

# ROUNDING UP THE RAIDER



PERCY. F.  
WESTERMAN

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DENBIGH AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE RESCUED BY A MONITOR

Page 207

Frontispiece

DENBIGH AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE RESCUED BY A MONITOR [Page 207](#). *Frontispiece*

# ROUNDING UP THE RAIDER

A Naval Story of the Great War

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "The Fight for Constantinople"  
"Sea Scouts All"  
&c. &c.

*Illustrated by E. S. Hodgson*

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By Percy F. Westerman

Haunted Harbour.  
His Unfinished Voyage.  
Midshipman Webb's Treasure  
Winged Might.  
Captain Flick.  
Tireless Wings.  
His First Ship.  
The Red Pirate.  
The Call of the Sea.  
Standish of the Air Police.  
Sleuths of the Air.  
Andy-All-Alone.  
The Westow Talisman.  
The White Arab.  
The Buccaneers of Boya.  
Rounding up the Raider.  
Captain Fosdyke's Gold.  
In Defiance of the Ban.  
The Senior Cadet.  
The Amir's Ruby.  
The Secret of the Plateau.  
Leslie Dexter, Cadet.  
All Hands to the Boats.  
A Mystery of the Broads.  
Rivals of the Reef.  
Captain Starlight.  
On the Wings of the Wind.  
Captain Blundell's Treasure.  
The Third Officer.  
Unconquered Wings.  
Pat Stobart in the "Golden Dawn".  
Ringed by Fire.  
Midshipman Raxworthy.  
Chums of the "Golden Vanity".  
Clipped Wings.  
Rocks Ahead.  
King for a Month.  
The Disappearing Dhow.  
The Luck of the "Golden Dawn".  
The Salving of the "Fusi Yama".  
Winning his Wings.  
The Good Ship "Golden Effort".  
East in the "Golden Gain".  
The Quest of the "Golden Hope".  
The Wireless Officer.  
The Submarine Hunters.  
The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge.  
With Beatty off Jutland.  
The Dispatch Riders.  
A Cadet of the Mercantile Marine.  
With the Last of the Buccaneers.  
A Lively Bit of the Front.

The Westerman Omnibus Book

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## Contents

- CHAP.
- I. [THE CAPTURED LINER](#)
  - II. [THE LAST OF THE \*NICHI MARU\*](#)
  - III. [ON BOARD THE RAIDER](#)
  - IV. [THREATENED](#)
  - V. [THE PURSUIT OF THE \*PELIKAN\*](#)
  - VI. [THE DECOY](#)
  - VII. [FOILED BY A COLLIER](#)
  - VIII. [REINFORCEMENTS](#)
  - IX. [THE MIDNIGHT LANDING](#)
  - X. [THE LAGOON](#)
  - XI. [DENBIGH'S PLAN](#)
  - XII. [A PERILOUS JOURNEY](#)
  - XIII. [NOCTURNAL INVESTIGATIONS](#)
  - XIV. [A NEGLECTED WARNING](#)
  - XV. [ARMSTRONG'S PART](#)
  - XVI. [THE DISASTER TO THE \*MYRA\*](#)
  - XVII. [A BID FOR FREEDOM](#)
  - XVIII. [DISAPPOINTMENT](#)
  - XIX. ["OUR LUCK'S OUT"](#)
  - XX. [ADRIFT IN THE INDIAN OCEAN](#)
  - XXI. [VON ECKENSTEIN'S SURPRISE](#)
  - XXII. [THE MONITORS IN ACTION](#)
  - XXIII. [HOW THE \*PELIKAN\* SURRENDERED](#)
  - XXIV. [THE LANDING PARTY](#)
  - XXV. [ACCOUNTED FOR](#)



## Illustrations

DENBIGH AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE PICKED UP BY A MONITOR . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"BY JOVE!" EJACULATED O'HARA. "SHE MUST BE ONE OF OUR MONITORS"

THE 'LOG' WAS A HEALTHY SPECIMEN OF A CROCODILE

"UNLESS THE GERMAN ENSIGN is HAULED DOWN ON BOARD THE *PELIKAN* WITHIN AN HOUR,  
I OPEN FIRE"

# ROUNDING UP THE RAIDER

## CHAPTER I

### The Captured Liner

"Fifteen days more and then Old England once again!" exclaimed Frank Denbigh.

"And bonnie Scotland for me!" added Charlie Stirling.

"You'll not be forgettin' 'tis Ould Oireland I'm bound for," remonstrated Pat O'Hara, purposely dropping into the brogue.

The three chums had just been reading the "miles made good" announcement that, printed in English and Japanese, was daily exhibited in various parts of S.S. *Nichi Maru*.

"Hostile submarines permitting," remarked Denbigh with a laugh, after he had taken good care that no lady passengers were within earshot.

"Rot!" ejaculated Stirling. "We've cleared them out of the Channel pretty well. It's part of the work of the British Navy under——"

"Stop it!" interrupted O'Hara good-humouredly. "I know what you were going to say: that old tag from the Articles of War. I propose that every time the word submarine is mentioned by anyone of us while on board this vessel the delinquent shall be suitably punished as soon as the sun's over the fore-yard."

"Hear, hear! I second that," agreed Stirling. "No more 'shop'. We'll get plenty of that in a few weeks' time. I fancy My Lords won't let us kick our heels in idleness for long, and honestly, the sooner we settle down to business the better."

The three chums were Sub-lieutenants, homeward bound from a portion of a certain group of islands off the coast of New Guinea, having till recently the high-sounding title of the Bismarck Archipelago. The youthful but none the less glorious Australian Navy had quickly changed the colour of that portion of the map, but the climate was a more formidable foe than the former German garrison. Thus the three young officers, who had been "lent" to the recently-formed navy, had the misfortune to be stricken with fever.

After a long convalescence, which by a pure coincidence lasted almost exactly the same time in each of the three cases, Denbigh, Stirling, and O'Hara were ordered to return to England and to resume their duties with the navy of the Motherland.

They had travelled by an intermediate boat to Singapore, whence, in order to save delay, they had proceeded by a Japanese liner, the *Nichi Maru*, bound from Nagasaki to London. It was a case of misdirected zeal, for, owing to the torpedoing of a large Japanese liner in the Mediterranean, the *Nichi Maru* had been ordered to take the longer passage round the Cape instead of the usual route via the Suez Canal.

"Hulloa! What's the excitement?" enquired Denbigh, pointing in the direction of the bridge. The chums had gained the promenade deck, whence most of the navigating bridge of the liner could be seen. There was evidently something to warrant his exclamation, for the dapper little Japanese officer of the watch was steadily keeping his binoculars upon some distant object.

"There's a smudge of smoke away to the nor'east'ard," announced Stirling. "The mild excitement of sighting a vessel will help to push the hands of the clock. Now if someone will kindly suggest a sweepstake on the nationality of yonder craft——"

The door of the wireless room opened. The sharp peculiar cackle of the instruments announced that an exchange of messages was in progress. A messenger made his way to the bridge. Almost immediately after, the captain hurried from his cabin. Evidently "something was in the wind", for the appearance of the imperturbable commander of the *Nichi Maru* at this time of day was rather unusual.

