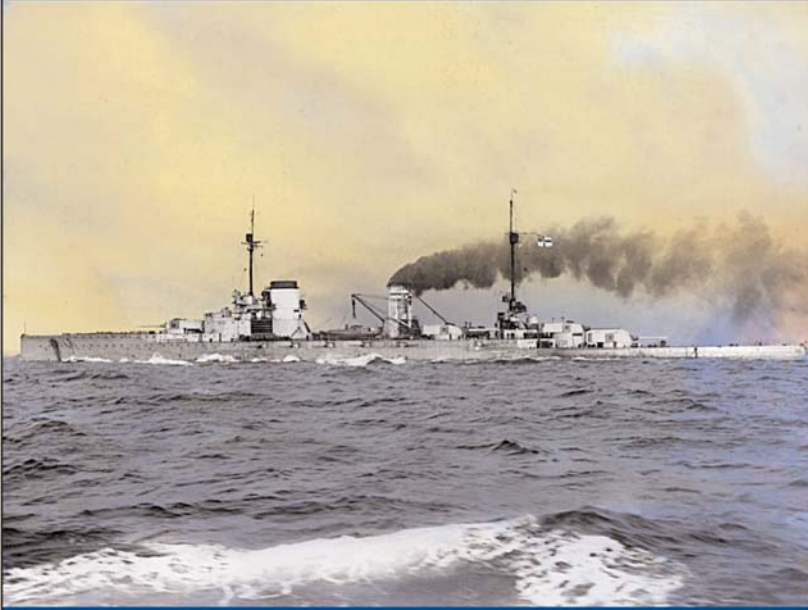




# Power at Sea

The Age of Navalism, 1890–1918



LISLE A. ROSE

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VOLUME 1

**The Age of Navalism  
1890–1918**

Lisle A. Rose



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# For John Rose

**SAILOR, SCHOLAR, SHIPMATE**



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## PREFACE

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**THE CENTURY JUST** past was preeminently an age of warring states and collapsing empires. Industrialism brought not peace but the sword. And the tip of that sword was sea power.

A hundred years ago, great war fleets from half a dozen nations—Britain, the United States, Germany, Russia, France, Japan—roamed the world ocean or rode at anchor, their national ensign displayed in every great port city from New York to Shanghai. They wore no sails, these representatives of proud peoples who beamed upon them. Their graceless hulls and blocky upper works were made of steel now, like the long-range guns that expressed their might. They were propelled through the water not by wind but by great propulsive machinery, engines that seemed the very epitome of the new industrial age. The greatest of the new battleships were adopted by schoolchildren, and their comings and goings often attracted large throngs.

The men who owned them were volatile masters who preached and practiced imperial competition from one end of the earth to the other. Most reveled in an endless game of great-power politics defined by amoral diplomacy in which fighting fleets were the chief expressions of national greatness and purpose. The dispatch of a cruiser to some distant, barely known Mexican or Moroccan bay or the appearance of a small fleet or even a gunboat in a Chinese port or upriver was enough to shift fragile, constantly calibrated and recalibrated balances of power and prestige.

Between 1890 and 1914, Britain, Imperial Germany, Japan, and the United States were or became preeminent naval powers, and their fleets often set the tone and rhythm of international affairs. Other countries, notably Italy, France, and czarist Russia, might have joined them. But whereas Italian warship design and even naval theories were characterized by “great ingenuity,” other factors, principally “lack of capital and raw materials,” the geographic disadvantage of being confined to the Mediterranean, and lack of technological sophistication,

condemned the Regia Marina to a consistently inferior status qualitatively if not quantitatively. Similarly, France and Russia simply could not maintain the hothouse pace of late-nineteenth-century industrial development.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Russia did not recover for more than a half century from the massive naval defeats of 1904–1905 inflicted by the Japanese.

The great industrial navies that plied the early-twentieth-century world ocean reflected the social and technological strengths and weaknesses of the countries they served. Admiralties and navy departments were both drivers and consumers of the most advanced industrial technologies of the time, from Harvey armor plate and the eleven-inch gun to the dreadnought, “all big gun” battleship. They would remain so throughout the remainder of the century. Navies forced the creation of great public works, including the building and widening of canals, the construction of vast bases, and the dredging and deepening of harbors. By World War I navies required nearly every aspect of industrialization for their survival.

