

Watts Naval School prided itself on turning out many a fine young sailor to serve the country during the period covering the two world wars. They provided a two year course of general education, followed at the age of 14 by a two year course of Naval Training. There was accommodation for 300 boys, the majority of whom, on leaving, went to H.M.S. *Ganges*, a boys Naval Training Establishment at Shotley, Suffolk. Only a few boys went into the Merchant Navy.

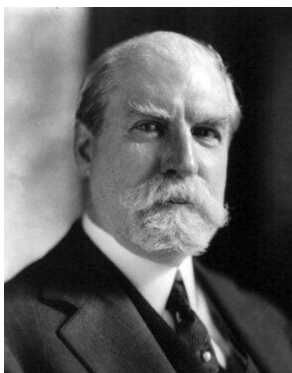
The school was closed in 1953, when the remaining boys were transferred to other Barnardo's training ship establishments, mostly on the south coast such as Russell-Cotes Sea Training School in Parkstone, Dorset.

The Washington Naval Conference, 1922 (Part 2)

By David Chessum

In the Spring edition of the Chough, naval historian David Chessum examined the background to the Washington Naval Conference, the centenary of which we mark this year. In this edition David looks at the Conference itself.

The opening theatrics of the WNC have been widely documented.¹ In a session described as “*really magnificent and stunning*”², Secretary of State Hughes proposed the cancellation and scrapping of all capital ships then under construction, and the disposal of many older

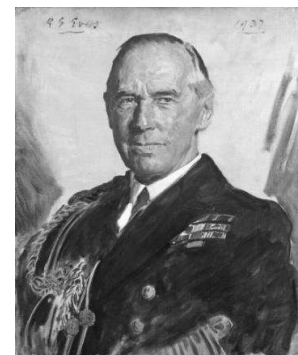


Secretary of State Hughes

vessels. The US, the British Empire and Japan would be left with capital ships which approximated the proposed ratios of 5:5:3. These capital ship fleets would be frozen by a ten-year capital ship building holiday, after which an agreed replacement programme would make the fleet strength ratios permanent.³

These ratios of relative strength proved to be the most contentious single issue of the interwar naval arms control process.⁴ As arms control historian Hedley Bull pointed out, it is doubtful whether parity “*bore any relationship to the actual strategic needs of either Britain or the United States.*”⁵ For the British Empire, accepting an equal ratio with the US represented the formal surrendering of the mantle of naval supremacy that had been held since the Armada. While this attracted considerable adverse comment, battle fleet parity with the US had in fact already been accepted in

principle prior to the WNC with the adoption of a one-power standard.⁶



Beatty (left) and Chatfield⁶ (right) provided the naval service expertise to the British delegation at the conference.

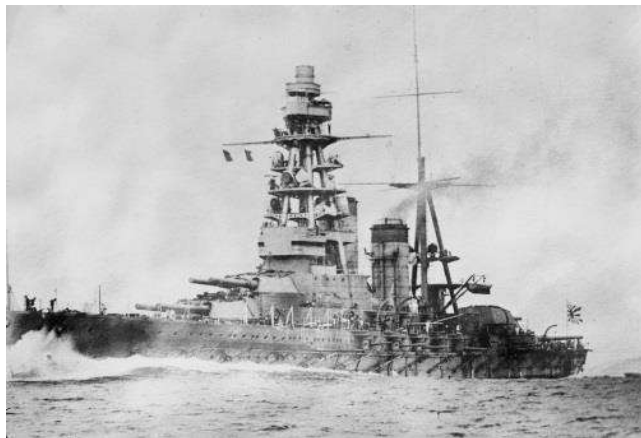
Far more contentious than parity between the British and American battle fleets was the 5:3 ratio between America and Japan. Both American and Japanese war planning was based on the heuristic that the USN fleet would require a fifty percent numerical superiority over the Japanese fleet to be able to operate in Japanese home waters. A ratio of 66.6% would give America the 50% superiority specified by the heuristic, while 70% would provide Japan with a minimal margin to deny them this level of superiority. Thus Japan demanded a 70% ratio vis-à-vis America, while the USN General Board requested a ratio of 2:1 between the USN and Japan.⁷

The mutually exclusive demands of the American and Japanese delegations were ultimately resolved by a compromise that entailed Japanese acceptance of the 60% ratio in return for the provisions which prevented all parties from fortifying or establishing naval bases in their possessions in the Western Pacific.⁸ Without a secure base, the USN would be unable to operate effectively in the Western Pacific, and Japan could be secure in her home waters despite the smaller ratio.