"We're altering helm," declared O'Hara after a brief interval. "Since we can speak with that vessel without the necessity of having to close, it points to something of the nature of a serious mishap."

The rest of the passengers were now making their way on deck. By an inexplicable intuition the presence of the still invisible vessel had made itself felt. None of the officers had communicated the news that the *Nichi Maru* was in touch with another craft, yet in five minutes the decks were crowded with a medley of Europeans and Asiatics.

"Do you know what is wrong, sir?" asked Denbigh, addressing one of the Japanese officers who happened to be making his way aft.

The Jap shook his head. Like most of the *Nichi Maru's* officers he spoke English. The question was plain to him, but with Oriental reticence he politely evaded it.

"I'll get my glasses," announced O'Hara.

"And mine, while you are about it," said Denbigh.

"And mine, too," added the Scot.

O'Hara quickly returned with the desired articles. Bringing their binoculars to bear upon the smudge on the horizon the three Subs made the discovery that there was a two-masted, three-funnelled vessel lying apparently hove-to. Smoke was issuing from her after-funnel in dense clouds, that rose slowly in the still sultry air.

"She's flying an ensign," remarked the Irishman.

"Yes, straight up and down like a wet dishclout," added Stirling. "For all the good it's doing it needn't be there."

"Perhaps her propeller shaft is broken," suggested one of the passengers, an English merchant who had given up a good position in Tokio to return home in order to "do his bit".

"Hardly," replied Denbigh. "She's bound to be a twin screw, and it isn't likely that both engines would break down."

"I don't know so much about that," said O'Hara, pointing aft, where a crowd of Japanese seamen were engaged in preparing a large flexible steel hawser. "It looks as if we were going to take her in tow. And it's a long, long way to Las Palmas, worse luck."

"She's a Dutchman," declared Stirling. "I can make out the red, white, and blue ensign. I wouldn't mind betting she's one of the Rotterdam and Batavia liners."

The three British officers relapsed into silence, devoting their whole attention upon the disabled liner which was now momentarily looming larger and larger as the *Nichi Maru* hastened to her aid.

Presently the engine-room telegraph bell clanged and the Japanese vessel's engines began to slow down. Two of the boats were swung out ready to be lowered, while the four ship's surgeons stood by, ready to be taken to the helpless Dutchman.

"Bad boiler-room accident," exclaimed one of the European passengers, who had learnt the news from a Japanese petty-officer.

"Boiler accident be hanged!" ejaculated Denbigh, excitedly. "We're done in, you fellows. That vessel's no Dutchman."

As if in confirmation of the Sub's announcement the tricolour of Holland was smartly lowered, its place being taken by that shame-faced and palpable imitation of the good old British White Ensign—the Black Cross of Germany. Simultaneously portions of the vessel's plating swung outboard, revealing a battery of six fifteen-centimetre Krupp guns.

"*Nichi Maru*, ahoy!" shouted a guttural voice in English, for the two vessels were now within megaphone-hailing distance. "Surrender instantly, or we send you to the bottom."

There was a pause, while the officer who had shouted the message was being prompted.

"Make no attempt to use your wireless," he continued. "That will not save you. It will make things very bad for you. Stand by to receive a prize crew."

Although completely surprised by the dramatic turn of events, both the crew and passengers of the *Nichi Maru* remained perfectly calm. The captain, a descendant of the knightly Samurai of Old Japan, was on the point of ordering full speed ahead, with the object of ramming the perfidious vessel and sending both ships to a common destruction; but the knowledge that the safety of nearly a thousand non-combatants, many of them women and children, would be in dire peril through such an act compelled him to submit to the inevitable.

Humanity, not fear, had conquered the courteous and lion-hearted yellow skipper.

Boats were lowered from the German auxiliary cruiser—for such she undoubtedly was. Into them clambered a number of motley-garbed men armed with rifles and automatic pistols. But for their modern weapons the boat's crew might have come from the deck of an Eighteenth-Century buccaneering craft.

"I say, you fellows," said O'Hara, "I'm off below."

"What for?" asked his companions in surprise. Not for one moment did they imagine that the Irishman was showing the white feather, but at the same time they were mystified by his announcement.

"To get into uniform," he replied. "Those skunks won't find me in mufti."

"Right oh!" declared Denbigh. "We'll slip into ours, too."

In a few minutes the chums had changed into their naval uniforms. By the time they regained the promenade deck the Germans were in possession of the ship.

A fat ober-leutnant, backed up by half a dozen armed seamen, held the bridge, the Japanese captain and deck officers being compelled to retire to the chart-room. A couple of arrogant unter-leutnants with much sabre-rattling, were herding the European male passengers on the port side of the promenade deck. The Japanese passengers they drove forward with every insulting expression they could make use of. It was the German officers' idea of revenge, for the fall of Kiau Chau, where the boasted Teutonic fortress had succumbed to Oriental valour, rankled in the breasts of the subjects of the All-Highest War Lord.

Two German officers, apparently of the Accountant branch, had possessed themselves of the passenger list of the captured vessel, and were proceeding to call the names it contained. Each person on hearing his name had to step forward. "Denbigh, Frank," exclaimed one of the officers. Denbigh, standing erect, faced his captors. "Ah! Englander officer, hein?" queried the Teuton insolently. "Goot! More to say soon. Step there over, quick."

The Sub obeyed. He realized that at times even passive resistance was indiscreet.

"Stirling, Charles," continued the German. "Ach, yet anoder Englander. Unter-leutnant? Goot, a goot capture of Englanders we haf."

"I'm a Scot—not an Englishman," protested Stirling.

"No matter. The one is as bad as odder, if nod worse. Over dere," and he pointed to the place where Denbigh was standing.

"We're marked down for something, old man," whispered Denbigh.

"Yes, but listen. They're tackling O'Hara now."

Sub-lieutenant O'Hara faced his inquisitor with a broad smile on his face. The Germans could not understand why a man should look pleasant in time of adversity.

"Irish? Ach, goot!" declared the Teuton. "Der Irish not like Englischmans. When we Germans take London, Ireland free country will be."

"You haven't got to London yet," remarked O'Hara with the perplexing smile still on his lips.

"Already our Zeppelins hab there been. It is matter of time. Ach? Brussels, Warsaw, Bukharest, Cettigne—five capitals—all conquered."

"How about Paris?" enquired O'Hara. "To say nothing of Calais. And who commands the sea? You Germans haven't a vessel afloat outside your own territorial waters."

"Vot is dis?" asked the Teuton, pointing to the armed liner. His voice rose to a crescendo of triumph.

O'Hara was temporarily non-plussed. Evidently something was at fault somewhere. How could a large vessel like that evade the strong cordon of British warships?

"You're at the end of your tether, old sport," he said after a brief hesitation. "That ship will be at the bottom before another twenty-four hours."

"You tink so?" almost howled the exasperated German. "You vill see. If she sink, den you sink mit her. Over dere."

