The Origins and Development of Jane's Fighting Ships

Bert Chapman
Purdue University, chapmanb@purdue.edu

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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF

JANE'S FIGHTING SHIPS

Bert Chapman

Once a year a reference source is published in Surrey, England, that brings visitors such as the military archeologists from the Chinese and former Soviet embassies in London to Surrey. The source these individuals and organizations are so eager to obtain is Jane's Fighting Ships (OFS), an annual naval compendium which has summarized international naval trends and developments for nearly a century.

The history of Jane's Fighting Ships (OFS) stems from the prescience and energetic dedication of its founder, Fred T. Jane (1855-1916), in stressing the importance of naval matters and bringing them to public attention. The son of an Anglican vicar, Jane was born on 5 August 1855 at Richmond, Surrey. At fifteen, he began making pen and ink sketches of warships and utilizing his brothers and sisters to inspect and simulate complex naval maneuvers on the vicarage yard. The 1882 British naval bombardment of Alexandria, Egypt, inspired Jane to make sketches of the warships involved and expanded his awareness of the important role played by the Royal Navy in national defense and international affairs.

While attending school at Exeter, Jane produced a magazine to rival the officially sanctioned student journal. Chemistry intrigued him for a while until his schoolmasters recognized his reason for taking this course was to learn to make explosives rather than to understand chemical equations and formulas. His school record precluding a possible military career, Jane moved to London in 1885 hoping to become a

Chapman is reference/Document Librarian, Gray Library, Lamar University.

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journalist and illustrator. He converted a Chelsea attic into a studio apartment while living a bohemian and poverty stricken life as he struggled to obtain professional employment.1

Jane's first professional breacase in 1889 when he became an artist for Pictorial World and was assigned to cover the joint Anglo-German naval maneuvers at Spithead.2 Statistically on the HMS Southampton, Jane proved unable to pay his mess bill and as compensation decorated the officers' wardrobes with a series of illustrations.3 Jane also became friends with Fleet Engineer David Grant and acquired considerable information about naval ships from Grant and his colleagues.4 The contacts made during the 1889 Anglo-German naval manoeuvres helped Jane obtain additional work and establish a reputation as a producer of quality black-and-white nautical illustrations. He proceeded to become an illustrator for the Illustrated London News naval correspondent for the Engineer.5 He also branched out into writing novels such as Blake of the Rattlesnake (1895) and The Violent Flame (1899), articles, and numerous nonfictional works including The British Battle Fleet (1911).

These nonfictional works showed his willingness to challenge prevailing viewpoints on naval matters. In The British Battle Fleet Jane contended:

Many works have been written on the tactical and strategic superiority of those who have led British fleets to victory; but in the great majority of cases there is little to show that the majority of our admirals were really more clever than their opponents. The real secret of British naval success has surely lain in the possession of naval architects able to create the kind of ship that could compete so steadily in hammering, and hard-hearted folk in authority who created a discipline which, however unreasonable some of it may now seem, has ensured victory.6

Jane's oracy and prevalence on naval matters were also reflected in an 1898 article in which he envisioned a possible Russian-Japanese war initiated by Japan while predicting that a Japanese victory in such a conflict would propel them into the ranks of the world's preeminent powers.7

However, Jane's naval assessments were far from flawless. In another 1898 article, he postulatingly denigrated American military prowess in view of the upcoming U.S. confrontation with Spain and maintained that the United States had no ships to spare to take the Philippines.8

These literary products and illustrative efforts that originated from his sketchbook led in 1897 to the creation of All the World's Fighting Ships, a book that featured what Jane saw as 'Every warship in the world of any fighting value.'9 Jane went to the Yorkshire printers Netherwood and Dalton for publication of the initial edition, which sold poorly.10 Publication was subsequently assumed by Sampson, Low & Marston of London.11

The initial edition of All the World's Fighting Ships12 focused on Jane's illustrations of world warships. It featured a silhouette index, ship plans, and text in English, French, German, and Italian. Successful sales resulted in a subsequent edition four months later.

