

PLANNING FOR A WAR - AT SEA

HMS Dreadnought

One cause for quarrel between the alliances was to do with the size and power of their armed forces, especially their navies.

On 10 February 1906, just a year and a day after they started building it, the shipmakers at Portsmouth Dockyard watched a battleship named **Dreadnought** slide majestically from the slipway into the sea. This event was important for two reasons. First, *Dreadnought* was the most powerful battleship ever built. Second, its revolutionary design made all other battleships out of date.

What was so different about *Dreadnought*? Partly it was that she was faster and more thickly armoured than any other warship. More importantly, she was designed to fight at long range. Her ten huge guns could blow up an enemy ship from 32 kilometres away. This made ships with smaller guns useless because they would never be able to get close enough to *Dreadnought* to fire them. German sailors soon began to call their own ships 'Five Minute Ships' because they thought five minutes was all that *Dreadnought* would need to sink them.

The Anglo-German naval race

The launching of *Dreadnought* was the latest step in a 'naval race' between Britain and Germany. The race began in 1900 when the German Navy Law ordered the building of forty-one battleships and sixty cruisers. Germany's naval chief, Admiral Tirpitz, also set up a Naval League to encourage the German people to take more interest in the navy. People were given tours of the German ports and lectures about the fleet were given all over Germany.

Britain's naval chief, Admiral Fisher, followed in Tirpitz's footsteps. More battleships were built in Britain and a Navy League was formed. But when *Dreadnought* was launched in 1906 it was Tirpitz who then imitated Fisher. In great haste, German shipbuilders began work on *Rheinland*, the German version of *Dreadnought*. Fisher replied to this in 1911 by building *HMS Neptune*, a 'super-Dreadnought' with more guns and greater speed. In 1913 he launched an even more powerful ship, *HMS Queen Elizabeth*; she had eight 15-inch (381-mm) guns and sixteen 6-inch (152-mm) guns.

By 1914, when war began, Britain seemed to have won the 'naval race'. Germany had seventeen

Dreadnought-class battleships while Britain had twenty-nine.

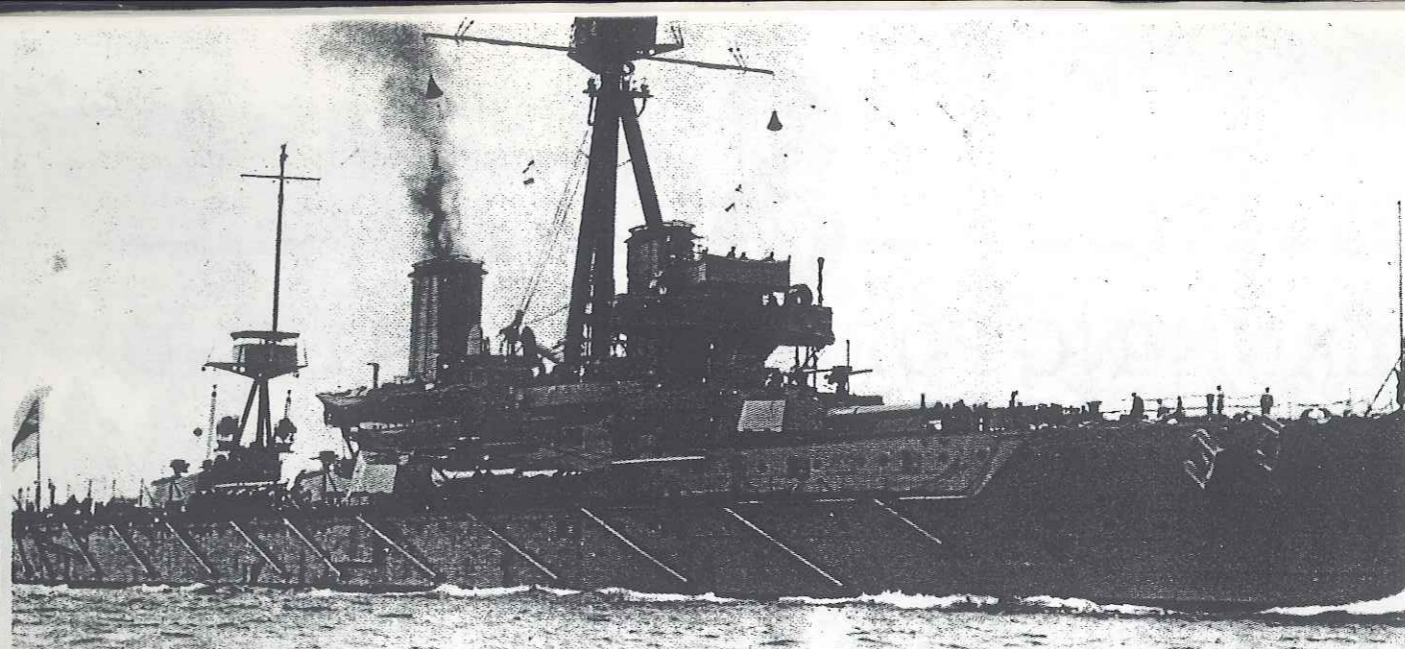
This account of a naval exercise in 1912 written by Winston Churchill gives you a good idea of the tremendous power of the British Royal Navy:

