conducted itself properly when he sent out orders on April 29 that read, "Require all officers not only to refrain from all criticism of British methods, manners and customs, and ask them to refrain from mentioning them in their letters. Also give attention to bringing about friendly relations between our enlisted men and the British."<sup>72</sup> Sims' relationship with Bayly improved very quickly. A little more than a week after the previous cable to Daniels, May 26, 1917, he reported that "Vice-Admiral commanding at Queenstown, Sir Lewis Bayly, is one of the wisest, ablest men of my acquaintance, as well as one of the most admirable characters, and it is a positive pleasure to serve under him."<sup>73</sup> And, more importantly, Sims also noted that "I am aware that I have his complete confidence."<sup>74</sup> The interaction between Bayly, Sims and the U.S. and

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*



British crews formed the foundation of Anglo-American operational cooperation for the rest of the conflict. Sims and Bayly eventually created a strange but effective joint command system that Sims notes he was unwilling to change in August 1917 due to the effectiveness of the relationship. The diplomatic moves promoted by Sims and the officers under his command created an atmosphere of brotherhood between the anti-submarine forces in Southern Ireland that would serve the Allies well when the convoy system was eventually implemented. Even before Sims' May 11 cable was sent the anti-submarine forces had an advanced base established in Berehaven and were beginning to utilize the newest anti-sub weapon, the depth charge.<sup>75</sup>

Not long after the United States joined the war against Germany, the Admiralty began to realize that it would have to employ a new anti-submarine strategy. This led to the creation of the convoy system which would prove key to defeating the submarine and was the U.S. Navy's largest contribution to the war effort. The push for a convoy system began on April 26, 1917 when Admiral Sir Alexander L. Duff, Admiral Bayly's superior, recommended convoys as a counter measure to unrestricted submarine warfare.<sup>76</sup> All in the Admiralty agreed that this would require the assistance of the United States since Britain's fleet was already stretched to the limit. Both Bayly and Sims were proponents of the convoy system, and in a April 30 cable to Daniels, Sims stated that the convoy system was being examined by the Admiralty and that

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-222.

<sup>76</sup> Trask, 26.

it would involve one escort to protect merchant vessels in the open ocean crossing and then a destroyer escort when the vessels entered the danger zone around Southern Ireland.<sup>77</sup> The most important point that Sims made in this cable his statement stated that "This plan would require us to furnish some escort vessels and additional vessels on this side and would necessitate abandonment of present patrol against raiders."<sup>78</sup> Basically, this meant that the U.S. would have to put an end to its East Coast patrols which were supposed to protect against possible, and highly unlikely, U-boat attacks in the western hemisphere. The estimated need for this operation was put forward in a May 1 Admiralty memorandum which noted that the experimental convoy would require 14 escort vessels and 18 destroyers.<sup>79</sup>

June proved to be a rocky month for the anti-submarine forces in European waters since the submarine campaign continued, but the convoy trial proved effective. By June 1 the United States had sent 24 destroyers to Queenstown.<sup>80</sup> The success of the convoy experiment program laid the foundation for greater implementation in the months to come.<sup>81</sup> On June 14 Sims suggested that all Allied traffic move toward being convoyed.<sup>82</sup> In a June 14 cable he noted that the "British are in process of changing from previous methods of handling shipping to the convoy system" and that "Every indication points to the

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<sup>77</sup> Simpson, 215.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>80</sup> Trask, 77.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

desirability of adopting the convoy system for all traffic and particularly from our North Atlantic ports.”<sup>83</sup> To this he added “... I cannot lay too much stress upon the urgent necessity of increasing the destroyer and other patrol forces here with utmost dispatch.”<sup>84</sup> Sims emphasized the offensive potential of the convoy during the month of June due to the fact that many in Washington either did not believe in the system or wanted to try bolder actions such as attacking well defended submarine bases. Sims defended the convoy well in a June 16 cable to Daniels when he stated that “This convoy system is looked upon as an offensive measure.”<sup>85</sup> He also explained the advantages of the convoy by explaining that “If shipping were grouped in convoys the enemy would be forced to seek us, thereby imposing upon him the necessity of dispersing his forces, [so] as to locate us, while on the other hand, we obtain the benefit of the principle of counter attack on his dispersed line.”<sup>86</sup> Even after these explanations, Daniels and Admiral William S. Benson, Chief of Naval Operations, still viewed arming merchant vessels as a viable solution to the submarine. The presence of U.S. vessels and introduction of the convoy system seem to have had some effect on the submarine campaign since sinking statistics began a downward trend. In May 600,000 tons were lost and in June 700,000 tons of shipping were lost.<sup>87</sup> This was down from the highest month of losses of April which had over 900,000 tons lost. The trend seemed to be reversing to

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<sup>83</sup> Simpson, 228.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Trask, 81.

a certain degree but it would be some time before losses would fall below the monthly Allied production of new tonnage.