O'Hara rejoined his chums. A couple of armed seamen mounted guard over them while the work of investigation and pillage continued.

"We're marked down as hostages," began the Irishman; but one of the seamen, bringing the butt end of his rifle down on the deck within a couple of inches of O'Hara's toes, rendered unnecessary the guttural "Verboten" that accompanied the action.

In silence the three Subs watched the proceedings. Under the orders of their captors the Japanese seamen were compelled to transfer bullion stores from the *Nichi Maru* into the boats. German seamen brought charges of explosives and placed them below. It was apparent that the destruction of the captured vessel was already decided.

At length all preparations were completed. One of the *Nichi Maru's* officers, acting under the authority of the ober-leutnant gave the order—first in Japanese and then in English—to abandon the ship.

"Fifteen minutes only are allowed. Boats to be provisioned and manned. No personal property is to be taken. Women and children first."

The Japanese captain was expostulating, firmly and in a dignified manner. He pointed out the inhumanity of sending women and children adrift in mid-Atlantic and under a tropical sun. His protests were in vain.

"We will send a small vessel to pick up the boats," retorted the German lieutenant. "We will not sink a small one purposely. A little discomfort will do these English good. You yellow apes are used to it."

The Japanese accepted the direct insult without signs of emotion. The disguise of his feelings was a national trait, but it would have gone hard with the arrogant Prussian had the captain of the *Nichi Maru* not been hampered with a crowd of non-combatants.

"Now, Englishmen," exclaimed the German. "Into that boat. Any trouble make and you dead men. Ach! You smile now: your trouble it only has just commenced."

## CHAPTER II

### The Last of the *Nichi Maru*

In silence the three Subs left the doomed *Nichi Maru* and entered the waiting boat. At the word of command the men pushed off and rowed towards the modern pirate.

The disguised vessel had now swung round and was lying motionless at a distance of two cables' length from her prize. The hull was painted a light yellow, with a broad black band. Her funnels were buff with black tops. On her stern were the words, *Zwaan*—Rotterdam.

"She's no more the *Zwaan* of Rotterdam than I am," cogitated Denbigh.

He was right in his surmise. The vessel was originally the *Pelikan*—a supplementary Hamburg-Amerika Line boat. On the outbreak of the war she was homeward bound from South America, with, as was the case with all liners flying the German flag, an armament of quick-firers stowed away in her hold.

Unfortunately for Kaiser Wilhelm's plans the abrupt entry of Great Britain into the arena of war had nipped in the bud the activities of German commerce raiders. A few ran amok until promptly rounded up and settled by the ubiquitous British cruisers. Others fled for neutral ports. Amongst them was the *Pelikan*, whose captain, with considerable astuteness, contrived to make for a harbour belonging to an obscure South American Republic.

Before doing so he had fallen in with the light cruiser *Karlsruhe*—a craft doomed shortly afterwards to end her career at the hands of her own crew rather than face an action that would end either in destruction or ignominious capture—and from her received a number of additional officers and men.

For a twelvemonth or more the *Pelikan* lay hidden. Lavish sums expended in bribery sealed the mouths of the grasping officials of the port, in addition to procuring coal and stores to enable the German vessel to put to sea whenever an opportunity offered.

At length the chance came. Acting under wireless orders from Berlin the *Pelikan* was to make a dash for the Atlantic, do as much damage as she possibly could to shipping of the Allies, and finally attempt to reach Dar es Salaam, the principal port of German East Africa. Here, should she succeed in evading the British patrols, she was to transfer her crew, armament, and munitions to shore to assist the land forces of the Colony against a threatened advance from Rhodesia.

Accordingly the *Pelikan* became the *Zwaan*. Disguised by a different colour paint and supplied with forged ship's papers she easily evaded the lax authority of the neutral port and made for the open sea.

A course was shaped to cut the Dutch East Indies liners' route in the latitude of Cape Verde. Then, following in a parallel direction, the track usually taken by the vessels she was impersonating, the pseudo *Zwaan* headed due south.

Kapitan von Riesser, her commanding officer, was a resourceful and crafty Hun. He was steeped in the doctrine of "frightfulness", but in the present instance there were limits.

Had he been the commander of a U boat he would not have hesitated to send the *Nichi Maru* to the bottom without warning, for a German submarine could strike a fatal blow and not show herself during the attack. The *Pelikan*—to revert to her original name—was not capable of emulating the methods of German unterseebooten without risk of subsequent capture. And as the possibility of being taken by a British warship always loomed upon von Riesser's mental horizon, he was determined to tread warily.

The fear of reprisals alone kept him within the bounds of discretion as laid down by up-to-date rules of warfare. He might sink any merchant-vessel that fell into his clutches, provided he gave the passengers and crew time to take to their boats.

Three days before sighting the *Nichi Maru* the *Pelikan* had been stopped and examined by a British cruiser. The boarding-officer knew neither German nor Dutch, and conversation had to be conducted in English. The ship's papers were apparently in order. The British lieutenant failed to pay sufficient attention to the bulky deck-gear that concealed the raider's quick-firers; nor did he discover that, hidden between double bulkheads abaft the engine-room, two torpedo-tubes, removed from the *Karlsruhe*, were ready for instant use should occasion arise.

The cruiser had, indeed, a very narrow escape of sharing the fate of a British battleship that was torpedoed in the Channel on a dark and stormy night, the deadly missile being launched from a vessel sailing under the Dutch flag. Only Kapitan von Riesser's doubts as to the immediate success of a torpedo attack prevented him putting his treacherous design into effect. A stricken cruiser, he knew, could use her guns with tremendous results, and he had no wish to lay down his life for the Fatherland while an easier course lay open to him. Accordingly the boarding officer, with many apologies for having detained a neutral vessel, returned to the cruiser, which immediately steamed northwards, while the *Pelikan* proceeded on her course.

Having assumed that the British cruiser was well out of her way, the raider began to send out wireless calls, limiting the radius of action to about fifty miles. She did not call in vain, for the *Nichi Maru*, picking up the appeal for aid, hastened to the *Pelikan's* assistance and, all unsuspecting, fell a victim to her captor.

During the "round-up" of the passengers, Kapitan von Riesser had been informed by signal of the presence of three British naval officers on board the *Nichi Maru*, and instructions were asked as to their disposal.

The kapitan resolved the problem in his mind. He could not murder the prisoners without the news being conveyed by the rest of the passengers of the Japanese liner. If they were brought on board the *Pelikan*, they would be a source of danger should the ship again be overhauled by a patrolling cruiser, unless——

He consulted the ship's surgeon. Apparently the latter's advice was satisfactory. In addition, should the *Pelikan* arrive at Dar es Salaam with three British naval officers on board as prisoners, well and good. If, on the other hand, the vessel were captured on the high seas, the prisoners would no doubt be willing to testify to the fact that Kapitan von Riesser had committed no unpardonable breach of the usages of war. From which it will be seen that von Riesser was always considering how to save his own skin in the event of capture.