'We made a great assembly of the Navy this spring of 1912 at Portland. The pennants of 150 ships were flying together. One day there is a long cruise out into the mist, dense, utterly baffling - the whole Fleet steaming together all invisible, keeping station by weird siren hootings. It seemed incredible that no harm would befall. And then suddenly the fog lifted and the whole long line of battleships, coming one after another into view, burst into tremendous flares of flame and hurled their shells with deafening explosions while the water rose in tall fountains. . . . The speed is raised to 20 knots. Streaks of white foam appear at the bow of every vessel. The land draws near. The foreign officers I have with me stare anxiously. We still steam fast. Five minutes more and the Fleet will be aground. Four minutes, three minutes. There! At last. The signal! Every anchor falls together; their cables roar through the hawser holes; every propeller whirrs astern. In 150 yards, it seems, every ship is stationary. Look along the lines, miles this way and miles that, they might have been drawn with a ruler. The foreign observers gasped.'

Why was there a naval race?

The naval race began because Kaiser Wilhelm wanted Germany to become a great world power. To achieve this, he needed a navy that could challenge Britain's navy, the largest in the world. It didn't have to be bigger, just big enough to be a threat. The idea behind this was that the British navy would stay in port rather than risk being badly damaged in a battle with the German fleet. The Germans called this the 'risk theory'.

Britain, however, was not prepared to allow this build-up of the German navy. Britain needed a large fleet to protect her colonies and the trade routes to them. So the British naval chiefs decided to make the Royal Navy equal in size to the two strongest navies in the rest of Europe put together. This was known as the 'two-power standard' and the idea was to have a fleet so big that no other navy would ever dare attack it.



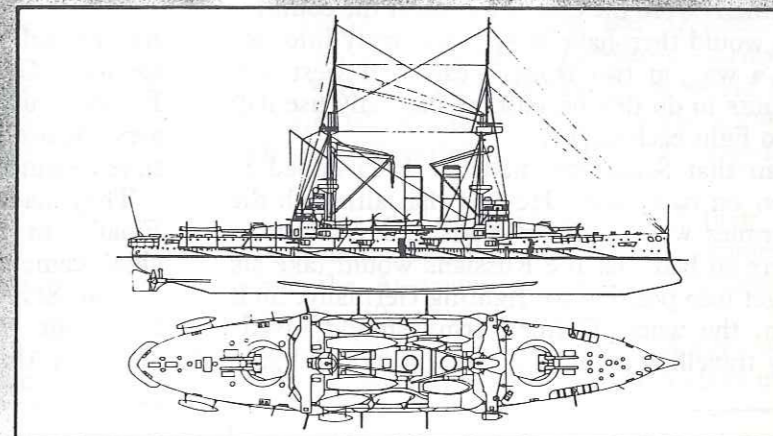
HMS Dreadnought

Work section

A. Study the picture above and the diagrams below and read the information about each battleship. Use this evidence to write an account of how *HMS Dreadnought* was superior to all other battleships afloat in 1906.

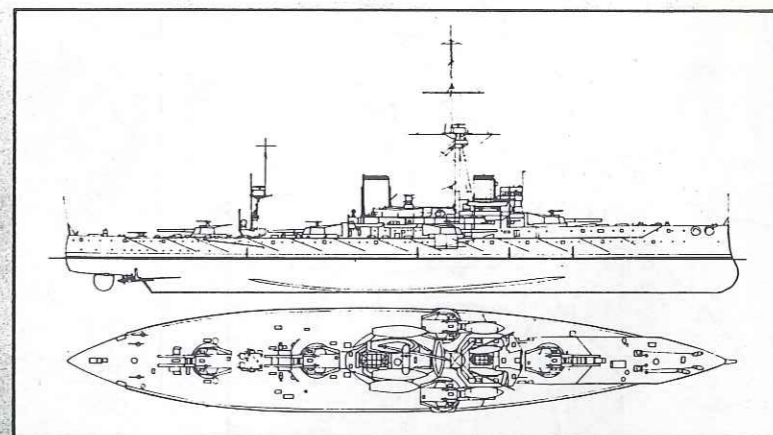
HMS Duncan
(A pre-Dreadnought class of battleship)