Each of the early-twentieth-century navies served distinct masters and marched to different orders. Britain’s Royal Navy remained dedicated to protection of the world’s sea-lanes in order to sustain an empire of global dimensions. Kaiser Wilhelm’s ill-named High Seas Fleet was primarily designed to promote “Germandom” abroad as the spear point of an aggressive imperial development that would eventually rival if not supplant that of the envied British cousins. The Imperial Japanese Navy was charged with protection of the sacred homeland while leading the way to the acquisition and protection of a vast regional empire in Asia and the western Pacific. Only the United States Navy assumed an ostensibly defensive posture, but its commander in chief from 1901 to 1909 was a rabid navalist who kept a small squadron of warships and river gunboats in China and sent his fleet around the world to demonstrate American maritime power and prowess.

The fighting fleets of Imperial Germany and Japan were faithful replicas of the authoritarian systems they served. The individual was subservient to the immediate needs and whims of the state. Obedience was the prime virtue; innovation, curiosity, creativity were left, if at all, to only a few. Bravery and loyalty were given by men to nations and leaders who sooner (in the case of Imperial Germany) or later (in the case of Japan) failed them. Yet in war and peace they went out on great waters to do their masters’ bidding. Whatever problems there were onshore, whatever problems might be encountered at sea, the sailors of emperor and kaiser, like those of the Soviet regime more than a half century on, accounted themselves “real men” once the anchor was slipped and the warship

large or small got under way. They were “doing a job that gave them back their sense of self worth and dignity, and instilled in them, in spite of everything, pride in their country.”<sup>2</sup> Britain’s Royal Navy reflected a society that while certainly free was not truly open. Rigid and cruel class distinctions defined and often smothered British democracy during the crucial early decades of the twentieth century when fate and events forced it to stand at the forefront of opposition to expansive German militarism.

Burdened by various restraints both subtle and overt upon individual initiative, none of these navies, or the societies they represented, could adapt with maximum efficiency to the constantly shifting and growing demands of industrialism with its emphasis upon ceaseless innovation, flexibility, and adaptation. Even the biggest navies became more or less technically deficient because they lacked the broad base of mechanically proficient sailors, shipwrights, and industrialists essential to waging modern war at sea with maximum effect.

The United States eventually proved the one exception. Its open society, incredibly broad and diverse industrial plant, rabid competitive order, obsession with technology and practical education, and exaltation of mass production, distribution, and consumption perfectly positioned the nation to fashion and employ on a massive scale the kinds of weapons that twentieth-century war at sea and power projection ashore demanded. Comparatively well educated and working within arguably the loosest and most decent military command structure ever developed, America’s sailors and marines were encouraged to work and think as a team. Initiative was generally encouraged, and from the beginning a sense of professional development was bred into a rapidly industrializing naval establishment. To be sure, snobbery and condescension have never been absent from the U.S. naval officer corps. But they have never been encouraged as a matter of policy, as was the case in every other major sea service with the striking exception of Germany’s U-boat arms that were defeated in both wars by superior technology and their own understandable, if in the end inexcusable, blunders.

The years leading to 1914 were devoid neither of conflict nor of drama. The United States battled Spain in 1898, emerging not only with a small empire scattered from the Caribbean to the western Pacific but with a promising industrial fleet as well, while Spain’s once mighty maritime power fell below the point of serious calculation. Eight years later, Russia and Japan crossed cutlasses in Far Eastern waters, and the result was the same: victorious Japan demonstrated that it possessed a modern, if modest, and highly efficient navy. The country promptly went mad with navalism, while defeated Russia saw its defeated, depleted navy sink into impuissance that neither the First nor the Second World

War could resurrect. Thirty months after Tsushima, Theodore Roosevelt sent his Great White Fleet of increasingly obsolete pre-dreadnoughts on an unprecedented and chancy world cruise that reconfirmed the rising professionalism and steady growth of American sea power.