"Up—at once!" ordered the unter-leutnant as the boat containing Denbigh and his companions ran alongside the lowered accommodation-ladder of the *Pelikan*. The German did not hesitate to show his arrogance; but he was severely snubbed by his kapitan.

"I must apologize, gentlemen," began von Riesser in good English as the British officers came over the side. "My subordinate, Herr Klick, has allowed his zeal to outrun his discretion. It is necessary for me to detain you. I know you will bow to the inevitable and recognize that it is the fortune of war. I will speak to you again shortly!"

The kapitan hurried off, leaving Denbigh and his fellow-prisoners standing close to the head of the accommodation-ladder. Beyond the fact that a sentry stood within ten feet of them, no attempt was made to place them under restraint. They were free to speak, and to watch the scene that was being enacted a few hundred yards from the vessel to which they had been removed.

The *Nichi Maru* was lowering her boats rapidly yet with admirable discipline. Without accident the heavy lifeboats with their human freights took the water. As soon as the falls were cast off, the crews rowed to a safe distance, where they lay on their oars and awaited the end of the huge liner.

With some minutes to spare, the work of abandoning the vessel was completed. The captain was the last to leave, the imperturbable look upon his olive features masking the rage and grief that gripped his mind.

The two German boats still lay alongside. Presently half a dozen Teutons hurriedly scrambled into the waiting craft, which without delay were rowed quickly toward the *Pelikan*.

Three muffled reports came almost simultaneously from the interior of the doomed liner. These were followed by two more at comparatively long intervals. The *Nichi Maru* heeled slightly, and began to settle slowly by the bows.

The ship took her time. The wreaths of fleecy steam mingled with denser columns of smoke that issued from 'tween decks. Then, as the in rushing water came in contact with the furnaces, the vessel was enveloped in a cloud of eddying pungent fumes.

When the cloud dispersed, the *Nichi Maru's* bows were level with the water, while her stern was raised until the blades of her now motionless propellers were clear of the agitated sea.

Lower and lower sank the doomed ship. At frequent intervals, small explosions of compressed air took place. The sea was strewn with fragments of floating wreckage.

"She's going!" whispered Stirling.

The liner recovered herself. For a moment it seemed as if she were floating on an even keel. Then, with a convulsive effort, she flung her stern high out of the water and slid rapidly to her ocean grave. Almost the last to be seen of her was the mercantile flag of Japan, still floating proudly from the ensign staff.

In the liner's crowded boats the Japanese officers were standing erect and at the salute as the vessel disappeared from view. They, too, were of a breed that is not to be intimidated by Teutonic frightfulness.



## CHAPTER III

### On Board the Raider

"I wish to call attention to the fact, gentlemen, that we acted in strict accordance with the rights of belligerents," remarked Kapitan von Riesser.

The *Pelikan's* captain was seated in his cabin. On either side of him stood von Langer, the ober-leutnant who had been in charge of the boarding-party, and Unter-leutnant Kaspar Klick. Facing him stood Denbigh, Stirling, and O'Hara.

"I am afraid we cannot agree with you," replied Denbigh.

"Possibly not," retorted von Riesser, "but on what grounds?"

"It is hardly a humane act to turn those people adrift in open boats," continued the Sub.

"What else could I do? Surely you would not expect us to receive a thousand people on board this ship? They will be picked up, without doubt, within a few hours."

"Perhaps," declared Denbigh. "But there is always a risk. Your action in sinking that ship is unjustifiable. I am not here to argue the point, but I will merely state a case in which one of your captains did not think it advisable to go to the lengths you did. When, in the early part of the war, the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* compelled the British liners *Galicia* and *Arlanza* to heave-to, these ships were subsequently allowed to proceed——"

"Yes, but at that time you English were not attempting to starve us out by a blockade," interrupted the kapitan excitedly, as men do when cornered in argument.

Denbigh shrugged his shoulders. He had made his protest and had scored a point.

"We have done with the past," continued von Riesser. "My object in sending for you is to explain your position. You are, of course, prisoners of war. It is my intention to accord you treatment as your rank demands. In ordinary circumstances you are at liberty to leave your cabins and come on deck whenever you wish during hours of daylight. There may be times when it will be necessary for you to be locked in—perhaps taken below. But, understand: if you attempt to jeopardize the safety of the ship, or to communicate with any passing vessel, or, in short, to behave other than officers on parole——"

"But we are not on parole," interrupted O'Hara.

"It matters not," declared the kapitan. "If I choose to consider that you are equivalent to being on parole that is my affair. If, then, you break any of the conditions I have mentioned you will be tried by a properly constituted court consisting of officers of the ship, and if found guilty you will be shot. Is that perfectly clear?"

The three prisoners signified their assent. After all, the German's stipulations were reasonable.

Von Riesser turned and conversed for a few minutes with his ober-leutnant. O'Hara, being ignorant of German, and Stirling having but a slight knowledge of the language, were unable to understand the drift of the conversation. Denbigh, on the other hand, was a fluent linguist, but he had already decided to keep that knowledge from his captors.

Presently Kapitan von Riesser produced a British Navy List. Somewhat to the British officers' surprise they noticed that it was dated "April 1916", or more than a twelvemonth since the last list had been obtainable by the public.

"You have qualified as an interpreter, I see," remarked von Riesser. "For what languages?"

"Hindustani, Swahili, and Arabic," replied Denbigh promptly. He did not think it necessary to add that German

was amongst his qualifications, and he thanked his lucky stars that the recent Navy Lists do not specify the language in which officer-interpreters are expert.

"You are evidently considered a promising young officer," continued the kapitan. He could not refrain from adding, with a thinly-veiled sneer, "I am afraid your services will be lost to the English Admiralty for some time to come."

"Perhaps," drawled Denbigh, with such well-feigned indifference that von Riesser glanced keenly at the young officer's clear-cut features.

Having subjected Stirling and O'Hara to an examination—in which the Irishman scored more than once by his smart repartees—the prisoners were dismissed.

The first meal on board the raider was served in the cabin allotted them. Judging by the nature of the repast provisions were neither scarce nor unvaried. Having finished, they went on deck. No one offered to interfere with them. The seamen affected to ignore them. Once Unter-leutnant Kaspar Klick passed, and gave them such a look that O'Hara afterwards remarked he would like to have a quiet five minutes with the German.

"I wonder they haven't searched us," said Stirling in a low voice. "Now I wish I had put my small revolver into my coat pocket. I thought it would have been too risky."

"For the same reason I practically emptied my pockets before we left the *Nichi Maru*," declared Denbigh.

"And so did I," added O'Hara, "but I took jolly good care to hide that little automatic pistol—you know the one: I collared it from a German officer in that little scrap at Herbertshöhe."

"For goodness sake be careful," protested the cautious and level-headed Scot.

"I'll try to be," replied O'Hara non-committedly.

"Where is the pistol?" asked Denbigh.

"Inside the lining of my cap," replied the Irishman. "Can you see any sign of a bulge under the cap-cover?"

"Not a trace," declared Denbigh. "Only, old man, remember you are rather hot-headed. Let's hope there won't be a premature explosion."