The months of July through September would prove to be some of the most important months in the whole naval conflict due to the fact that the Allies began an implementation of the convoy system and the submarine campaign came to its climax with the long days and good weather of late summer. By the end of July there were 37 U.S. destroyers in the European theatre.<sup>88</sup> However, the U.S. Department of the Navy and British Admiralty continued to disagree on what constituted the best anti-submarine strategy, and Sims constantly complained that better communications needed to be established. The main problem in the summer was getting the Navy Department in Washington on board with the Admiralty's plan for a complete convoy system in and out of the warzone around Great Britain. In a June 29 cable, Jellicoe stated that "I am convinced convoy system is a necessity and only method left to us."<sup>89</sup> He also noted that full implementation of the system would require 50 cruisers and 80 destroyers which meant that the United States would have to pitch in.<sup>90</sup> However, Admiral Benson, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, was still not sold on the convoy system. In a July 1 cable, Commodore Sir Guy Gaunt, the British Naval liaison officer in Washington, informed Jellicoe that he "Just discussed your and Sims' cable of the last three days with Admiral Benson. He is still

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<sup>88</sup> Simpson, 201.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

opposed to convoys and strongly in favor of armed merchant vessels.”<sup>91</sup> The divide between the Navy Department and the naval forces in Europe was primarily the result of distance and communications problems but it also stemmed from the fact that many in Washington were still suspicious of British intentions in the naval arena.<sup>92</sup> Much of this stemmed from anger over the blockade during U.S. neutrality where it was perceived that Britain was using the war to gain trade advantages.<sup>93</sup>

From the Allied vantage point in Europe the war effort was in a very dangerous place due to the fact that continued heavy losses from the submarines would eventually take them below the tonnage needed to supply the fronts and their economies. Sims understood this situation well and endlessly prodded the Navy Department for a more rapid response. In a July 3 cable to the sympathetic Captain Pratt at the Navy Department Sims noted that the Allies required 32,000,000 tons of shipping per year to supply their needs and that “when it falls below [that], it will be wholly impossible to maintain this population and to maintain the armies in the front.”<sup>94</sup> In plain language Sims confided that “The truth of the matter is that the enemy is winning the war.”<sup>95</sup> One of the main reasons that the Navy Department was not acting quickly on these concerns was the conviction that Sims and Page were pawns of the British and not to be taken seriously. Sims tried to remedy the situation by asking

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>92</sup> Hendrick, vol. 2, 284.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Simpson, 37.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

in a September cable for a naval officer from Washington to come and assess the situation.<sup>96</sup> In his book, *Captains and Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relation 1917-1918*, David Trask notes that "The British Government shared Sims' desire to enhance Washington's grasp of the European situation, every day realizing more clearly that before that the outcome of the war would probably depend upon the effectiveness of the American reinforcement."<sup>97</sup>

After practically a whole month of Sims, Page, and Jellicoe calling for greater cooperation, the Wilson administration decided to send Admiral Henry T. Mayo, Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet, to a conference with the Allies.<sup>98</sup> The conversation between the British and Americans focused around the anti-submarine campaign and different operations that were being considered such as the North Sea barrage, attacks on sub bases, and a possible close-in blockade. Meeting with Admiral Sir Eric Geddes, who was now the First Sea Lord, convinced Mayo of the impracticality of attacks on sub bases and close-in blockading action and, more importantly, it convinced the Admiral of the need to use patrol craft in the convoys. The meeting was not a complete game changer, but Trask makes a keen observation that it "was a useful step toward fuller coordination of the inter-Allied naval effort, and stimulated more activity in the United States."<sup>99</sup> The meeting really moved the Navy Department and Admiralty toward complete

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<sup>96</sup> Trask, 138.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 153.

cooperation, “as far as the undersea war, the Admiralty was committed to the convoy system.”<sup>100</sup> The Mayo Mission and its conclusions is a great example of how a lack of other viable strategic options allowed the British and American forces to focus their attention on the most important aspect of their joint operations which was protecting the lifelines of the allies by expanding and reinforcing the convoy system. The Allied losses during these months were quite high, but they were also always lower than April, which was remarkable given that the days were so much longer and sailing conditions were better. The losses at that time were 558,000 tons in July, 812,000 tons in August and 352,000 tons in September.<sup>101</sup> One important note about these casualties was that most of this tonnage was replaced by production now that the U.S. economy was moving into full mobilization.<sup>102</sup>

Full Anglo-American cooperation in anti-submarine warfare should probably not be considered complete before the last three months of 1917. From October through December 1917, the process of building cooperation between the two navies reached a level where it would remain for the rest of the conflict. The final organization of cooperation was a diplomatic dance that resulted in the foundation of the Supreme Allied War Council and, more importantly for anti-submarine warfare, the Allied Naval Council. An October 28 memorandum summed up the situation well when it implied that the “will to cooperate was present, but not the way” between the Navy