The appearance of All the World's Fighting Ships came at a time of significant technological change in military and naval matters and at a time of enhanced naval competition between England and Germany fuelled by British concern over the perceived and actual challenge to British naval hegemony.13

One scholar has described the influence of this technology on late nineteenth-century naval subjects in the following manner:

[The 1880's also marked the consolidation of the technological innovations which had revolutionized naval material since 1815 and introduced a new range of uncertainty over the nature of future maritime war. Increasingly efficient boilers and engines hastened the abandonment of sail even as an auxiliary to steam and increased the significance of speed in combat. Iron and steel similarly displaced wood in hull construction and the growing destructiveness of guns and projectiles competed with heavier protective armour. By the end of the decade the principal problems in designing warships to embody all these advances had been identified, if not completely solved. Huge ironclads became symbols of national prestige as well as evidence of the technical triumphs of the age.]14

Knowledge of these technological changes along with British concern over political and military developments involving England and Germany were enhanced by the growing influence of the media as another scholarly assessment of this era notes:

Continually rising newspaper circulation was one of the most effective instruments of the New Navalism, as Navy League propaganda, parliamentary speeches, and patriotic publications steadily increased the Navalist agitation. The popular press tended to be intensely nationalistic and a forceful propagandist of Navalism, seeing the world in terms of British national interests and the future of British naval

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supremacy was the result of the alarmist propa-
ganda so effectively disseminated by the press.25

Although JFS has always provided sober comment-
tary on global naval trends and developments, its
appearance in England at a time of often hyperbolic
concern over British naval strength proved particularly
fortuitous for its founder and helped meet the unprece-
dented demand for scholarly and popular naval informa-
tion generated by the tempestation of British public
opinion at the dawn of the twentieth century.26

Change is a constant in coverage of naval trends
and recognition of ongoing evolution in naval matters
has characterized JFS. The initial editions were illus-
trated by Jane himself but in 1900 he agreed to utilize
photographs of more important warships.27 Textual
changes saw the original scope of coverage expand
from general listings of launch, length, defensive and
offensive capabilities, and speed to incorporate more
detailed engineering and structural features such as fuel
capacity, types of boilers and machinery, and builders.28

Additional changes for 1911 saw ships arranged
by country of perceived naval ranking instead of by
ship and funnel size, and a growing number of technical
and topical articles served as appendices.29 These
articles became influential in their own right as evi-
denced by the 1903 appearance of "An Ideal Warship
for the British Fleet" by Italian naval architect Vittorio
Cuniberti. Cuniberti proposed a 17,000-ton ship with
a speed of 24 knots, 12 12-inch guns with 12-inch
armor, and no secondary battery with the exception
of eight antitorpedo weapons. This combination of
high speed and thick armor was required so Cuniberti's
battleship (bearing remarkable similarity to the Dread-
ought constructed by the Royal Navy two years later)
could get within point blank range of prospective
targets.30

The 1906 edition included articles on the 1905
Russian naval defeat at Tsushima, description of
warship signal systems, diagrams of naval dockyards,
and distances between British naval bases such as
Singapore, Esquimalt, Aden, Kowth, and other ports,
as well as its now usual coverage of warship photo-
graphs.31

This information was obtained by Jane and
freelancers working for him from British and foreign
naval sources whose trust he obtained and succeeded
in retaining by never divulging their identities, a
practice still adhered to today.32 Consequently this
information is compiled in a format a current compiler
describes as follows: "We price unclassified material
together in a jigsaw and sometimes come up with a
picture that would be very classified.33"

Contemporary reaction to JFS proved generally
positive. Scientific American proclaimed it "the best
work of its kind offered to the public,... which is
endorsed by the fact that the book has received official
recognition in the leading navies of the world.34 A
Times review of the 1913 edition was essentially
positive but wished JFS utilized the same classification
system for both British and foreign ships.35