"There won't," said O'Hara emphatically. "Because I've no cartridges."

"That's something to be thankful for," remarked Stirling. "But what, might I ask, is the use of an automatic pistol, if you haven't any cartridges?"

"You never know your luck," replied O'Hara. "I may manage to pick up some on board. Whist!"

Von Langer, the fat ober-leutnant who had been in charge of the boarding-party, was approaching.

Possibly at a hint from his chief he had dropped his overbearing manner, for he addressed the prisoners in a mild tone.

"It is nearly sunset," he remarked. "You vos go below. I am sorry to tell you dis, but dese are orders. Wir müssen vorsichtig zu Werke gehen."

Denbigh gave no sign that he understood. Von Langer had hoped to trip the Englishman, but he had failed.

"What was that Johnny spouting about?" asked Stirling, when the three chums had retired to the cabin.

"That they had to be very careful," replied Denbigh. "That I don't doubt. I'll give them a week at the very outside. If we are not free men then, I reckon we're booked to Davy Jones his locker."

The cabin was plainly furnished. An electric light was burning, but the porthole had been previously closed and locked. Overhead an electric fan was buzzing, while fresh air was admitted by means of ventilation pipes communicating with the open air.

"We might do worse," remarked O'Hara as he proceeded to undress. "The rotten part of it is, we can't see what's going on outside. The beggars have cooped us up pretty well."

"They are evidently busy," said Stirling, as the bustling of some hundreds of men was plainly audible above the hum of the fan. "Perhaps they do the worst of their dirty work during the hours of darkness."

The three officers proceeded to make an examination of their quarters. The walls were of pitch-pine, but upon O'Hara sacrificing one of his razors, it was found that the woodwork merely formed a casing to a thin steel bulkhead. The ceiling, too, was of steel, coated with a patent cement to preserve the metal and to prevent "sweating". The door was of steel, and was fitted with a "jalousie" or latticed shutter; but their captors had taken the precaution of bolting a solid metal plate over the opening.

"Not much chance for anyone who happens to be a somnambulist," said Denbigh. "Well, it's no use kicking against the pricks when you're barefooted. I'm going to turn in. By Jove, I do feel horribly sleepy."

"And so do I," added Stirling, unable to stifle a terrific yawn.

"I believe I'm asleep already," muttered O'Hara drowsily.

A moment later the three chums were lost in oblivion. An opiate secretly administered by the doctor had been mixed with their food. So soundly did they sleep that they were unaware of a terrific crash that took place during the middle watch—the explosion of a torpedo launched from the supposed Dutch liner at a large French vessel.

Von Riesser had risked an example of frightfulness. The huge, heavily-charged missile—powerful enough to sink the largest battleship afloat within a couple of hours from the moment of impact—had literally torn to pieces the lightly-built hull of its victim. Before the luckless passengers and crew rushed for the boats—and these were for the most part shattered—the French craft sunk like a stone.

It was not until the sun was almost overhead that Pat O'Hara awoke. The deadlight of the porthole had been unshipped and the cabin was flooded with dazzling sunlight.

He sat up in his bunk. His head seemed to be splitting. Everything in view was slowly moving to and fro with a semicircular motion.

"What the deuce have I been up to?" he soliloquized. "Where was I last night? By Jove, I must have had another touch of that rotten malaria."

Presently the erratic movements of his surroundings quieted down. He became aware that Denbigh and Stirling, lying in their bunks on the other side of the cabin, were still sleeping and breathing stertorously.

"Now how in the name of goodness did those fellows get into my cabin?" asked the puzzled Irishman, for he was under the impression that he was on board the *Nichi Maru*. "Has someone been having a rag?"

From the alley-way came the sound of voices. He listened. The speakers were making use of a foreign language. It was not the soft, pleasing Japanese tongue—something harsh and guttural.

"German!" ejaculated O'Hara. "By my blessed namesake I remember it all now."

He leapt from his bunk and, crossing the cabin, shook Denbigh by the shoulders. The Sub's only reply was a grunt of semi-conscious expostulation. O'Hara turned his attentions to the Scot.

"Fore!" muttered Stirling, engrossed in the joys of a round of golf in dreamland.

"More like twelve, be jabbers," retorted O'Hara. "The sun's well over the fore-yard. Show a leg and shine, you

lazy bounder."

The discipline imbued in the old Dartmouth College was too strong to resist the nautical invitation to get up. Stirling rolled from his bunk—fortunately it was the underneath one—and subsided heavily upon the floor.

"Pull yourself together, man," counselled O'Hara. "Those rotten Huns have been hoccussing our grub."

"If they have, they have," muttered the imperturbable Stirling. "That's no reason why you should bellow into my ear like a ninety-thousand horse-power siren."

Leaving the Sub huddled upon the floor O'Hara proceeded to dress.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"The dirty spalpeens! They've been to my pockets while I was asleep."

This announcement literally electrified his companion, for Stirling remembered that he had over twenty pounds in Australian sovereigns in his purse. Alas! The gold had vanished.

"Your pistol?" asked Stirling.

The Irishman whipped his uniform cap from a hat-peg.

"It's there," he reported. "And might you be wanting it to let daylight into the fellow who collared your cash?"

"Not much use without cartridges," replied Stirling savagely. "It might have got us into hot water if they had found it. Better pitch it through the port-hole, old man, before it lands you in queer street."

"No fear," declared O'Hara. "It may come in handy some day."

Some time elapsed before the two men were able to rouse Denbigh from his stupor. He, too, discovered that a small amount of gold that he happened to have on him at the time of the capture of the *Nichi Maru* had been taken from him. Some silver and a few Japanese coins had been left.

"We've been drugged right enough," said Denbigh. "I wonder why? There's some underhand game afoot during the hours of darkness. To-night we'll do without wine at dinner, and see how that acts."

Having completed their toilet the three Subs left the cabin, for the door was now unlocked and the metal covering to the jalousie removed. Without stood a seaman on sentry duty. He drew himself up stiffly as the British officers passed, but made no salute, nor did he attempt to bar their progress.

At the foot of the companion-ladder a petty-officer stopped them.

"Breakfast awaits you in this cabin," he said in German. Neither Stirling nor O'Hara understood, while Denbigh was sufficiently on his guard to feign ignorance of the nature of the announcement.

"Der vos a meal for you in dere," announced von Langer, stepping from behind the shaft of a ventilator.

"Thank you!" replied the three Subs in unison.

"But it's nearly lunch time, isn't it?" added O'Hara.

"Dey vos tell me der Englische are very fond of sleep," retorted von Langer with a laugh. "Himmel! I tink dot is very true."

The meal over, the prisoners went on deck. Out of curiosity Denbigh walked to the rail and leant over the side. He was not surprised at what he saw. The ship's sides had been painted during the night. The black band still remained, but the yellow paint had been replaced with a coat of blue. Already the tropical sun was blistering the still wet paint, revealing patches of the original hue underneath. The funnels, too, had been redecorated. They were now

red with black tops.