Six years later, it was the turn of Europe's fighting fleets, large and relatively small, to be sucked into the maelstrom of war—mankind's first truly industrial conflict at sea that proved midwife to scores of lesser conflicts and one even greater that defined the remainder of the century. The sea war of 1914–1918 was fought all around the Eurasian landmass, on its rivers, and across much of the world ocean. But unlike World War II, the grandest battle fleets remained in home waters, and the newer weapons of war, the submarine and the airplane, proved incapable of projecting their reach much beyond the skies above and the seas surrounding the British Isles and western Europe. So it was that the one great surface battle of the war was fought in waters that lapped both the British and the German coasts, while the U-boat, a sudden new menace of increasingly dire proportions, was confined by the crudity of its technology to sharply limited operational ranges that eventually restricted its effectiveness, then doomed its existence and the navy it served.

This is the tale that unfolds in the following pages. Although it stands by itself, it also forms a prologue to even greater and often more terrible stories of the growth of sea power in the industrial and later nuclear ages to the point where it not only decided wars and the fates of nations and empires but also, finally, with the strategic-ballistic-missile submarine threatened the very fabric of civilization itself. A second volume will carry the story through the end of World War II. The third and concluding volume will examine the new order of sea power that emerged in 1946 with the unprecedented supremacy of the United States Navy on the world ocean and its determination, with unprecedented new weapon systems at its disposal, not only to exercise power *at* sea but also to project power *from* the sea onto and well beyond the coasts of the earth.

The meaning and influence of sea power through the ages have always attracted scholarly interest. In recent years a small army of scholars led by John B. Hattendorf and Norman Friedman in this country and Geoffrey Till in England have attacked the subject. Till's *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-first Century* (2004) is especially challenging and comprehensive.<sup>3</sup> But there is no reasonably detailed narrative history of sea power, or, more precisely, power at sea, during the war-drenched industrial-nuclear age that began around 1890. Despite its size, the present effort is neither exhaustive nor an attempt at a final word; the

subject is simply too vast. Rather, I have written what might be termed a reconnaissance in force, a needed attempt to bring together in some sort of coherent narrative and analytical whole the work of many scholars and observers over the past century. I hope it will be considered a starting point, a launching pad for more work, more criticism, and more consideration, and will bring fresh minds and new perspectives to a subject whose fascination is endless.





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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**THE GENESIS OF** this study goes back many years to a conversation that an eleven-year-old boy on a train had with a naval aviator about the recent war. At one point the pilot said, “Well, I suppose you know about *Jane’s Fighting Ships?*” I did not, of course, but within weeks the deficiency was remedied and I was hooked on a lifelong fascination with ships and the sea.

Three-plus years of sea duty in the Pacific and polar waters between high school and college gave me a firm grounding in the culture of life on the world ocean in general and within the United States Navy in particular. My respect for that efficient, exasperating organization is, I think, apparent on every page of this project, and my affection for shipmates long lost to everything but memory remains strong. Eleven years in the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science, especially the year I spent on the U.S. Law of the Sea Delegation, completed an informal but productive maritime education.

The dedicated research that I began in 1995 has been helped immeasurably by the efficient research staffs and open shelves of the Suzzalo and Odegaard Libraries at the University of Washington, Seattle; the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England (whose manuscript room is a particular delight to work in); the Nimitz Library at the United States Naval Academy; the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C.; and the Naval Undersea Museum at Keyport, Washington. Conversations with the National Park staff of the USS *Arizona* Memorial at Pearl Harbor were also useful in advancing my knowledge of arguably the single most significant event in twentieth-century naval history.

As this work began to take shape, George Thompson and Randall Jones of the Center for American Places in Harrisonburg, Virginia, provided invaluable guidance and support in further developing my ideas and suggesting possible publishers. Their continued interest in my work is deeply appreciated. David Alan Rosenberg, Ted Heckathorn, and John M. Rose shared critically important materials and information that I might otherwise have missed. Robert Ferrell,

