

Striking a Balance between Dissent and Discipline: Admiral Sir Reginald Drax

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L'amiral Sir Reginald A. R. Plunkett-Erle-Drax a été un des officiers les plus doués de la British Royal Navy au cours de la première moitié du 20e siècle, et un des premiers officiers d'état-major qualifié de la Navy. L'amiral Drax a oeuvré pour que le personnel au niveau du travail soit reconnu par le service et a été un des membres fondateurs de la Naval Review. Il a pleinement participé aux réformes de la révolution de la Navy mais a réalisé que la passion pour la réforme doit être équilibré d'une acuité politique. Contrairement aux autres, il a travaillé avec diligence pour encourager les changements professionnels dans le cadre de l'organisme.

Instead of the brain being an active and productive machine, a thing of vast constructive power, we try to make it a cross between a museum and a lost-property office.

-Commander R. Plunket, 1913¹

Military organisations have a deserved reputation for resisting change, and the Royal Navy has been one of the principal offenders, or so we have been told by disgruntled officers such as Admirals Herbert Richmond, Kenneth Dewar and Percy Scott.² The experiences of these men have coloured the historiography to such an extent that other officers advocating reform less stridently are largely forgotten. Although these men have not left volumes of memoirs, masses of private papers or newspapers commentaries, their work was vital. Not only did many gain their "brass hats" as senior executive officers but often reached flag rank and served in important posts ashore and afloat.³

¹ Drax, "Naval Education," *Naval Review*, I (1913), 28.

² Arthur Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran* (London, 1974), 33.

³ Ironically, many of the would-be reformers, including the three mentioned above, made it to flag rank, even if they did not receive the appointments for which they had hoped.

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One of these officers was Admiral Sir Reginald A. R. Plunkett-Ernlé-Drax (1880-1967), one of the most intellectually gifted officers of his time and a reformer associated with the "Young Turk" movement headed by then-Captain Herbert Richmond in the years surrounding the First World War. Indeed, in Donald Schurman's view he was "the most intelligent of the lot."⁴ Born Reginald Plunkett in Marylebone, London, in July 1880 as the second son of the 17th Baron Dunsany, he followed the example of his grandfather, entering the Royal Navy in July 1896 and passing out of *Britannia* with a first and earned five first-class certificates as an acting sub-lieutenant. Selected to specialise in the Torpedo branch, he scored highly in the resulting exams. While serving as a lieutenant, Plunkett attended the Army Staff College at Camberley to study staff training and its use in war. This was extremely unusual duty for a naval officer, especially considering the often strained relations between the Admiralty and the War Office.

In May 1912 he was promoted to commander and selected for training as a staff officer, the first of twelve officers chosen.⁵ In 1913, he passed the war staff duties examination and was assigned to the staff of Rear-Admiral Sir David Beatty aboard HMS *Lion*. Beatty apparently thought highly of his new flag commander and entrusted him with the squadron's tactical planning. As a result of his actions at Jutland in 1916, where he was mentioned in despatches, Drax was promoted to captain; he and Martin Naismith, the renowned submarine commander, were the youngest captains on the navy list at the time.⁶

During this period Drax became closely associated with Richmond and other reformers who were dissatisfied with the direction of naval policy. Drax had first encountered Richmond as a lecturer at the War Course in 1912 at the point that dissenters began to gather around that particular officer.⁷ Indeed, Drax soon became the key link between Richmond and Beatty, especially after Richmond became the assistant director of naval operations at the Admiralty.⁸ Drax was also one of the founders and most important contributors to the *Naval Review* from its inception.

After the war, he became Director of the newly re-established Royal Naval Staff College from 1919 to 1922 and president of the Allied Control Commission in 1922-24. He was promoted to rear-Admiral commanding the 1st Battle Squadron in the Mediterranean Fleet before returning to the Admiralty as director of manning from 1930 to 1932. Promoted to vice-admiral in 1932, Drax was appointed commander-in-chief North America and West Indies Station until 1934 and commander-in-chief Plymouth from 1935 until 1938. During his time in North America, Drax visited Ottawa during the Royal Canadian Navy's struggle for

⁴ D. M. Schurman to author, personal communication, 10 December 1993.

⁵ "Drax Obituary," *The Times*, 18 October 1967, 12.

⁶ Drax Paper, Churchill Archives, Cambridge, D R A X 6/18, "Notes on Chapter 12 of Marder's Book," 1959, 13. *The Navy List* is an official publication that lists officers according to rank and status (retired, active, etc.) and commissioned warships.

⁷ Barry D. Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946* (Waterloo, ON, 1982), 30-31.