Some minutes later Kapitan von Riesser descended from the bridge and walked aft. Seeing the British officer he crossed the deck.

"You like our new colour scheme?" he asked.

Denbigh did not reply to the question. He asked another.

"Mr. Stirling and I both lost some gold during the night. Our cabin was entered while we were asleep and the money taken from our pockets. Was the—er—theft committed at your instigation?"

For a moment von Riesser hesitated.

"There was no theft," he replied. "The gold was taken from you prisoners——"

"Contrary to——" began Stirling hotly.

"In accordance with my instructions," continued the Kapitan. "Gold is of no use to you. Instead, you will be furnished with Notes to its equivalent as soon as we arrive."

"You may as well get your purser to write out a receipt," said O'Hara. "It will come in handy when the *Zwaan*—if that's her proper name—is captured."

Von Riesser laughed boisterously.

"Captured?" he repeated. "Ach! I don't think there is much danger now. South of the Line there is not a solitary British cruiser that can touch us in speed. There are plenty of them, I admit, but that is your English all over. Three swift vessels would be worth all your East India fleet put together, yet you pack highly-trained crews into slow and out-of-date tubs."

"Possibly the captain of the *Emden* thought the same as you do," remarked Stirling.

"Müller had difficulties that I have not," replied von Riesser. "He was known to be in the Indian Ocean and swift cruisers were dispatched from England and Australia to hunt for him. Our presence on the High Seas will not be known to your Admiralty until it is too late. So, gentlemen, I must ask you to seriously consider the possibility of finding yourselves prisoners of war in our well-defended Colony of German East Africa."

## CHAPTER IV

### Threatened

That night, according to their pre-arranged plans, the captive sub-lieutenants avoided taking any of the wines that were placed before them.

They dined alone in a small cabin placed at least fifty feet from their sleeping quarters.

As it was now after sunset the porthole was closed and locked. The door, too, was shut, but not secured. Outside, a sentry paced to and fro.

"Look here, you fellows!" exclaimed Denbigh after the man deputed to attend to their needs had gone. "It's all very well knocking off the fizz, but they'll notice we haven't drunk any."

"Pour it into the grate," suggested Pat O'Hara recklessly.

Denbigh shook his head.

"Won't do," he objected, giving a glance in the direction of the small "bogie" stove. "I suppose there isn't any possibility of prizing open the port-lid?"

"You'd be spotted even if you could. There are plenty of men on deck," said O'Hara, glad of the opportunity of countering Denbigh's objection with another. "Come along, old bird; what do you suggest?"

Stirling, to whom the invitation was addressed, thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his coat.

"What would you do if I weren't here to look after you?" he enquired, at the same time producing three sponges. "I took them from our cabin."

"For dessert?" queried O'Hara, lifting his eyebrows in surprise.

"Yes, if you are a goat," said Stirling with asperity. "Goats are, I believe, rather partial to this sort of tack."

Coolly the Scot poured out a wineglassful of sherry—it was from the same decanter that they had taken some the previous evening—and slowly spilt the liquid on the sponge.

"Fill your glass first," cautioned Stirling. "Then they'll think we have had some of the poisonous stuff. Slip your sponge into your pocket, Denbigh. Don't squeeze it. I am presuming you'll want it again later. Of course if Pat wishes, he can chew his."

Dinner over, the chums retired to their sleeping cabin. In fact they had no option, since they were forbidden to go on deck after sunset. Here they talked and looked at the illustrations of some old Spanish newspapers until lights out; then, turning in, they lay awake awaiting possible developments. Eight bells struck. The *Pelikan* was no longer moving through the water. Outside the cabin men were talking. Springing from his bunk Denbigh approached the door, putting his ear to the covered jalousie.

"I suppose those English swine are sound asleep," said a voice which the sub recognized as that of Kapitan von Riesser. "I cannot hear them grunting—we did last night."

"Nor can I, sir," replied Unter-leutnant Klick, who as officer of the watch was accompanying the captain on his rounds. "But they must be. They went for that doctored sherry like fishes."

"Himmel! That is good news," exclaimed von Riesser. "It will be quite safe to settle that vessel. When she first answered our call she was only forty kilometres away. In twenty minutes——"

The listener fancied he could hear the kapitan rubbing his hands with glee.

"It is much the better way," continued von Riesser: "'Lost with all hands' is quite a plausible theory. I am almost sorry we didn't wait until night when we tackled the Japanese ship. We run a good risk of being made a quarry for a dozen or more of those accursed cruisers. Those English may even send some swift destroyers on our track. You are sure those fellows are quite insensible?"

"As quiet as the grave, sir," assured the unter-leutnant. "They will hear nothing. Even that terrific explosion when our torpedo took the Frenchman by surprise never disturbed them. But, of course, sir, I'll make doubly sure. We'll squirt some chloroform into the cabin."

"Then be sharp about it," said von Riesser. "There's no time to be lost. That English vessel ought to be in sight within the next quarter of an hour."

The German officer moved away. In a trice Denbigh communicated the news to his companions.

"Oh for a respirator!" whispered O'Hara.

"Don't worry," said Stirling. "The electric fan will carry off the fumes as quickly as they pump them in."

Even as he spoke the fan ceased to revolve. The current actuating the ventilating gear had been switched off. Already Unter-leutnant Klick was putting his scheme into effect.

"Those voice tubes," hissed Denbigh.

"They lead nowhere," protested Stirling. "They are blocked. I tried them some time ago."

The cabin had previously been used as the purser's office, and from it voice-tubes had communicated with the captain's cabin, the head steward's quarters, and the clerk's office. The metal pipes had been removed, but three lengths of flexible tubing had been left.

With a sharp tug Denbigh wrenched one of the tubes from the flange securing it to the bulkhead. The second gave more trouble. As he was straining at it a sharp rasping sound fell upon his ear. In the adjoining cabin someone was at work drilling a hole through the metal partition.

Smearing the bell-shaped mouth-pieces of two of the detached pipes with soap from the wash-basin, Denbigh clapped them together.

"Hold on here, Pat," he whispered. "Press 'em tightly."

O'Hara obeyed unhesitatingly. Instinctively he realized that this was Denbigh's pigeon, and once Denbigh undertook a task he was pretty certain of the result.

Stirling was then told to hold one end of the second and third sections. The united length of tubing was now nearly nine feet. One end Denbigh wedged into the opening in the ceiling for the electric fan. The other he held in his hand in readiness.

At length, after a tedious wait, Denbigh saw the tip of the drill emerging from the bulkhead. Marking the spot he instantly switched off the light. A dull thud announced that the boring tool had made a complete perforation and that the handle had struck home against the steelwork.

The drill was withdrawn. In its place a small metal tube was inserted. Deftly and noiselessly Denbigh slipped the lower end of the flexible piping over the projecting nozzle. Then he waited. He could hear the Irishman breathing heavily. The portion of the tube that he was holding quivered in his excitable grasp. Stirling, cool and collected, gave no sign of the potential alertness that possessed him.