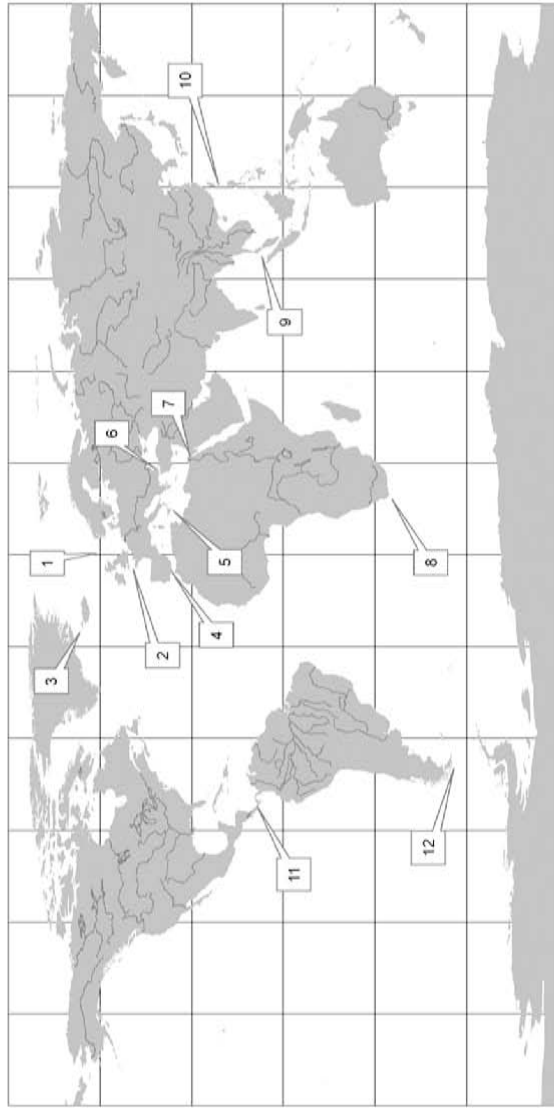
Scott Truver, and a number of anonymous readers over the years went through various iterations of the manuscript with great care, providing insightful chapter-by-chapter advice on revision that saved me from numerous sins of omission or commission. Annette Wenda edited the manuscript with great skill.

My gratitude to Beverly Jarrett of the University of Missouri Press for taking on such a “mammoth” (in the words of one reviewer) project is nearly immeasurable, and her editorial staff has transformed manuscript into book with professional aplomb. In its first and final stages, *Power at Sea* became what we used to call in the navy a half century ago an “all hands evolution.” My late wife, Mari-beth Rose, edited earlier portions of the manuscript with her usual keen eye and brisk efficiency. John Rose, a global information specialist, has provided the maps, while my wife, Harriet Dashiell Schwar, read the final work and provided a number of important suggestions.

With such support from so many, it is clear that I alone am responsible for whatever errors of fact or interpretation that remain.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the use of ESRI’s data and map collection and its third-party vendor ArcWorld for providing the data used in the creation of the maps in this volume.