⁸ Richmond was assistant director of naval operations at the Admiralty until 1915. From there he was briefly sent to the Mediterranean and then to the 3rd Battle Squadron of old pre-dreadnought battleships

survival with the Treasury Board in 1933, reinforcing the arguments of the Canadian Naval Staff that played an important part in the salvation of the R C N from the treasury blade.⁹

He was pulled back to the Admiralty to assist in the development of naval war plans and was promoted to full admiral in 1936. After Winston Churchill returned to the Admiralty as first lord in 1939, Drax was appointed commander-in-chief at Chatham until 1941, when he retired from active service. He moved back to the family's estate at Charborough Park in Dorset, but returned to sea duty in 1943 as a commodore of convoys. He remained active in his postwar retirement and continued to write, involve himself in youth work, and design solar heating systems (a project of which he was especially proud) until his death on 16 October 1967.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Royal Navy and Britain itself underwent revolutionary change. Admiral Sir John Fisher, as recent scholarship has shown, was intent on revolutionising not just the posture of the British fleet with the introduction of the dreadnought battleship, but also was intent on upsetting the traditional battleship-cruiser force structure that was traditional to navies. He fostered the development of submarines, torpedoes, aircraft and destroyers and wanted the construction of fast heavy cruisers that could double as battleships for the defence of Britain's vital sea communications.¹⁰ Fisher was also intent on revolutionising the makeup and training of the naval officer corps. He insisted that promotion and advancement would be based on professional attainments and merit, not social connections or "interest." With the assistance of Julian Corbett, the historian, Fisher also took tentative steps to introduce staff training and a naval staff structure. However, Fisher's reforms were arrested by the growth of an increasingly loud and effective opposition since his methods verged on the dictatorial and he often took steps that violated traditional discipline.¹¹ In order to preserve his position he was forced to consolidate his reforms and was, as a result, reluctant to open up more fields of dissent by instituting a fully-fledged naval staff. More to the point, he had no desire to establish an institutionalised alternative system of planning over which he did not exercise full control. The rift with Beresford who was commander-in-chief of the Channel Fleet reached unprecedented proportions and triggered an inquiry of a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence into Admiralty policy.¹² It became apparent that Fisher's tenure at Whitehall was coming to a close by 1909. This left a series of incomplete reforms in the Royal Navy for another generation of officers.

However, this new generation of officers became radicalised by the experience of the

⁹ James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto, 1964), 282-83. The author wishes to thank Dr. Roger Sarty for bringing this to his attention.

¹⁰ See Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia, SC, 1999).

¹¹ The most outstanding example of Fisher's questionable methods was his habit of encouraging junior officers to write to him directly about activities in various fleets. A series of letters written by Captain Reginald Bacon critical of Admirals Beresford and Lambton in the Mediterranean caused an uproar which nearly finished Bacon's career.

¹² See Great Britain, House of Commons, Sessional Papers 1909 LIV, Report of the Beresford Commission, 12 August 1909.

First World War and culminated in the embarrassing dismissal of a First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe in December 1917. This dismissal proved even more distressing due to the fact that several officers, "Young Turks" (as they styled themselves) were involved in direct communication with the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George to secure Jellicoe's ouster. Captain Herbert Richmond, Commander K G B . Dewar, and Lieutenant Commander J. M. Kenworthy conspired with the complicity of Admiral Sir David Beatty to shake things up at the Admiralty and institute what they saw as a properly-run naval war staff. The war mercilessly exposed the limitations of pre-war planning (or, more accurately what passed for planning) and showed the emptiness of Mahanian battle fleet doctrine. All the dreadnought battleships sitting in Scapa Flow or cruising the North Sea did not prevent Britain's near-starvation. The palace revolution, however, tended to make dissent decidedly unpopular and led to another challenge: making reform effective in the long term. This goal was behind the work of Admiral Sir Reginald Drax as he sought to integrate the path of reform and change with the continuity of the Royal Navy's development.

Richmond and Drax were a part of the generation that first experienced Fisher's reforms and had, to a certain degree, embraced them. Richmond, in particular, was marked by Fisher as an up-and-coming officer of high intelligence and skill which earned a place in the "Fishpond."¹³ Fisher was impressed by Richmond's abilities as the latter had served as Fisher's naval secretary at the Admiralty. Indeed, after several years at the Admiralty, Richmond was given command of HMS *Dreadnought*, one of newest of the Navy's battleships and Fisher's brainchild. This was a very significant posting for a relatively junior captain. However, at some point both of these officers became disillusioned with Fisher.

Younger men who experienced the first fruits of Fisher's reforms found themselves increasingly alienated from the first sea lord. If they questioned Fisher's methods they would find themselves in severe difficulty professionally as "Jacky" became extremely dictatorial as he forced through the reforms he saw necessary.¹⁴ As Fisher hissed at an opponent: "Anyone who opposes me, I crush."¹⁵ Fisher, "will neither seek nor accept counsel. He generalises about war, saying it is to be made terrible, the enemy is to be hit hard & hit often, and many other aphorisms."¹⁶ Nor does it take long to find examples of Fisher's hostility. Richmond himself found himself "promoted" from the command of *Dreadnought* to a second class cruiser. Needless to say this centralisation of control greatly hampered efforts by younger officers, especially Richmond, to get an efficient staff system to allow for better planning. As it stood, all strategical and tactical plans rested in the minds of either the individual

¹³ Drax was only promoted to commander in 1912, after Fisher had left the Admiralty. The "Fishpond" referred to Admiral Fisher's habit of pulling relatively junior men to the fore and being given highly favoured positions within the navy.

¹⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, (London, 1927), I: 73.

¹⁵ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought*, (New York, 1991), 405.

¹⁶ Arthur J. Marder, (ed.), Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Portrait of an Admiral - The Life and Letters of Sir Herbert Richmond*, (London, 1952), 48, entry dated 2 May 1909.

commander-in-chief or the first sea lord. Some years later Drax wrote a more balanced view: "I have immense admiration for Lord Fisher, but he was surely in some respects a sad materialist and no expert tactician. How otherwise could he have built the "Furious"... with two 18" guns..."¹⁷

However, Fisher's methods had one very important result. The men of the "Fishpond" whom Fisher had recognised as being particularly brilliant officers were pushed ahead in rank above their fellows and were in positions to use their influence to aid the growing intellectual revolution. Officers of unique gifts were promoted rapidly such as Richmond and Reginald Bacon along with others.