A gentle hissing sound, repeated at short intervals, announced that the Germans were injecting the stupefying fumes by means of a bellows. A faint, sickly odour assailed Denbigh's nostrils. He had to fight hard to refrain from gasping. Grimly he stood by until the hissing noise ceased.

His plan had been successful. Save for a slight leakage the fumes had travelled through the pipe and had been carried through the louvres of the ventilator, while the hot air of the cabin was sufficient to create an up-draught to disperse the noxious vapour.

Denbigh removed his end of the tube. As he did so he heard a voice exclaim:

"It is enough. More will kill them. You had better enter the cabin, Herr Doktor, and see that they are still breathing."

The sub drew the piping from his companions' grasp.

"Turn in and pretend you're insensible," he whispered, fearful lest the sound should be heard through the newly-made hole in the bulkhead.

It was less than five minutes later when the door was unlocked and a dim figure cautiously entered.

"Not half so bad as I expected," said a guttural voice. The smell of the anaesthetic had almost dispersed. "Where is the switch?"

"Here, Herr Doktor," replied a petty officer.

The next instant the cabin was bathed in brilliant light. In spite of their efforts to the contrary the three supposed sleepers twitched their eyelids.

The ship's surgeon bent over O'Hara. A short scrutiny confirmed his suspicions. He turned to the bunk on which Stirling was lying, and, lifting the sub's eyelid, placed the tip of his forefinger upon the eyeball.

"Ach, is it so?" ejaculated the German, for Stirling had been compelled to contract his eyelids.

A similar test bore the same result in Denbigh's case; then, without another word, the doctor hurried from the cabin.

"The old pillbox has tumbled to it," muttered Denbigh. "Now what will their little game be?"

The sub was not left long in doubt. Ober-leutnant von Langer, who had followed the doctor into the cabin, made his presence known by bawling out an order to half a dozen of the crew who were waiting without:

"Come! Out mit you!" he exclaimed, addressing the sham sleepers. "It is that I know your little pretend. Ach! you tink you smart?"

Yet Denbigh and his companions kept still, half-hoping that the doctor's test had not been successful and von Langer was trying his hand.

The ober-leutnant gave another order. Unceremoniously the three British officers were hauled out of the bunks by the seamen, who seemed to take a delight in roughly handling anyone of commissioned rank. Perhaps, if von Langer did but know it, his men would have been only too pleased to use him in the same way, for the ober-leutnant was a Prussian and a Junker, while the crew were for the most part from Schleswig-Holstein.

With as much dignity as their dishevelled appearance would permit, Denbigh and his companions allowed themselves to be taken on deck, where they had to cool their heels at the pleasure of their captors. It was a bright moonlight night. The air was decidedly chilly for the Tropics. A heavy dew was falling. The lightly-clad men—for the sub-lieutenants were in pyjamas—realized that there was a grave risk of tropical fever.

The ship was once more under way. With a true seaman's instinct Denbigh glanced aloft. By the relative position of the moon—since no stars were visible—he was able to fix the approximate course of the vessel. She was steering roughly sou'-sou'-east. Far away to the nor'ard a masthead lamp was blinking—calling in Morse to know why they had been summoned.



Denbigh gave a grunt of satisfaction. For once von Riesser's plan had gone awry. He had feared to treacherously torpedo an unsuspecting merchantman since there were hostile eye-witnesses on board the *Pelikan*.

Presently the kapitan, clad in a greatcoat over his white uniform, appeared at the head of the bridge-ladder.

"You there, von Langer?" he called.

"Yes, sir," replied the ober-leutnant. "Shall I bring the prisoners to you?"

"No, I'll see them in my cabin," replied von Riesser. "Tell off a couple of hands to guard the prisoners and another half-dozen to wait outside in case there is any trouble. I'll be there in a few minutes."

The kapitan's quarters were situated aft on the upper deck. They comprised a large cabin, used for meals and recreation, and a sleeping cabin opening from it. Denbigh and his companions were marched into the outer cabin and told to take up a position facing von Riesser's empty arm-chair and separated from it by a long mahogany table.

The cabin was plainly furnished. In addition to the arm-chair and table there were two sideboards, a large book-rack, and half a dozen cane chairs. On the table lay a pile of Dutch charts. Books for navigation and sailing directions in the same language occupied the shelves in company with a few American novels.

Everything German, with one exception, had been studiously eliminated, in order to baffle the curiosity of a British boarding-officer in the event of the supposed *Zwaan* being held up. The exception was a large oil painting of the Kaiser in the uniform of a German Admiral of the Fleet. The portrait was framed in a massive oak frame securely fixed to the bulkhead between the two cabins. The only other picture was a sepia-toned photograph of the Queen of Holland, in a narrow, plain gilt frame. When it became necessary to hide the features of the All Highest War Lord from the eyes of the strafed English, who had practically contrived to drive the War Lord's battleships from the face of the five oceans, von Riesser took the risk of committing lese majesté by placing the portrait of Queen Wilhelmina over that of the Emperor Wilhelm II. Then, to all appearances, the captain's cabin of the *Zwaan* was loyally adorned by a photograph of the Queen of the Netherlands in a deep oak frame with a thin gold slip.

In the circumstances, however, it was not considered necessary to eclipse the All Highest War Lord, so the three British subs found themselves confronted by the painted features of the modern Attila.

The door was thrown open. Von Langer and the two seamen clicked their heels and saluted as von Riesser entered with the dramatic effect of which Prussians are so fond. Gravely saluting the Emperor's portrait and then returning his subordinates' mark of respect the kapitan took his seat.

"You know why you are here?" asked von Riesser abruptly, lowering his brows and looking sternly at the three British officers.

"We do not," replied Denbigh. "In fact, it is rather unusual to turn a fellow out of his bunk at one in the morning."

"Do not bandy words, Herr Denbigh," snapped the kapitan. "You have been causing trouble."

"Is it causing trouble to take steps to avoid being gassed or chloroformed?" asked O'Hara.

"Yes," almost shouted the kapitan. "If we think it desirable that our prisoners should be put to sleep it is not for them to resist."

"In that case there's no more to be said," declared the Irishman. "You are top-dog——"

"You call me a dog, you English swine!" almost howled the now infuriated Prussian.

O'Hara burst out into violent laughter. Denbigh smiled broadly, while around Stirling's firm lips hovered the suspicion of a grim smile. Their utter indifference to the ravings of their captor took von Riesser by surprise.

"I may as well tell you," began Denbigh, seizing his opportunity, "that I can speak German perhaps as well as

you can speak English. I overheard your conversation outside our cabin an hour or so ago, and we know what you proposed to do to the ship which you were luring. I suppose you call those tactics frightfulness. I call them low-down, skulking treachery. How a man who professes to be a sailor, who has lived a free and healthy life upon the sea, could belittle himself to act as you propose to do, and possibly have done, passes my understanding. I give you fair warning, Kapitan von Riesser, that, should we be set free by an English cruiser, you will have a grave indictment to answer."

Von Riesser did not reply for a few moments. He was greatly agitated. Once or twice he glanced anxiously at his ober-leutnant, as if curious to know whether von Langer understood Denbigh's words.

