

## **Admiral John Arbuthnot Fisher**

*Admiral John Arbuthnot Fisher (1841-1920), often referred to as the greatest Royal Navy Admiral since Nelson, returned to office as First Sea Lord for a short period before his dramatic resignation over the conduct of the Gallipoli affair led to Winston Churchill's banishment to the political wilderness.*

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*Born on 25 January 1841 in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and from a military family, Fisher entered the Royal Navy at the age of 13, joining the Victory at Portsmouth on 12 June 1854. He served in the Crimean War of 1859-60, and later took part in the capture of Canton.*

*Once promoted to captain at the age of 33 in 1874, Fisher commanded numerous ships, and saw action at Alexandria in 1882, where he played a major role in the bombardment of the city from his battleship Inflexible.*

*Following a five year stint as the director of naval ordnance and torpedoes, Fisher was appointed in February 1892 to the Admiralty board as Third Sea Lord and controller of the navy. Never a conventional man - and one possessed of remarkable driving energy - Fisher hung a card around his neck upon his arrival at the Admiralty, bearing the legend "I have no work to do!"*

*Determined to modernise the fleet and to radically improve its efficiency, Fisher was given the opportunity to drive hard his reforms upon his appointment as First Sea Lord on 21 October 1904, two years after being made Second Sea Lord.*

*During Fisher's reign as First Sea Lord - until 1910 - he showed no mercy in dismissing incompetent officers. Among many other authoritative actions he re-organised the fleet, the manner in which dockyards were managed, pushed the development of submarines, greatly improved gunnery standards and encouraged the conversion from coal to oil power.*

*Perhaps most notably he also escalated the development of larger and far more powerful battleships, 'all big-gun ships', leading to the development of Dreadnought, which was completed and unveiled in record time in December 1906, and which was much imitated abroad, including Germany.*

*He readily scrapped the Royal Navy's obsolete ships while continuing to develop replacements, convinced that war with Germany was inevitable and that the Royal Navy would play a major role in it. In the naval arms race with Germany (which Fisher is sometimes criticised for initiating) his energy and little documented political skill ensured that Britain emerged manifestly the stronger.*

*Fisher, who had been knighted in 1894, was created Baron Fisher of Kilverstone in 1909. The following January he retired. Persuaded out of retirement by Churchill with war underway against Germany, Fisher replaced Prince Louis of Battenberg as First Sea Lord, a man whom Fisher admired and who had been hounded from office largely by the press for his Germanic background.*

*Once news of the early defeat of Sir Christopher Cradock's squadron at the Battle of Coronel filtered back to London, Fisher dispatched a powerful squadron under Sir Frederick Sturdee (whom Fisher actually disliked), and which included the battle cruisers Invincible and Inflexible, with the sole intention of finding and destroying Admiral von Spee's responsible squadron.*

*Somewhat fortunately - for Spee could feasibly have caught the British napping while in port at the Falkland Islands - Sturdee caught and destroyed all but one of Spee's vessels (including Spee's flagship) at the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.*

*Never keen on Churchill's planned expedition through the Dardanelles, one intent upon the capture of the Turkish capital, Fisher nonetheless acquiesced for a period, an action most untypical of the man. However, once the invasion was seen to be faltering Fisher openly argued that it be abandoned.*

*His pleas falling upon deaf ears, he dramatically resigned on 15 May 1915, stating his protest at Churchill's misuse of 'spare' Admiralty vessels as part of the Dardanelles campaign (and thereby depleting Fisher's cherished Grand Fleet).*

*Despite Churchill's pleas, as well as those emanating from the press, Fisher was adamant in his resignation. He served out the remainder of the war at the Board of Innovations. With Fisher's petulant resignation Churchill's position quickly became untenable; he subsequently resigned and spent a period serving on the Western Front.*

*Admiral John Fisher died at the age of 79 in London on 10 July 1920. A year earlier he had published two volumes of memoirs, *Memories and Records**