If naval officers were to be trained in only how to use weapons and to run their ships efficiently, something was lacking. If an officer, with the theoretical possibility of eventually becoming a commander-in-chief or first sea lord had not been trained in tactics and strategy, it was difficult to expect effective mastery of operations to magically appear along with additional stripes on the sleeve of a money jacket. As Richmond stated, it does not matter how many ships you arm for battle, it is the method in which you use them that counts. Officers had, he argued, simply forgotten what Kempenfelt called the "sublime" aspects of the naval profession.¹⁸ This anti-intellectualism may have even had wider causes due to the system of British education where the young were to be raised as "gentlemen" and the *Britannia* system which was supposed to create "practical men." As Captain Roskill noted, such attitudes were prevalent among naval officers.¹⁹

Although Drax was closely associated with Richmond, that relationship was never dominated by Richmond and nor did Drax never allowed himself to be "bullied" by his senior.²⁰ In later years, Drax wrote to Arthur Marder, "we certainly had not enough men of the Richmond type. Even he was a savage critic and never learnt 'to suffer fools gladly.'"²¹ He then went on to criticise Marder's too heavy reliance on "sour critics who had axes to grind against decision makers."²² The historical interest in Richmond such as Arthur Marder's *Portrait of an Admiral*, D. M. Schurman's *Education of A Navy*, and Barry Hunt's biography of Richmond, is showing that Drax remained independent and in some ways critical of Richmond. It is an important point.

Perhaps the best example of this refusal to knuckle-under to Richmond was an exchange in the 1914 volume of the *Naval Review*. Drax had written an article entitled "The Influence of an Efficient Home Defence Army on Naval Strategy" in which he suggested that an adequate defence army in Britain would give great tactical and strategic freedom to both

¹⁷ DRAX 2/2, "Battle Tactics: A Reply." Also found in the *NR XXI* (1933).

¹⁸ Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral*, 89, entry dated 27 October 1912. Richmond is commenting on the foundation of the *Naval Review*, "We are going to have a try to stir up interest in what Kempenfelt called the sublime parts of our work - strategy, tactics, principles."

¹⁹ Roskill, *Earl Beatty - The Last Naval Hero* (New York, 1979), 59-60.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ DRAX 6/18, "Notes on Chapter 12 of Marder's Book " 1959.

²² *Ibid.*

an expeditionary force and the fleet to strike decisive blows unimpeded. Richmond responded with a crushing criticism that deliberately sought to destroy every historical example used by Drax without really going after his thesis. "It is not proposed to discuss either the fallacies or the points in the following paper, nor whether R. X. [Drax's pseudonym] has succeeded in proving his case."²³ Richmond hoped that R. X. would give "half-a-dozen" historical examples "out of the many he knows" in the next number of the *Naval Review* to strengthen his case.²⁴ Instead, Richmond got a volley, followed closely by cold steel in the next issue of the journal.

Drax angrily responded saying, "But this article was quite obviously more of an attack than a criticism, and unfortunately the parts of it confined to criticism were purely destructive."²⁵ Drax continued, writing that he should feel flattered that his critic thought it necessary to write eighteen pages to destroy two pages of text. "I would do it with pleasure if it were of value to the service, but I feel more respect than my critic does for Mr. Corbett's dictum, officers no longer look upon history as a kind of a dustheap from which a convenient brick may be extracted to hurl at their opponents..."²⁶ At the end of his response Drax asked his critic if it would not be better that two naval officers could discuss the issue in a constructive manner that would do good for the Service.²⁷

Drax did indeed know the identity of his critic. Both Drax and Richmond knew each other rather well since they were both founders of the *Naval Review* and there was an extensive correspondence. In addition, the vast range of historical knowledge shown by the critic quite obviously pointed at Richmond. Drax was his own man and his mind was at least as quick as Richmond's. Indeed, in his later correspondence he told Richmond to be careful throwing his name around so there would be "less chance of evoking an order for my court-martial!"²⁸ Drax was not about to be bullied, even by a man of the intellectual prowess of a Richmond.

Drax was also independent of K. G. B. Dewar. Even though Drax was supposed to have been Dewar's best man at the latter's wedding, Drax changed his mind about bringing Dewar with him to the staff college at Greenwich as his assistant because of certain "difficulties."²⁹ Dewar stated in his autobiography, "I could only infer that these difficulties referred to the reputation for independent thought against which Sir John Jellicoe had warned me and that it was considered necessary to safeguard our future staff officers from the danger of independent thinking."³⁰ This is patently unfair to Drax, since he was equally the champion of independent thought as Dewar. In addition, Dewar was involved directly in the dismissal

²³ Captain H. W. Richmond, "Some Historical Aspects of Home Defence - A Reply to R. X." *NR* 11 (1914), 141.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 155; my emphasis.

²⁵ Drax, "Home Defence - A Reply by R. X.," *NR* H (1914), 254.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 262-63.

²⁸ Herbert Richmond Papers, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. RIC 7/4, Drax to Richmond, 24 November 1914.