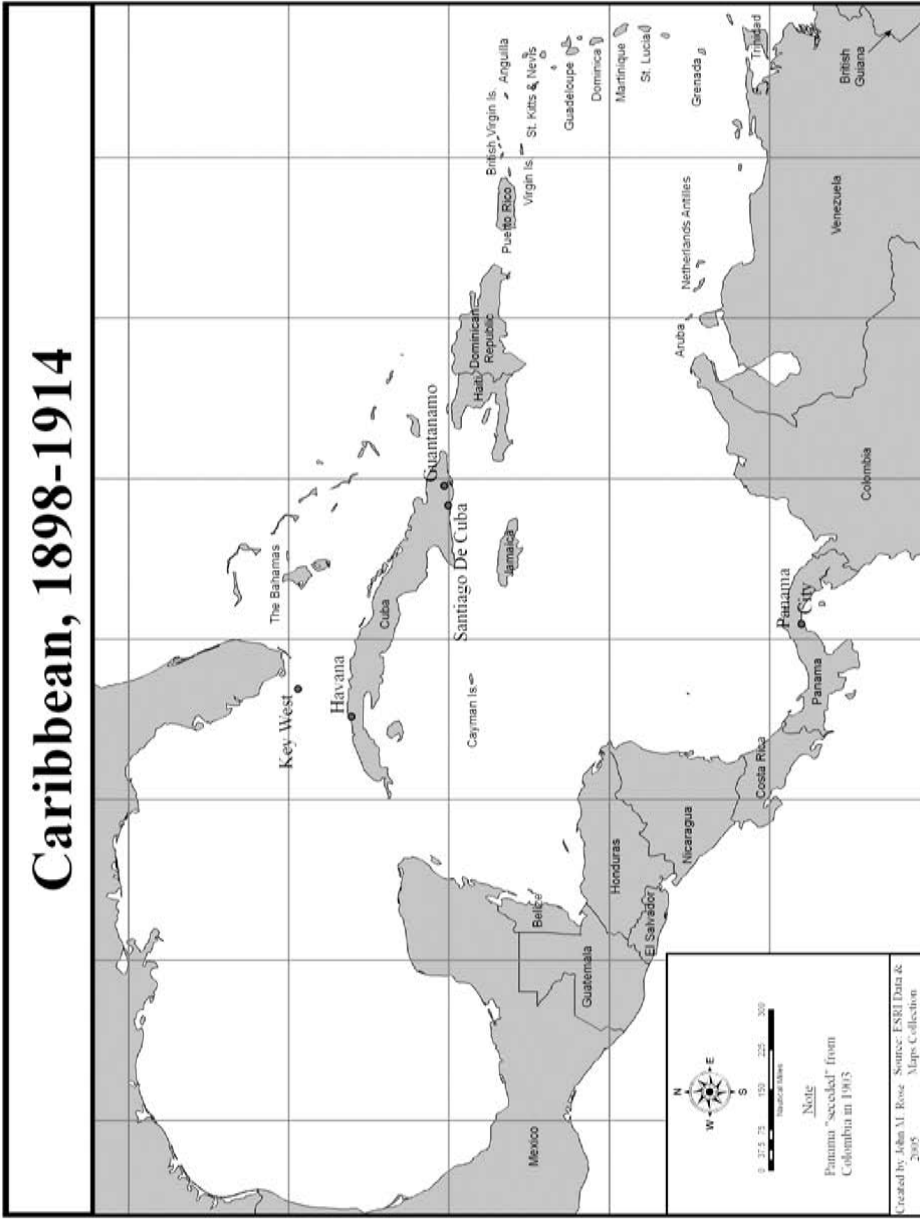
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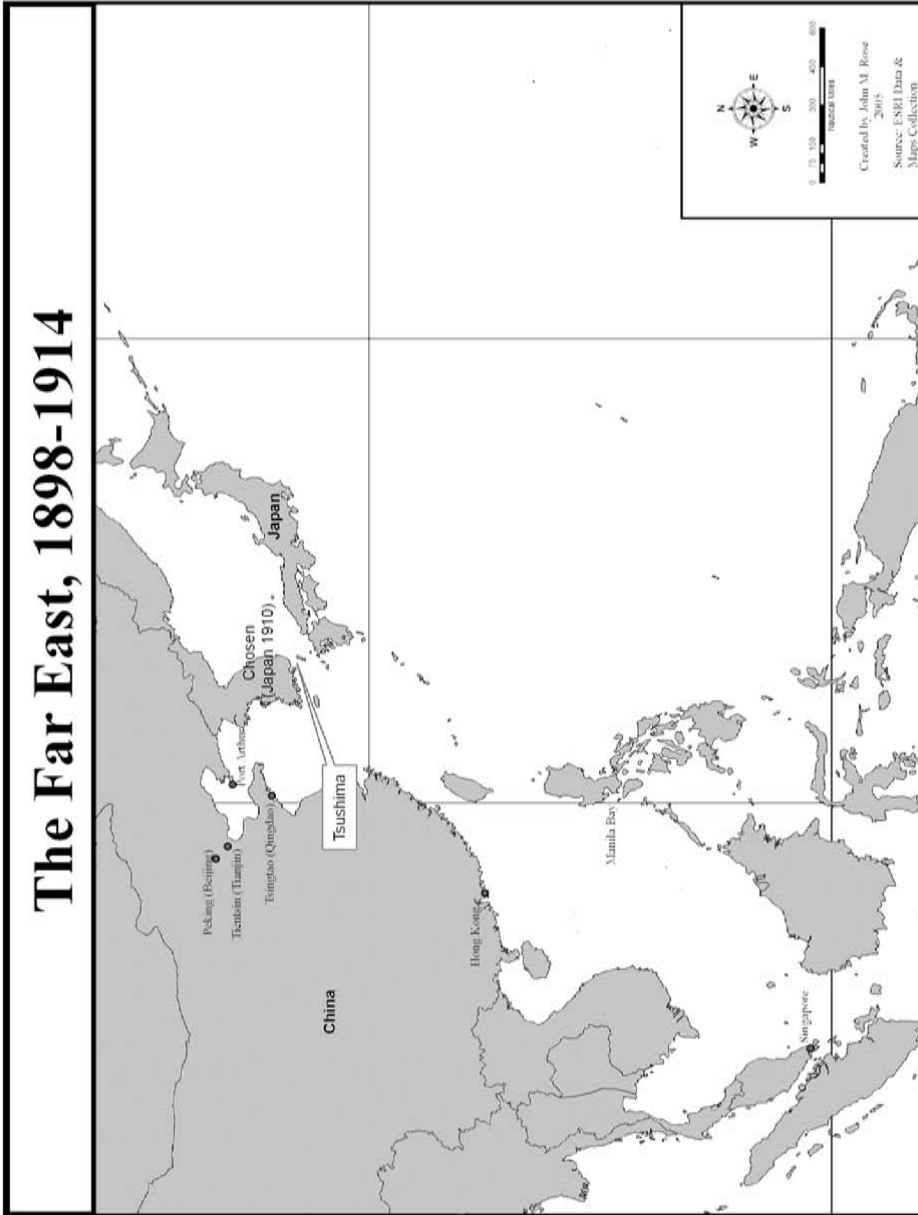