Nevertheless, Jane and his work were not without
critics. He was probably viewed as a dilettante
by prominent contemporary political and military policy-
makers.36 In 1906 a Times Literary Supplement
reviewer of Jane's Heroes of Sea Power contested his criticisms
of American naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-
1914) and Lord Nelson (1758-1805). Further, the
reviewer described Jane's writing and analysis as
polarical, wayward, and characterized by "facile
dogmatism," and contended that it might alienate serious
readers.37

Such criticism did not deter Jane from challenging
prevailing orthodoxies concerning naval thought. In
1906 he unsuccessfully stood as Portsmouth's candidate
for Parliament on an independent platform. Maintaining
his candidacy was apolitical and based solely on naval
issues, he was praised as "a fighting officer of
reasons for political expediency.38

He also courted controversy through his involve-
ment in the Navy League, an organization dedicated
to the maintenance of British naval supremacy. A
July 1907 Navy League meeting saw Jane and other
members protest what they saw as organizational acquies-
cence to reductions in naval spending by the govern-
ment of Prime Minius Henry Campbell-Bannerman.
Jane aroused particular ire when he was called upon
by Navy League officials to retract his statement that
naval cut were intended "to please a few dirty little
radicals of the Socialist order" and that his Portsmouth
supporters believed the Navy League imitated Boer
sympathizers in its purported acceptance of these acts.

Vilipiderous outbursts aside, the eventual outbreak of
war saw Jane unsuccessfully attempt to obtain a
governmental position. He continued producing articles
and giving lectures on naval developments along with
devoting himself to recruiting and propaganda. The
frenetic pace that he maintained caught up with him,
and he died of heart failure on 9 March 1916, leaving
his second wife and two daughters.39

The foundation and tradition erected by Fred Jane
was continued by his successor Maurice Prendergast
(1890-1961), who was joined after World War I by
Royal Navy surgeon Oscar Parkes (1885-1958). The
1919 edition of JFS sought to summarize wartime naval
developments, an effort made more complex by the
need to present information withheld from previous
ditions due to the exigencies necessitated by wartime
security particularly in regard to British and allied

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ships. This edition also featured photographs of ships lost during the war. The 1921 edition of JFS reflected postwar emphasis on disarmament and the increasing influence of the United States Navy. Commenting in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921, JFS mentioned that its purpose was not naval condemnation or abolition but regulation of "extravagant competition" in naval weapons. This edition also featured a map and listing of U.S. naval districts along with an appendix listing the official text of U.S. proposals for the Washington Naval Conference.

The year 1931 saw JFS commenting on the impact of recent conferences and treaties limiting ship construction while continuing:

Far-reaching changes are underway in wargship design, the world over, and the present halt in construction in this country is mainly due to a policy of waiting time preceding the completion of certain experiments, both in methods of construction and propulsion.

The most prominent of these changes proved to be the development of aircraft carriers, in particular those from Great Britain (HMS Argus, HMS Hermes, HMS Eagle, HMS Furious, and HMS Courageous), Japan (Ryuyo, Kaga, and Akagi), and the United States (USS Lexington, USS Saratoga, USS Ranger, and USSLexington), along with Japanese submarines.

In 1934 Sunday Express naval and shipping correspondent Francis McMurtie (1884-1949) assumed editorial responsibilities and he had periodically shared his views since 1924. In his foreword to the 1936 edition of JFS, McMurtie referred to the increasing tension posed by German rearmament and allied to the unequalled abandonment of naval construction limits set by the 1921 Washington Conference and the free ordering of capital ships by the major powers. This foreword went on to support a provision of the 1936 London Treaty calling for advance notification and information about naval maneuvers to concerned parties. This edition also expressed its belief that ships could be designed to withstand air strikes, mentioned Germany's 1936 launching of the 26,000-ton battleship Scharnhorst, and favorably viewed the possibilities for bilateral agreements between Britain and powers ranging from Germany to Norway.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 saw constraints imposed on JFS again. While subject to less British government censorship than during World War I, the 1940 edition included photos of Italian warships sunk by British planes and the first war losses section since 1917. It pithily commented:

Comparatively few fresh facts and figures will be found in the British section, since it would obviously be improper to disclose anything that might conceivably be of the slightest value to the enemy.