Weight 13,500 tonnes
Size 123 metres long
23 metres wide
Guns four 12-inch (305-mm) guns
twelve 6-inch (152-mm) guns
Armour 76mm thick
Fuel coal
Range 4830 kilometres
Crew 720 men



HMS Dreadnought

Weight 17,110 tonnes
Size 149 metres long
25 metres wide
Guns ten 12-inch (305-mm) guns
Armour 100mm thick
Fuel coal and oil
Range 10,650 kilometres
Crew 695 men



B. Read again the account by Winston Churchill of the navy exercises in 1912.

1. What two things seemed to him dangerous about the exercise?
2. Why do you think such dangerous exercises were carried out?

C. 1. How many Dreadnought class battleships did Germany have in 1914?
2. Do you think Germany had enough of them for the 'Risk Theory' to be successful? Explain your answer.

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PLANNING FOR A WAR – ON LAND

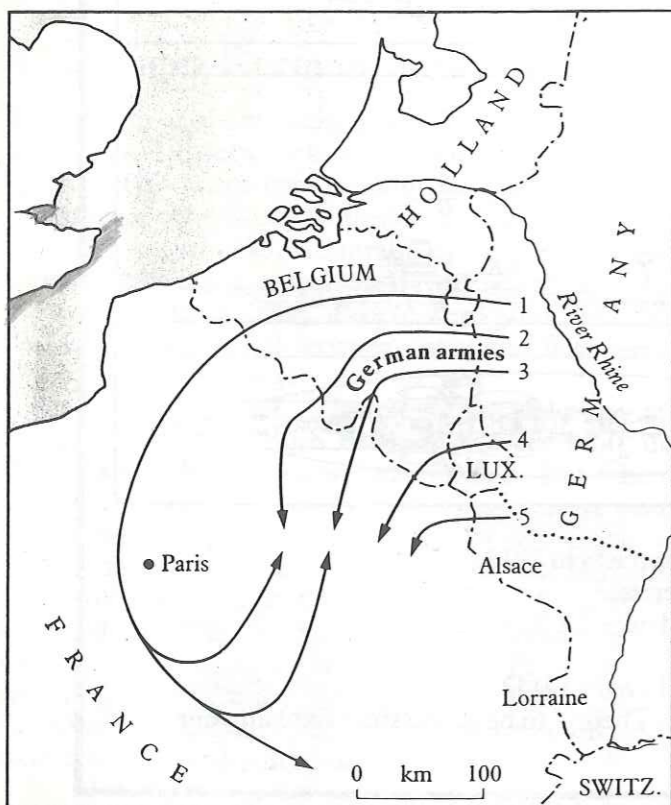
The Schlieffen Plan

In December 1905, while the shipmakers in Portsmouth were hard at work on *HMS Dreadnought*, an ageing German general was putting the finishing touches to a plan of war. His name was Count Alfred von Schlieffen, the most senior general in the German army.

Schlieffen was not at that moment intending to go to war. He was simply working out how Germany could fight her enemies if ever it became necessary.

As you know, Germany's main enemies were France and Russia, and this is what made Schlieffen's task difficult. If Germany fought France, Russia would attack Germany from the east. To protect the country, Schlieffen would then have to split his army into two and fight a war on two fronts – east and west. No general wants to do this because he can only use half an army to fight each enemy.

The plan that Schlieffen made in 1905 aimed to avoid a war on two fronts. He said that although the Russian armies were big, the roads and railways in Russia were so bad that the Russians would take six weeks to get into position for fighting Germany. So if war began, the whole German army should invade France by travelling at high speed through Belgium



The Schlieffen Plan

and northern France to capture Paris. Having defeated France within six weeks, the German army would then be sent to the other side of Europe to fight the Russians who would still be getting ready.