The original US proposal to terminate all capital shipbuilding for the duration of a ten-year building holiday was based on the understanding that each of the three major powers had completed just one post-Jutland ship - *Maryland*, *Nagato* and *Hood* - thus ensuring that no one power had any significant advantage. In making this assessment, the US delegation believed that the battleship *Mutsu* was still under construction and would therefore be excluded from the list of ships to be retained. But the Japanese were adamant that *Mutsu* was complete, and she had commenced sea trials prior to the Conference.

The retention of *Mutsu* upset the balance on which the original calculations were based. In order to preserve the agreed ratios of strength, a compromise was agreed that both the US and the British Empire could complete

two additional post-Jutland ships. The US was permitted to complete an additional two Colorado class battleships then under construction (*West Virginia* and *Colorado*), while the British Empire could build two new battleships (*Nelson* and *Rodney*).



The Japanese battleship Mutsu 'upset the balance' of the conference

The Treaty specified that no capital ship constructed by, for, or within the jurisdiction of any of the Contracting Powers could exceed 35,000 tons standard displacement or carry guns with a calibre more than sixteen inches. As this limit was subsequently incorporated into several follow-on naval limitation agreements including the 1936 London Naval Treaty and the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement, it effectively limited the size of all capital ships built until the *Yamato*, *Iowa* and *Vanguard* were built some 25-30 years later. But as these limits weren't retrospectively applied, the Royal Navy was permitted to retain the *Hood*, which exceeded the tonnage limit by approximately 6,000 tons, and she therefore remained the largest warship in the world by a significant margin throughout the interwar period.



The signing of the Treaty

Footnotes

1 - For example, see H & M Sprout, 1940, *Toward a New Order of Sea Power*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp145-153, and BL Simpson (pseud. P Weale), 1923, *An Indiscreet Chronicle from the Pacific*, George Allen & Unwin, London, pp160-161.

2 - Hankey to his wife, 13 Nov 1921, *Churchill Archives Centre*, HNKY 3/29.

3 - WNT, Article III. The replacement schedules for each nation were articulated in WNT, Chapter II, Part 3, Section II.

4 - CID Sub-Committee on the Disarmament Conference, 9 Apr 1931, p9, NAA: A5954/69, 1720/2.

5 - H Bull, *Strategic Arms Limitation: The Precedent of the Washington and London Naval Treaties*, in MA Kaplan (ed), 1973, *SALT: Problems & Prospects*, General Learning Press, Morristown, p42.

6 - Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 30 May 1921, p11, TNA: CAB 23/25/27.

7 - N Friedman, 2015, *The British Battleship 1906-1946*, Seaforth, Barnsley, p216. The RN had independently come to the same 2:1 ratio for the relative strengths of the British and Japanese navies. T Kuramatsu, *Britain, Japan and Inter-War Naval Limitation, 1921-1936*, in I Gow, Y Hirama & J Chapman (eds), 2003, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000, Vol. III*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, p129.

8 - Papers prepared by the Admiralty for the 1923 Imperial Conference concluded that "America is therefore precluded from taking effective action in the Western Pacific." Empire Naval Policy and Co-operation – Australia, NAA: A981/4, IMP 111. This opinion was repeated in 1934 when Foreign Policy Reports reported that "The effect of this agreement was to insure Japan against the danger of attack from either of its potential rivals, as without fortified bases neither the United States nor Great Britain could wage an offensive war in the Far East with any prospect of success." WT Stone, 1934, *Impending Naval Rivalry*, *Foreign Policy Reports*, 10 (3), p32.

Credits

A - Alfred Chatfield, 1st Baron Chatfield by Reginald Grenville Eves oil on canvas, 1937 NPG 4602

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The final part of David's article, in which he moves on to consider contemporary and historical assessment of the Washington Naval Conference, will be published in the Winter edition of *The Chough*.

Showing the Flag

By Alex Ray

With the news of recent weeks sadly filled with stories of the conflict in the Ukraine, we saw H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* set sail from Portsmouth to act as flagship for a NATO fleet operating in the Baltic in a show of strength to hopefully deter any Russian thoughts and ideas of operations in the Baltic Region. Great Britain using its naval strength to show the flag and to make any potential aggressors think twice before crossing the Rubicon is not anything new in the history of the Royal Navy; indeed the very first mission H.M.S. *Hood* would undertake would be a very similar one to the mission H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* has just taken part in.

In May 1920 the Russian Civil War was in its third year, having broken out in the aftermath of the October Revolution, and the Red Army was fighting a savage war