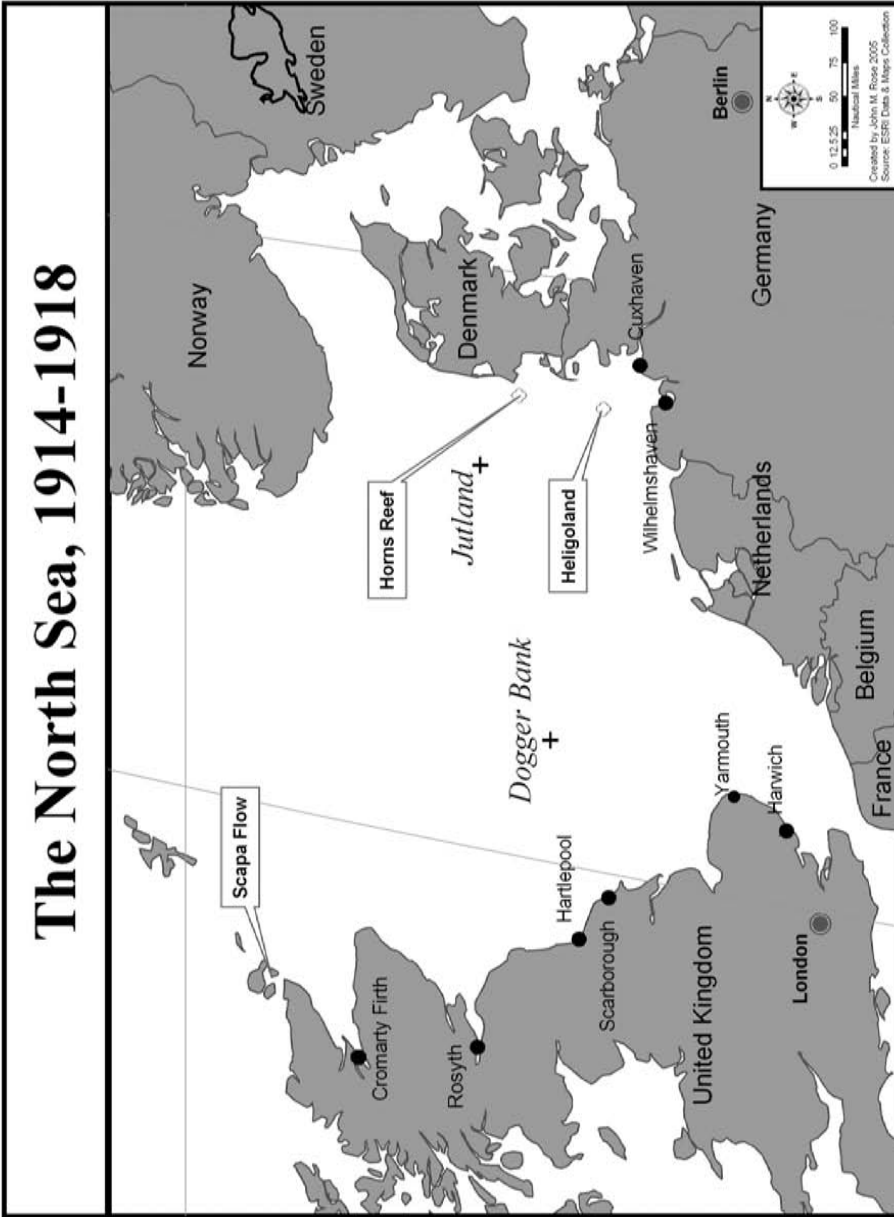
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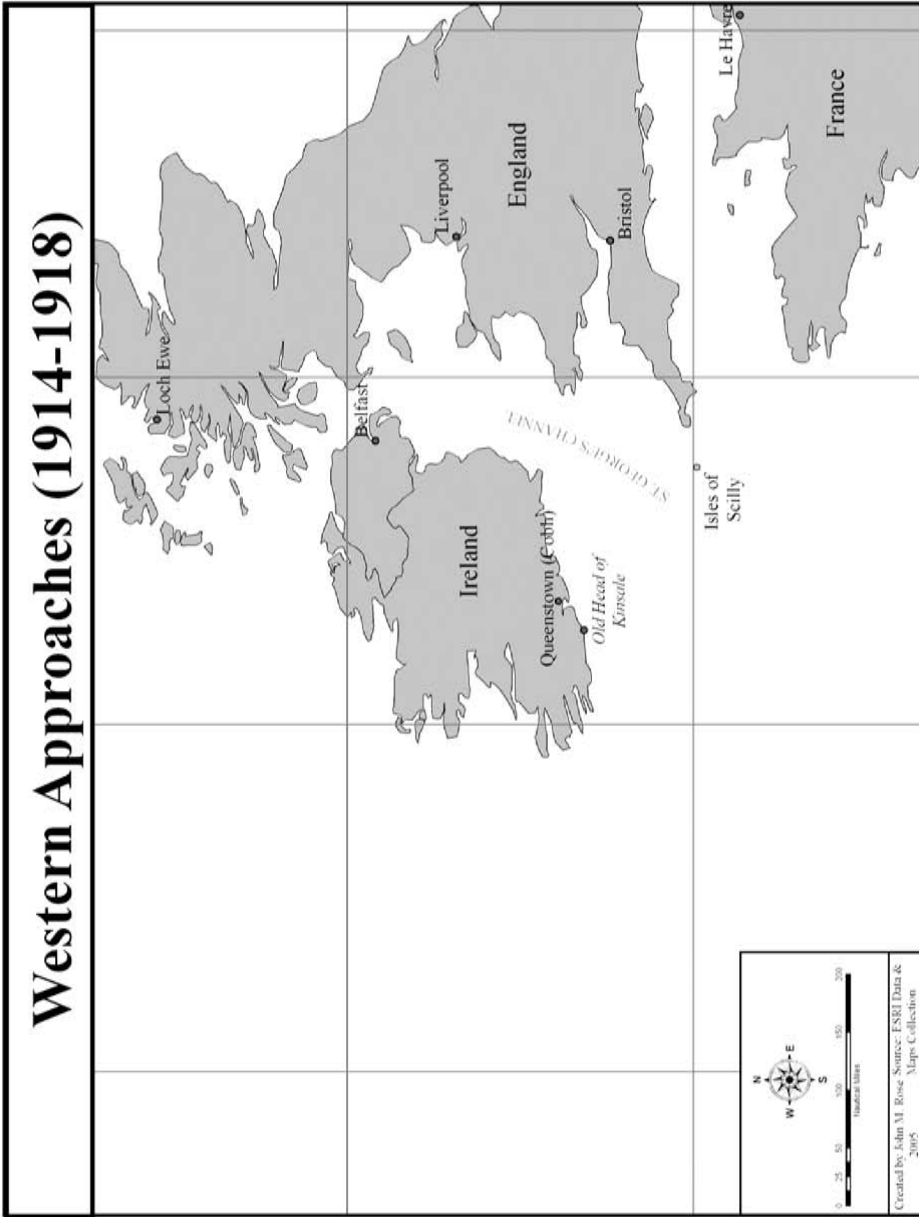
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- 1. North Sea
- 2. English Channel
- 3. Greenland-Iceland Gap
- 4. Straits of Gibraltar
- 5. Malta
- 6. Dardanelles
- 7. Suez Canal
- 8. Cape of Good Hope
- 9. Strait of Malacca
- 10. Formosa (Taiwan) Strait
- 11. Panama Canal
- 12. Strait of Magellan











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