The appearance of the 1942 edition in June 1943 further reflected wartime conditions, with the foreword commenting that data on British and allied navies were necessarily restricted to what could be acquired from official sources plus occasional press supplements, and that little reliable information existed on enemy navies. This paucity of information did not prevent the war losses section from mentioning the four Japanese aircraft carriers sunk in the Battle of Midway in June 1942.

The 1947-48 edition reflecting the postwar environment contained over 50 new photographs of the Soviet Navy and mentioned the navies of China, Mexico, and Chile. It also featured a biographical portrait of Fred T. Jane, alphabetical listing of all major warships listed in JFS during its first 50 years, the largest warships constructed, silhouettes of ironclads 1860-1945, and British war construction by shipyard.

The late 1940s also marked another transition for JFS with McMurtie's death in 1949 and assumption of editorial responsibilities by Raymond Blackman (1910-1989). Associated with JFS since 1930, Blackman had served in the Admiralty and as naval correspondent for the Sunday Times and other newspapers and shipping publications.

The foreword to the 1949-50 edition observed the following changes wrought by World War II on naval thought and practice:

In the next few years we are likely to see several categories of warships of revolutionary type, among them the atomic bomber carrier, the guided missile control vessel, the task force command ship, the anti-submarinecruiser, rocket destroyers, fast lowlying frigates and gas turbine ships.

This same edition also recorded the prediction of the U.S. Navy's Chief of Naval Operations that guided missiles would become the "basic naval weapon of the future.

The 1961-62 appearance of JFS saw the first alphabetical listings of countries in contrast to the previous practice of having the Royal Navy listed first. Other highlights of this edition include the appearance of 16 new navies due to decolonization, warning that the destructiveness of weapons made conflict localization imperative in order to prevent escalation to nuclear
The 1970s and 1980s saw further changes at JFS. In November 1972, Blackman was succeeded by John Moore as editor. Moore was the first professional naval officer to hold this post. His background involved service in all branches of the Royal Navy and as Deputy Director of British Naval Intelligence.

Utilising contacts built up during his career, Moore succeeded in further enhancing the professional expertise of JFS and incorporating tactical, strategic, and political aspects to its contents.

I found that my contacts with foreign officers, built up over 35 years in the RN, were of enormous value. They trusted me [with] a lot of un publishable material which was of insatiable value in analyzing other information and also saved me from making a gaffe. I am proud that nobody accused me of betraying a confidence or blowing a source.

Describing his editorial philosophy Moore explained:

I attempted to show that maritime affairs, both naval and mercantile, are an integral part of a country's international strategy and can be ignored or diminished at that country's peril.

Applying this philosophy, Moore utilized editorial standards for including data or photographs in JFS that included photographic clarity, foreign estimates, shipbuilders' information, and discussion with British and foreign naval staffs and attachés. Individual sources were estimated for reliability and two four-point codes were utilized to evaluate access and professional knowledge; 1A represented a professional with good access and 4D counted a tourist interested in ships.

The 1978-79 edition of JFS refers to Soviet naval exercises off Estonia as evidence of enhanced Soviet Navy geographic mobility while also noting the potential of the Tormabathik cruise missile to enhance the U.S. Navy's position against the Soviets.

The dawn of a new decade also saw changes in JFS' business status. JFS had been part of the British Printing Corporation and, with other Jane's publications, operated as Jane's Publishing. Financial difficulties confronting the British Printing Corporation during this period, however, caused it to accept an offer of three million pounds from Thorson Publishing to purchase Jane's Publishing. Jane's Publishing would eventually become Jane's Information Group. Under this name, it would produce JFS and comparable works on other military and maritime subjects, a relationship that continues today.