²⁹ Dewar, *The Navy from Within*, (London, 1939), 160, 256.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

of Jellicoe as first sea lord in 1917, which made him undesirable. Taking the perspective from Drax's writings and the way his career progressed, the navy was the loyalty that he cared about most. Dewar, whilst having many good ideas and a first-rate brain, would only serve to alienate staff training from the navy afloat and impair the work of the staff college. Furthermore, Dewar's behaviour during the "*Royal Oak* Affair" of 1927-28 further split naval opinion and exposed the navy to public disgrace.³¹

Drax attempted to take the ideas of the Young Turks and translate them into effective policy. He did so by first ensuring his separation from Richmond. Richmond's name had acquired a distasteful odour as Beatty wrote to him in 1917, "I shan't tell him [Jellicoe] you had anything to do with it as your name stinks at the Admiralty."³² Generally, Drax took a more even-handed approach than Richmond and certainly displayed much more patience. Eventually, Drax was included in the highest planning circles of the navy and at least three first sea lords called on him to assist in writing war plans.

Drax also had considerably more tact than Richmond. Although both of these capable officers often reacted very strongly, Drax would admit his errors far more readily than Richmond. In his latter years, Drax would regret many of the things he had written in haste. As he wrote to Richmond in 1914: "I am getting in the habit of writing perhaps more freely than I ought to. I write in haste, sometimes with no knowledge of a situation beyond our own view, so if I write too much please make allowance for my Celtic temperament! I know you will use them, as I write them, only for the good of the Service - or rather for the good of the Country, which comes before the Service."³³ In the note that Drax included with the index of his personal papers telling the future reader that he had burned much of the correspondence with Commander (later Rear-Admiral Sir) Roger Bellairs and Herbert Richmond,³⁴ he wrote "I have tried to cut out most of the letters containing criticism or dealing with controversial subjects but if I have not done enough in this direction, I hope that Captain Roskill (the custodian of his papers at Churchill College) will perhaps do a little more for me."³⁵

Although he may have been more tactful than his associates he nevertheless was the recipient of some criticism from his superiors. One performance report recognised his strength of character and ability but added: "Somewhat lacking in tact and inclined to shirk details."³⁶

³¹ Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, 172-75 and, Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars* (New York, 1968) 1:559-60. Dewar commanded the flagship of the 1st Battle Squadron *Royal Oak* in the Mediterranean Fleet in order to gain enough sea time to qualify for promotion to flag rank. Conflicts between the ship's executive officer, Dewar and Rear Admiral Collard resulted in a series of embarrassing courts martial. The commander-in-chief, the highly regarded Roger Keyes, was denied the post of first sea lord as a result of this affair. See Leslie Gardiner, *The Royal Oak Courts Martial* (Edinburgh, 1965).

³² Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, 75.

³³ RIC 7/4, Drax to Richmond, 18 December 1914.

³⁴ Bellairs served on Beatty's staff during the war. Unfortunately, his ship *HMS Rodney* was one of the most heavily involved in the Invergordon mutiny of 1931. Therefore, his promotion to active flag-rank was invalidated. James Goldrick, "The Founders and the Early Days," *NR LXXV* (1988), 60.

³⁵ DRAX 1/1, Introductory Note, June 1966.

³⁶ Public Record Office, Kew, A D M 196/45, Service Records, report dated January 1913, 214.

When in the 1930s Drax recommended improvements of staff work, he earned a withering rebuke from his former shipmate. Admiral Sir Ernie Chatfield informed him that the planning system that he proposed would "overlap existing structures" and to the charge that the present system did not allow for the cultivation of the offensive spirit, Chatfield replied: "I am unable to accept this severe implication. You will recollect that in 1933 you expressed yourself in somewhat similar terms in a personal letter to me about the Far East War Plan. I had occasion to write to you personally pointing out the incorrectness of your arguments."³⁷ Chatfield was annoyed with the lack of apparent respect shown by Drax to the Admiralty. Just prior to the outbreak of war, however, Drax's concerns were shown to be wholly justified. The "Binney Report on the Naval Staff" showed that there was an insufficient division between the material side and the "higher" development of the naval staff. Moreover, the Plans Division of the Naval Staff only seemed to develop plans for defensive dispositions without regard to offensive plans. Apparently it was up to the individual commanders-in-chief to work out their own offensive planning, but the defensive tone of the Plans Division seemed to indicate that offensive action was neither desired nor expected.³⁸

Drax's comments on the 1938 War Plan also got him into trouble. Instead of merely criticising it, he wrote what the German war plan would look like if it was written in the same spirit as the 1938 Admiralty war plan. Afterwards, Drax noted "1 or 2 of the Sea Lords much disliked the criticism herein. I think my Appendix I wd. [sic] have been best omitted."³⁹ In 1929 he clashed with Admiral W. H. Kelly when Drax gave a lecture entitled, "Battle Tactics." Drax found Kelly "violently antagonistic" and his arguments to be "plausible, persuasive, and utterly unsound."⁴⁰ In the context of one of the arguments, Drax wrote, "my theories are based almost entirely on an exhaustive study of the late war, where, incidentally, I did more sea time and saw far more fighting than he [Kelly] did."⁴¹ These examples show how he managed to keep his temper under control and avoided the high-handed actions of either Richmond or Dewar.⁴²

The tact that was often a key feature in Drax's writings went in both directions, to senior and junior officers. There was no reason to be stingy with praise and subordinates should be given a chance to air their views to improve the navy's performance. Also, juniors were to be treated with respect and their concerns should be looked after since the human

³⁷ Chatfield Papers, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, CHT 3/1, Chatfield to Drax, 5 November 1937.