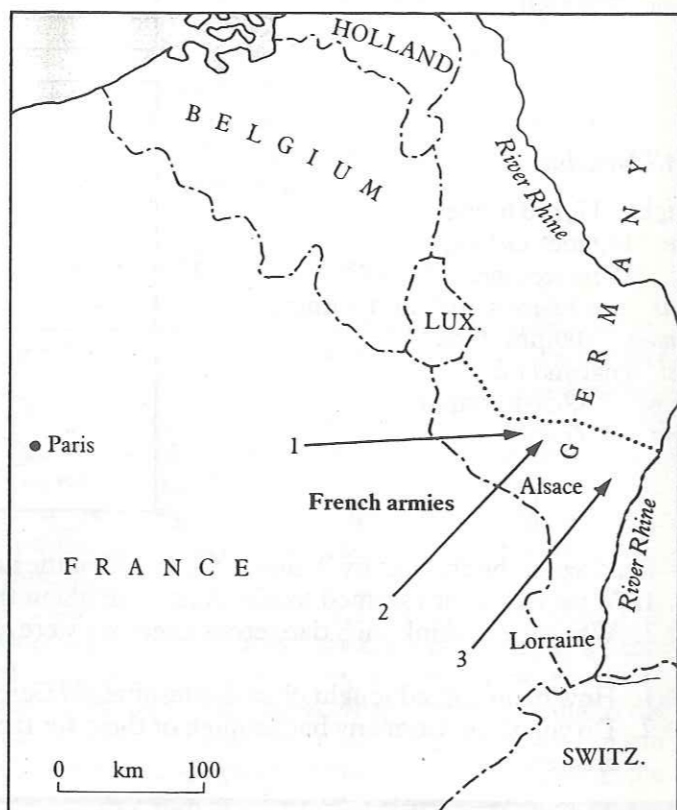
It was a simple plan but unfortunately it really made a war on two fronts even more likely. Schlieffen took it for granted that if Russia attacked Germany, France would also attack. But suppose that France decided *not* to help Russia, and to keep out of the war, the Plan meant that Germany would attack France anyway. Schlieffen had made sure that any war fought by Germany would be a big one.

Plan Seventeen

As you will remember, the French wanted revenge against Germany for their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Ever since then, the French generals had planned what to do in another war – this time to win it.

They made many plans and threw out many more. Finally, in 1913, General Joffre, the French army chief, came up with Plan Seventeen.

Plan Seventeen was very simple indeed. If war broke out, the French army would make an all-out attack on Alsace and Lorraine. After capturing the two



Plan Seventeen



The German army practising battle tactics in 1912

'lost provinces' they would cross the River Rhine and head for Berlin. Like Schlieffen's plan, Plan Seventeen would only work if the French moved at high speed. So soldiers were trained to fight hard and furiously, to attack the enemy whatever the odds.

Other plans

In 1906 the British War Minister, Richard Haldane, agreed to help the French if ever there was a war with Germany. He therefore set about improving the British army. He formed an **Expeditionary Force** of 144,000 soldiers whose task would be to travel

quickly to France as soon as war was declared. To back them up he created a **Territorial Army** of volunteers. And to make sure that there would be a good supply of officers to lead this enlarged army, he set up **Officers Training Corps** for older pupils in schools.

Both Russia and Austria-Hungary had their war plans too. Russia started to build up her armies in 1909, while the Austrians secretly made enormous cannons in their Skoda arms factory.

Well before 1914, then, the rival alliances were armed to the teeth and ready to fight each other using detailed plans for high-speed attacks.

Work section

A. In 1911 General von Moltke of the German army wrote this about the Schlieffen Plan:

'It may safely be assumed that the next war will be a war on two fronts. Of our two enemies, France is the most dangerous and can prepare the most quickly. I agree with the basic principle of opening the war with a strong offensive [attack] against France with weak forces against Russia. This is only possible by means of an advance through Switzerland or Belgium.'

1. What did Moltke mean by 'a war on two fronts'?
2. Why do you think Moltke thought that 'of our two enemies France is the most dangerous'?
3. Most of Belgium is flat, while most of Switzerland is mountainous. Can you think of a reason why the Germans decided to attack France by moving through Belgium instead of Switzerland?

B. Between 1900 and 1914 Germany increased the number of her railway lines leading to Belgium from nine to sixteen. Look at the map of the Schlieffen Plan and suggest why this was done.

C. Look at the map of General Joffre's Plan Seventeen. Why do you think he planned to invade that particular area of Germany? Look back to page 10 if you are unsure.

D. Look at the photograph of German soldiers practising battle tactics. Using the information you have read about the Schlieffen Plan, say what you think the purposes of this battle practice might have been.