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Moore stepped down in 1987 and transferred editorial responsibilities to Captain Richard Sharpe OBE, RN, who has generally continued his predecessor's practices. The foreword to the 1991-92 edition of JFS features commentary on the crucial role played by naval power in the successful results of Operation Desert Storm. This successful utilization of naval force is contrasted with the inability of the U.S. and Soviet Union to cut off enemy supplies in Vietnam and Afghanistan. Sharpe's foreword also stresses the importance of deploying two U.S. aircraft carriers to the region in the aftermath of the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait in August 1990 and the influence of U.S. naval power in logistics and troop movement in the months leading up to Desert Storm's initiation.1

The growing influence of automation makes more changes possible in the compilation process. Sharpe estimates JFS receives approximately ten letters per day from prospective contributors and continual fax machine traffic. Governments and shipbuilders are JFS most reliable sources, and verification remains a continual process due to ship construction, modernization, and cancellations. Sharpe himself sees the primary audience of JFS as being the individual on the bridge or in the operations room at sea instead of the industrialist and researcher.14

There are also numerous subjects likely to be examined in future issues of JFS. Factors that former editor John Moore sees JFS addressing include propulsion, the quietness of ships and submarines, their speed (particularly in submarines and how their relatively lower costs will increase their numbers and influence), the stalemate between air/surface launched missiles and ship defenses, competition in antisubmarine warfare between non-acoustic detection systems and massive active detection systems, and the increasing urgency for greater understanding, cooperation, and communication between conventional and special forces.15

Trends and developments Sharpe sees JFS contending with include what he sees as the inevitable decline of the U.S. global naval presence and the subsequent rise of Indian Ocean and China Seas naval forces, an increasing threat to ocean security by Islamic regimes over strategic waterways, growing claims to control exclusive economic zones (EEZ) by developing nations, the pervasive influence caused by submarine mining, bureaucratic ignorance of naval and maritime issues, and the mounting influence of stealth technology due to its declining cost.16

JFS has evolved from the enthusiasm and energy of Fred T. Jane to an authoritative and influential reference work utilized by political and military officials internationally and by ordinary library users desirous of enhancing their knowledge of international naval developments. The increasing role of international trade and augmented importance of naval power projection in light of ongoing geopolitical and strategic trends are likely to enhance further the need for reliable maritime information sources for individuals, businesses, and governments. As it approaches its centenary and beyond, JFS will undoubtedly remain an indispensable reference source for policymakers, organizations, and individuals interested in and concerned with the importance of naval and maritime issues and their manifold influence on our lives.

NOTES
8. Dempsey, 8.


17. This publication was entitled All the World's Fighting Ships from 1898-1904, Fighting Ships from 1905-1913, and Jane's Fighting Ships since 1916. Arthur Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: Volume 5: Victory and Aftermath, January 1914-June 1919 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970): 403. For the purposes of this article Jane's Fighting Ships will be used.


23. Kemp, 426.


28. See Bendor, 1,385 and Jane's Fighting Ships, 1947-48, ix.


31. Times, 2 August 1913, 11.

32. Moore interview. Evidence that neither Fred T. Jane nor his work was viewed as significant by contemporary British policymakers is reflected in the absence of reference to Jane in the papers and correspondence of prominent naval figures such as Fisher, Beesly, Beauty, and Jellicoe even though he had positive contact with these first two individuals.

33. Times Literary Supplement, 24 August 1906, 110.

34. See Times, 3 January 1906. 3. For a description of the often intense political and electoral passions aroused by the naval debate see G.J. Marcus, "The Naval Crisis of 1909 and the Croydon By-Election," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution 103 (1958): 500-514.


40. Jane's Fighting Ships, 1921, 139-142, 629-634.

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60. Great Britain, Parliament, 715-716.


62. Moore correspondence.

63. Moore correspondence.

64. Moore correspondence.


66. For information on this transaction see Times, 8 August 1980, 15 and Catherine Guin, "Jane's Publishing Bought by Thomson for over 3 Million," Times, 8 August 1980. The cost of this buyout at the prevailing exchange rate was $7.11 million.


68. Sharpe correspondence.

69. Moore correspondence.

70. Sharpe correspondence.