³⁸ A D M 167/105 "Binney Report on the Naval Staff," 5 January 1939.

³⁹ DRAX 2/8, Drax (C-in-C Plymouth) to Secretary of the Admiralty, *War Plans*, 3 September 1937, minute by Drax.

⁴⁰ DRAX 2/8, "Battle Tactics - a note on the results of the lecture in November 1929." This document may have been sent to Ernie Chatfield since he invited Drax to give the lecture in the first instance. See DRAX 6/18, "Notes on Chapter 12 of Marder's Book," 1959.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Richmond published articles in *The Times* on 21 and 22 November 1929, contrary to the views of Their Lordships. Dewar, as a captain, went over the heads of everyone in the navy in consulting with the prime minister to get rid of Jellicoe as first sea lord in 1917.

element was the decider of battles.⁴³ Loyal subordinates were trusted not terrorised into performing their duties. The chief characteristics that a senior officer required in dealing with juniors was a quality that Drax had seen first hand in Beatty, that of accessibility. Beatty was always willing to hear the ideas of his subordinates and was open even towards those who distrusted him.⁴⁴ That quality was vital to avoid stagnation and friction.⁴⁵ But, tact was also required to ensure an inherent unity of purpose and doctrine in the Royal Navy's officers corps, in order to improve the performance of the navy. There was a good deal of mistrust among naval officers during Drax's career. Some did not hesitate to stab each other in the back in order to get ahead. Disputes such as the one between Beresford and Fisher or the writing of the official history and the Battle of Jutland controversy were prominent examples, and they posed a severe threat to that unity of purpose which was so necessary to operational efficiency.

The Jutland dispute, in particular, was where Drax turned his attention to heal the rift in the officer cadre in an article entitled "Jutland or Trafalgar?"⁴⁶ He questioned the Beatty camp, "Is it right that Lord Jellicoe should be blamed for bad tactics, bad staff work, or for not doing better than he did? The answer is definitely No." He further states that "four out of five of our remaining admirals would have done no better",⁴⁷ and the mistakes were ones to be "logically expected from the pre-war training of the British Fleet."⁴⁸ This paper is especially important since Drax was a "Beatty man;" he had been the admiral's flag commander throughout most of the Great War. Furthermore, Drax wrote a part of the tribute to Beatty when he died in 1936.⁴⁹ His defence of Jellicoe is especially telling in this context since Drax's aim was always the improvement of the navy and the unity of its officers. Mistakes and errors must be learned from and it is simply not enough to seek out scape-goats for a general problem. "The dead past can well enough bury its dead, but the future is gravely

⁴³ Drax, "Advice to the Young - A Few Notes for a Dartmouth Cadet," *NR XXXIII* (1945), 235.

⁴⁴ § 32 Madden to Jellicoe, 12 February 1917, *Jellicoe Papers* 1:144. Madden and Beatty were rivals for the post of commander-in-chief Grand Fleet when it was vacated by the promotion of Jellicoe in the end of 1916. Admiral Sir Charles Madden then found himself second-in-command to Beatty.

⁴⁵ Drax, "The Art of Command," *NR XH* (1924), 101-3.

⁴⁶ This dispute was over the unsatisfactory results of the Battle of Jutland where the Royal Navy lost three battle cruisers. Admiral Jellicoe commanded the Grand Fleet while Admiral David Beatty commanded the Battle Cruiser Squadrons. Members of the Beatty camp complained of Jellicoe's timidity and the Jellicoe camp justified their mentor's position and attacked Beatty's professional reputation as well. The controversy raged even after both of the antagonists were dead. Indeed, Lady Jellicoe wrote to the Board of the Admiralty (ADM 167/96) in 1937 angrily protesting the erection of a monument to both Beatty and Jellicoe in Trafalgar Square. In February 1940, the Admiralty deliberately renamed two battleships under construction *from Jellicoe* and *Beatty* to *Anson* and *Howe* to avoid controversy (ADM 167/108). This would make an excellent research topic in and of itself.

⁴⁷ Drax does not confirm or deny that Beatty could have not done any better. Drax would be most readily identified as a Beatty supporter due to his service under Beatty throughout the entire war.

⁴⁸ DRAX 6/11, "Jutland or Trafalgar?" Also found in *NR XIJJ* (1925), 238-43.

⁴⁹ DRAX 6/12, "D.B." This article also appears in the *M? XXIV* (1936), 215-220.

in danger."⁵⁰

This phenomenon was certainly relevant to the Royal Navy in the interwar period as everything settled down to a leisurely pace even after a period of reform brought about by the "Young Turks". As Drax himself wrote to Richmond, "The English won't learn in peace... but they *can't* fail to learn from war. It may be 5 years, or 10... but sooner or later the truth *must* come to light and a renaissance will result..."⁵¹ The inertia of administration continued in many ways unabated. Marder's masterful explanation of this development is particularly effective.⁵² However, some very key changes had taken place.