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

Department and the Admiralty.<sup>103</sup> By October the Admiralty and the Navy Department were still having trouble understanding one another. The situation was improved by the establishment of the Planning Section in London in November which "would allow American officers to improve communication with the Admiralty."<sup>104</sup> This council was a joint U.S. and British undertaking where officers would critically examine current strategies and policies to insure effectiveness. Trask notes that the group "did exactly as desired, working in tandem with Admiralty planners, and made significant contributions to the Anglo-American effort during the decisive stages of the war."<sup>105</sup> However, back in Washington, members of the administration and Department of the Navy still harbored suspicions of British activities.<sup>106</sup>

Page probably said it best when he stated that he "believed that 'misunderstanding had arisen because personal acquaintance and contact are lacking between naval authorities in Washington and London.'"<sup>107</sup> This led Sims to request senior administration and Naval Department officials to make a visit in an October 15 cable. The result was that Wilson sent Colonel House and Admiral Benson, both of whom arrived on November 7, 1917. The Allied conference that House and Benson had arrived to participate in was postponed until the end of November due to the Bolshevik revolution and serious

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 166-168.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 168.



Italian defeats at Caporetto.<sup>108</sup> This lull allowed the Commander of Naval Operations, Benson, to observe the situation from the European point of view, and “Three days after the mission reached Britain, Admiral Benson took the first step toward general acceptance of the naval viewpoint expressed by the British Admiralty and Admiral Sims.”<sup>109</sup> Benson’s visit to Europe may have been one of the most important developments of the House mission because his understanding and assistance was required for the U.S. forces in Europe gain the full support of the Department of the Navy. The real clearing up of misunderstandings came about with the establishment of the Supreme Allied War Council in late November. The Council consisted of the heads of government and secondary representatives from Britain, France, Italy, and the United States.<sup>110</sup> This move went a long way toward clearing up the disconnection between many political leaders and the militaries that served them. More importantly, however, was the creation of the Allied Naval Council which required all naval staffs to report their general policies. The Allied Naval Council helped to get all the Allies on the same page in terms of naval operations and facilitated the extension of the convoy system which would eventually defeat the submarine campaign. The Allied Naval Council was officially announced on December 14, 1917, and Sims was appointed as the U.S. representative on January 8, 1918.<sup>111</sup> The House Mission which culminated in the

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

creation of the Allied Naval Council was really the last step taken into full cooperation. With the creation of the Allied Naval Council, all naval staffs began coordinating policies and moved to a common strategy of anti-submarine convoys that would stave off defeat and ensure victory in the coming year.

### **Conclusion**

The full cooperation and coordination that characterized Anglo-American operations in anti-submarine warfare at the beginning of 1918 was not immediately established with the entrance of the United States into World War I, but was developed over time. The high level of cooperation was primarily the result of diplomatic relations, severe Allied shipping losses, and the lack of viable strategic alternatives to the convoy system. Diplomatic movements had helped to facilitate the cooperation as early as 1913, when Walter Hines Page became the U.S. ambassador to Britain. Page helped the British government steer through the dangers of the blockade of Germany and American neutrality. After the U.S. entered the war, Page continued to support the British and Admiral Sims in their campaign to convince the U.S. Navy Department of the need for a fully functional convoy system. Admiral Sims' arrival in April, 1917, and his diplomatic efforts with the Admiralty and the Queenstown anti-submarine forces, created a close working relationship between the British and American anti-submarine forces. This relationship allowed the two to call for the adoption of the convoy system. Cooperation was finally completed in September and November of 1917 when the Mayo and

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House missions established both military and, to a certain degree, political cohesion in the whole Allied naval war effort. The resulting Supreme Allied War Council and Allied Naval Council garnered Anglo-American cooperation in anti-submarine warfare the full support it required from Washington. The loss of millions of tons of shipping between February and December, 1917, pushed the commanders in Europe to demand cooperation in the face of losing the war. Finally, the lack of immediately viable strategies besides the convoy system, which was revealed during the Mayo mission of September, 1917, enabled naval leaders to focus on the essential maintenance of the Allies' lines of communication to the United States and the rest of the world. Anglo-American cooperation in anti-submarine warfare in World War I, which was unprecedented at the European operations level from early on, took almost nine months of diplomacy, severe shipping losses, and the exhaustion of most non-convoy related strategies to become the clearly essential naval policy. In the end, once Anglo-American strategies were set, they maintained the vital communications lines around the western approaches of Ireland and assured eventual victory for the Allies.

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*developed out of research conducted on the British blockade of Germany during World War I for his HIST 101 paper.*