One important issue these reformers found themselves addressing was what they regarded as the growing "materialist bent of the naval profession to the detriment of reasoned and informed discussion of policy and strategy. Drax's anti-materialism was very pronounced but it took a different tack than Richmond. Richmond's indictments of the narrow education he received were, "the standard complaints of a mind that cannot, will not, or perhaps should not, come to grips with technical and mathematical detail for its own sake."⁵³ Drax, on the other hand, was profoundly fascinated by material inventions that flooded the naval arena in the first decade of the twentieth century and it was an interest that never left him even into his eighties. Drax had invented several systems, one of which was responsible for his promotion to commander.⁵⁴ On the other hand, he felt that weapons and systems for combat vessels should meet rigorous standards for quality and usefulness. For instance, in 1939 he raised the alarm about the vast number of types of ordnance required for the navy which greatly complicated the supply difficulties of an overseas fleet.⁵⁵ This problem was certainly borne out in the difficulties experienced by Admiral Cunningham in the Mediterranean supplying his cruisers with proper 5.25" and 6" ammunition in 1940-41. Nor by any means was Drax slow to grasp the importance of new technologies to naval warfare. As a captain in 1921 he understood the importance of aircraft in an essay that won the Royal United Services Institution bronze metal.⁵⁶

Unlike Richmond, Drax would not hesitate to argue from the "materialist" point of view if it aided his point. For instance, Drax in his article "Big Battleships" argued for a reduction in battleship tonnage from a distinctly materiel point of view. He argued that modern warships could only use specialised docking facilities and were, in fact, more vulnerable to battle damage, especially below the water-line, which was even more difficult to repair.⁵⁷ By

⁵⁰ Drax, "Jutland or Trafalgar," *NR XJH* (1925), 238

⁵¹ RIC 7/4, 28 September 1917. Also quoted in Marder *From the Dardanelles to Oran*, 34.

⁵² Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran*. See the chapter aptly titled, "The Influence of History Upon Sea Power

⁵³ D. M. Schurman, *The Education of A Navy*, (Chicago, 1965), 117.

⁵⁴ A D M 196/45, "Officer Service Records," 214.

⁵⁵ D R A X 6/19, Drax to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 2 September 1938.

⁵⁶ Drax, "The Influence in the Future of Aircraft Upon Problems of Imperial Defence," *NR XX* (1922), 210-247.

⁵⁷ Drax, "Big Battleships," *NR XXXTV* (1936), 249-250.

contrast, Richmond would often be arbitrary. His pronouncement of the 10,000 ton limit that should be, in his view, be imposed on battleships.⁵⁸ Richmond's advocacy of an unsubstantiated displacement weakened his case.

Differences in personal style also affected their relative positions on this issue. Richmond would often rail against "materialists," rightly, because of their frequent failure to think through the applications of their technology. This was compounded by Richmond's historical view of naval affairs in which he often failed to recognise the importance of changing technology as Eric Grove indicated.⁵⁹ His manner of trying to convince fellow officers fell on deaf ears as they disliked being told "what materialist blockheads they were."⁶⁰ Eventually his obdurate attitudes pushed him to publish those infamous articles in *The Times* in November 1929 which finished his naval career and earned him the lasting enmity of Lord Chatfield.⁶¹ Just how bitter the reaction was against Richmond was shown by Chatfield's comment: "I mention this because in the last few years Admiral Richmond has descended from his position of advantage among the clouds of Mount Olympus where he used to declaim against such vulgar matters as *materiel and weapons* and used to explain at great length how unimportant they are."⁶²

By contrast, Drax was profoundly aware that any direct assault that went out of its way to insult brother officers would be counter-productive. It would only make their hearts more obdurate from accepting any of the criticisms that were vital to the good of the Service. Notice his conciliatory approach when he examined the issue in his article "The Psychology of War" in 1914. "Can we not try each to appreciate the good qualities of the other, to admit that one is the complement of the other, and all to agree that at least we should credit our brother officers with working loyally for the good of the service..."⁶³ The practical and the dieoretical officer need to work together in order for the Service to benefit. When the existence of the *Naval Review* was threatened, just after the Great War, Drax resisted the desire of both Admiral William Henderson and Richmond to take the dispute to the public arena. Drax preferred to use the powerful political contacts to gain the *Naval Review* a permanent place.⁶⁴

Drax, although being very wary of the inflated claims for new technology in the fleet

⁵⁸ Richmond, "Smaller Navies JJ - The Capital Ship," *The Times*, 22 November 1929, 15, and Eric J. Grove, "Richmond and Arms Control," in Goldrick and Hattendorf, eds., *Mahan Is Not Enough*, (Newport RI, 1993), 231-235.

⁵⁹ Grove, "Richmond and Arms Control," *Mahan Is Not Enough*, 233.

⁶⁰ Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral*, 31.

⁶¹ CHT 3/1, "Sketch Estimates for 1933." Richmond had published a series of articles which advocated the limitation of battleships to 10,000 tons. This greatly aggravated Chatfield's difficulties in extracting additional funds for the navy needed reconstruction.

⁶² *Ibid.* To be fair to Lord Chatfield, Richmond's ideas were used by the politicians to justify cuts in Naval Estimates. Also, Richmond's abrasive manner and his break of the chain of command generated considerable and wholly justifiable resentment. Apparently, Richmond returned Chatfield's enmity, Paul Halpern, (ed.) *The Keyes Papers* (London, 1980), U: 356-357, #297 Richmond to Keyes, 7 December 1936.

⁶³ Drax, "The Psychology of War," *NR U* (1914), 106.

⁶⁴ Goldrick, "The Irresistible Force," *Mahan Is Not Enough*, 97.

also recognised that material change itself was necessary. His only concern was that naval officers would regard new equipment and better weapons not as an end in and of themselves and only the means to protect British maritime interests. His method of reducing this dependence rested on persuasion and understanding rather than a descent from "Mount Olympus."⁶⁵

Drax, as a trained staff officer, wanted the Royal Navy to have a highly effective staff system which could develop plans and raise new ideas and concepts in order to make the fleet a highly-effective fighting force. The concept of individual responsibility of command would remain unchanged yet staff officers would be able to take the pressure off a commander by taking over his paperwork and give him advice and access to new ideas of fresh minds.

Even so, Drax was puzzled by the difficulties of retaining individuality in a staff structure. As John Ralston Saul indicated in his recent best-seller *Voltaire's Bastards*, the problem with military staffs is the attempt to rationalise war to such a degree that individual direction becomes impossible.⁶⁶ Individuality had to be embraced and cultivated to avoid intellectual stagnation. Drax himself blamed the education system that naval officers had to endure as cadets. "For it is simply the inevitable outcome of a process of evolution which has been very largely shaped by the peculiarities of the English character."⁶⁷ The system of education that trained Royal Navy officers concerned itself with cramming and with an almost deliberate effort to crush individuality.⁶⁸ As with a modern bureaucracy, unpopular ideas assumed to be "unworkable" are thrown out. Too often the tendency is to go on with a system that works without thinking through its implications.⁶⁹

Drax's ideas concentrated round the development of a free-standing staff of brilliant young officers to introduce new ideas and to be freed from day-to-day routine. Perhaps from this idea springs Admiral Cunningham's distrust of the archetypal staff officer yet he encouraged debate and argument among his subordinates to get maximum input into decision-making. As Richmond wrote sarcastically in his diary about Fisher's attempt at a naval staff: "There are a great many things we want our naval Von Moltke to tell us when you have started him at the head of the Naval War College! What distance shall we open fire? How near shall we approach the enemy in view of the gyroscope?"⁷⁰

Staffwork involved a radical departure in how naval officers functioned and were educated. As Admiral J.H. Godfrey wrote in his 1921 unpublished memoirs: "A junior commander assigned to two years in the Plans Division had very little idea what he was in for. In two respects his relationship with his seniors was quite different from anything he was

⁶⁵ CHT 3/1, "Sketch Estimates for 1933."

⁶⁶ Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards*, 205-211.

⁶⁷ Drax, "Naval Education," *NRI* (1913), 26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁹ John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards*, (Toronto, 1995) see the chapter entitled "Learning How to Organize Death." See also B. H. Liddell Hart *Why Don't We Learn From History!* (New York, 1943, 1971), 26-32.

⁷⁰ Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, 17.

experienced... at sea. Firstly, he must no longer expect to be told what to do. Now he must produce the ideas..."⁷¹ This was quite a contrast from the days when Lord Fisher could boast that he and Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson were the only ones to know the naval war plan.⁷²

Drax's career focused primarily on getting officers to think for themselves and to improve the Service. He wrote in 1939, "without intelligent criticism you can have no progress; but in our Service, having sometimes criticism of the wrong sort, all criticism is looked on with suspicion. I know young officers who would tell you to-day that in their opinion certain things are wrong and ought to be put right, but they dare not say so officially because they believe their careers would be finished if they did so."⁷³ In the same way, while Drax agreed with most of the substance of both Richmond and Dewar's ideas and even though many of his own thoughts were entirely concurrent, he rejected their harsh style. Drax quickly learned the best way to get ideas considered was to take a lower profile. The dismissal of Jellicoe from the post of first sea lord in 1917 was a case in point. Whilst Dewar and Richmond took an active part in the process and exulted in Jellicoe's fall, Drax remained aloof.⁷⁴ The jealousies among officers was one of the primary causes in the loss of a war or campaign in Drax's eyes.⁷⁵ Certainly, he would fight as hard as he could to get them implemented, but he would stay out of the public eye and would work behind the scenes.

Drax was profoundly aware of the difficulties raised by powerful personalities and the bitter criticisms levelled by naval officers on their brothers: "Friction between officers who are required to co-operate and work together is one of the most frequent causes of failure in war. Wherever personal jealousy or disagreement begins to operate it is almost certain that injury to the State will result."⁷⁶ Criticism of no longer effective practices was necessary because without such activity the results of a war could be disastrous. "Also we should remember that the less we encourage discussion and criticism within the Service the more violent is likely to be the criticism directed at the Service from without."⁷⁷

To be sure, Drax often had very harsh things to say about those who failed to think through the Navy's problems. For instance, in 1914 he wrote of "the deep sense of uneasiness

⁷¹ Hattendorf et al., (eds.) *British Naval Documents 1204-1960*, (London, 1991), 892, #486 "From the Unpublished Memoirs of Admiral J.H. Godfrey, 1921."

⁷² Admiral Sir John Fisher, *Memories*, (London, 1919), 102.

⁷³ DRAX 2/2, "Battle Tactics - A Lecture 1929," 14-15.

⁷⁴ Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, (London, 1969), IV: 344. Richmond and Dewar had directly and indirectly discussed the issue with the Prime Minister. Knowing Drax's attitude toward fellow officers, it would be unlikely that he would have participated in the scheme. Besides, he was no longer on Beauty's staff and was thus further away from the centres of power and influence. However, in DRAX 1/1 Drax wrote that much of his correspondence from the War was destroyed so it is unknown exactly what reaction he had at the time.

⁷⁵ Drax, "With the Grand Fleet 10/10/14," A/R U (1914), p. 311. See also his caution against unfair criticism in: Drax, "The Art of Command," NR XH (1924), 104-105.

⁷⁶ Drax, "The Principles of War," (1921) NR XX (1932), 328.

⁷⁷ DRAX 2/2, "Notes on the Jutland Controversy," ca. 1939.

beginning to pervade the Fleet. I omit the pessimists who of course are stupid..,"⁷⁸ His candour later caused him concern for his personal correspondence from the Great War.⁷⁹ In addition, Drax wrote a letter to Richmond when Lord Fisher was contemplating breaking up the battle cruiser squadrons into separate divisions, "I look on it as verging on lunacy among those who have not had the opportunity to study naval strategy, and little better than treason in those who have."⁸⁰ More often than not, his bitter attacks were confined to his private correspondence. Even in his publications, when his temper showed through, he tried to couch it in terms that would limit the sarcasm and the resulting personal hurt. One is reminded of the storming prophet gaining no converts while the quiet, slower-working disciple manages to gain a whole congregation. While Commander Goldrick may be correct in pointing out that Richmond was well-liked and respected in all his commands, his effectiveness as a reformer was severely compromised by his "descents from Olympus" which annoyed Chatfield so much.⁸¹

Throughout his career, Drax was committed to what he saw as the proper training of naval officers to seize the initiative and not to fall into the trap of finding security in printed orders. He concluded that, "Generally, the tendency to wait for orders and do nothing in cases of this sort is becoming a disgrace to the Navy and a menace to the Empire."⁸² He used an example from an exercise where a cruiser had to be ordered to engage the enemy. During the war two destroyers observed enemy vessels at night but did not attack. The commander replied when questioned afterwards, "I thought that if I left them alone and did nothing they might have moved clear of your course [of Drax's minelaying flotilla] before you came up."⁸³

The struggle between the opposing forces of individualism and collectivism was one of the key issues of Drax's career. On one hand, too much individualism would result in the much-dreaded "friction of war" while too much collectivism would only foster mediocrity and discourage original solutions to both old and new problems. Somehow, a consensus was required for a common doctrine while it was necessary to have some form of internal dissent to check stagnation and chaos. This was the very problem that dominated much of Drax's thinking and writing.

Drax's career represents, in some respects, a triumph not only of the intellectual naval officer, but also of the relevancy of history to strategy. The historically-based naval "principles of war" brought forth by Colomb, Mahan and especially Corbett found their application in officers of Drax's generation and in Drax himself. History offered concrete lessons for the modern warrior, not just a source of inspiration and a story of battles.⁸⁴ Indeed,

⁷⁸ RIC 7/4, Drax to Richmond, 6 November 1914.

⁷⁹ DRAX 1/1, "Note Regarding Private Letters," June 1966.

⁸⁰ RIC 7/4, Drax to Richmond, 7 January 1915. To be fair to Lord Fisher, it was Jellicoe that devised the scheme of dividing the battle cruiser squadrons. #68 Jellicoe to Fisher, 18 November 1914, *The Jellicoe Papers*, 1:96

⁸¹ CHT 3/1, "Sketch Estimates for 1933."

⁸² DRAX 2/2, "Memorandum on Initiative," 2 February 1932.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ See Schurman, *Education of A Navy*, 1-15.

the many articles written by Drax all fall back on this bastion.

Drax struggled with the dichotomy between individualism and the collective identity of the Royal Navy's officers. This tension posed a pressing problem for intellectuals which was even more intense in the case of a military organisation where *esprit de corps*, trust and honour are watch-words. His career saw many of the results of daggers drawn among brother officers based on personal jealousies and professional disagreements. At the same time, rigid centralisation of authority led to even greater difficulties since individual imagination and skill played so much in the victories of the past. Drax, in the author's view, never satisfactorily resolved this tension but did attempt to find a balance. While he constantly argued that individual officers must be trained to think for themselves and to exercise initiative, that must be restrained by a common doctrine as a starting point. However, the difficulty of doctrine's change over time remained the chief problem. What does an officer do who feels that the common doctrine is based on ill-founded assumptions? How far is the officer justified in combatting these assumptions? Certainly Drax himself felt that the propagation of new ideas was vital and he himself took part in the "Young Turks" revolt against the Admiralty. On the other hand, unlike Richmond and Dewar, Drax was profoundly aware of the need for discretion. In his view, breaches of discipline and political intrigue bore heavy costs for not only the individual officer involved but the navy as a whole, and those costs must be carefully weighed so that harmful consequences in both the long and short term could be effectively managed.

Intellectual flexibility and the growing allowance for individualism was fostered by the "Young Turks" rebellion. Officers were given an outlet for intelligent discussion of the "higher" side of their profession and many were forced to re-think the navy's role and the individual's place within that navy. Naval officers on the broad scale were resisting the great trend of increasing conformity and followed different paths than the well-worn ones of the nineteenth century. No longer would it automatically be assumed that the easy path would be taken, that, as Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge wrote early in the century, "As in the physical domain the tendency is to follow the line of least resistance, so in the moral and intellectual it is to follow the line of least exertion."⁸⁵