Then he, too, laughed, but it was not a natural outburst of an unburdened and evenly-balanced mind.

"You threaten?" he asked. "Well, I can threaten also. Suppose I decide to put into operation the principle of your worthy Prime Minister? One of his maxims, oft quoted in the Press, is, I believe, 'Wait and see?'"

"It ought to be particularly applicable in your case," rejoined Denbigh coolly.

"Ach! And in yours. What is to prevent me from ordering a weight to be put about your neck and cast you into the sea? Weight and sea. Himmel, that is great!"

He roared at his own joke, while von Langer, although unable to comprehend the significance, showed his servile approbation by laughing in a minor key.

"I don't think that it would make very much difference if you did," replied Denbigh. "You see, the *Nichi Maru's* people know that you carried us off. Some day you will have to answer some rather searching questions if you could not produce us."

Again von Riesser pondered. He was beginning to feel horribly annoyed with himself for having ever received the three British officers on board the *Pelikan*. He was plunging deeper and deeper into the mire. He lacked the determination to cut the Gordian Knot.

By way of an excuse he scribbled a note and tossed it to von Langer.

"Take that to the officer of the watch," he said carelessly.

The ober-leutnant quitted the cabin. The two impassive seamen remained. They, fortunately, knew no English, save a few catch phrases picked up when lying in dock in that dim period before the War.

"Suppose we cry quits," resumed von Riesser. "I am ready to apologize for having exceeded my rights in dealing with you. After all there's no great harm done. I'll admit I planned to trap yonder vessel. You must have misunderstood me when I said that I had intended to torpedo her. We use our torpedoes only in cases of extreme necessity. Are you willing to forget this night?"

"We would like to talk the matter over between ourselves," replied Denbigh. "If you have no objection, we will give our reply at noon to-morrow."

"I agree," said von Riesser, with a meekness that quite surprised Denbigh and his companions. He gave an order to the two seamen. They turned and left the cabin.

Two minutes later the British officers were back in their own quarters. Time had been called after the first round, and the Prussian had not come out top-dog.

## CHAPTER V

### The Pursuit of the *Pelikan*

"One thing that puzzles me," remarked Stirling during the following forenoon, "is why they didn't clap us below under hatches, instead of trying to stupefy us. It would have been far less trouble."

"I must say that I share your thoughts," said Denbigh. "These Germans are no fools. They are pretty thorough in whatever they take up, whether it's a diabolical scheme or otherwise. It might be that there's something below that they don't want us to see, and rather than run a risk in that direction, they prefer to lock us up in the cabin."

"That's all very well," rejoined O'Hara. "But it won't wash. Old von Langer let it out in the course of conversation that this ship has already been examined by one of our cruisers."

"Then perhaps the boarding-officer wasn't cute enough. It's a tribute to our sagacity, old man," said Stirling. "However, time and events will prove. By Jove, the fateful hour approaches! What will von Riesser say to our decision?"

At eight bells the three British officers were told to proceed to the kapitan's cabin. This time von Riesser was alone. He looked flustered and worried.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he began. "You must look upon this as a private and confidential chat. Now, to go straight to the point: are you prepared, in the event of your being given honourable treatment and allowed the greatest liberty possible, to maintain silence upon last night's affair?"

Denbigh, as spokesman, did not think it advisable to give a direct reply.

"Do you, on your part, promise to refrain from treacherous attacks upon Allied merchantmen?" he asked.

"I think I can give that guarantee," replied von Riesser. "If I do so, will you write a certificate to the effect that, to the best of your belief, I, as commander of the ship, am acting in accordance with the present accepted rules of naval warfare? That, I think, will square matters."

"We cannot do that," declared Denbigh. "We are willing to give a certificate to the effect that you acted with discretion."

The kapitan smiled grimly.

"There is a certain amount of latitude in that," he replied. "I suppose you will then say nothing of last night's business."

"Since we have no direct evidence of what you have done, we cannot very well state a case," said Denbigh. "The thing is this: are you going to torpedo any merchantmen without warning?"

"No," replied von Riesser.

"Very well. We have forgotten last night," declared Denbigh. "Should occasion arise we will give you the required certificate."

"And should occasion not arise," thought von Riesser, "I will make it pretty hot for these young cubs. Once safely in port in our African colony, I will show them what it means to thwart a Prussian officer."

With these sentiments in his mind and a smile on his face the kapitan dismissed his prisoners.

During the afternoon there was a thick haze. It was impossible to distinguish anything beyond a distance of about a mile from the ship. Sea and sky were merged into an ill-defined blurr. The glass, too, was falling rapidly. That and the presence of the mist betokened an imminent change in the weather.

Suddenly there was a rift in the curtain of vapour. At less than two miles away on the *Pelikan's* port bow were two vessels, one being in tow of the other.

The subs were quick to recognize the leading craft. She was a British cruiser of the "Eclipse" class—a vessel of 5600 tons, and with a nominal speed of 19 knots. But the craft in tow was a puzzle to them. She was low-lying, with a raised superstructure amidships, one funnel, and a tall mast fitted with a fire-control platform. From her for'ard turret two huge guns, seemingly out of all proportion to the rest of the ship, protruded. The muzzles, instead of being inclined upwards, were depressed. Although Denbigh and his companions could not distinguish details owing to the distance of the vessel, the German officers, by means of their telescopes and binoculars, could see that the muzzles of the guns were resting on large chocks bolted to the deck, while the protruding part of the weapons were additionally secured by stout hawsers. The mysterious craft was apparently deserted. Everything was battened down, for the decks were swept by the long Atlantic waves.

"By Jove!" ejaculated O'Hara. "She must be one of our monitors. Now, where is she off to, I should like to know? There's something in the wind."



**"BY JOVE!" EJACULATED O'HARA, "SHE MUST BE ONE OF OUR MONITORS."**

Kapitan von Riesser could have answered the question. He stood on the bridge, glasses glued to his face and rage in his heart. There could be but one solution. The monitor was bound for the Indian Ocean, to take part in the forthcoming operations against the Germans in East Africa.

"Donnerwetter!" muttered von Riesser. "These accursed English. They may throw away their opportunities on

land, but they know how to do things at sea."

"Shall I carry on, sir?" asked the officer of the watch.

"No, port helm," ordered the kapitan. Then realizing that the carrying out of this command might arouse the suspicions of the British cruiser, he had the *Pelikan* steadied on her helm. The course would bring her within a mile of the cruiser and her tow.

"The cheek!" exclaimed Stirling. "Old von Riesser's going to play a game of bluff."

"I vote we semaphore," suggested O'Hara impulsively. "We'd do the trick before they could stop us."

The Irishman, however, had no opportunity of putting his plan into effect, for at that moment a petty-officer informed the subs that it was the kapitan's pleasure they should go below.

They found the port-hole closed and locked. Von Riesser was not a man to take needless risks.

A hoist of bunting fluttered from the cruiser's signal yard-arm. It was a message in the International Code: "E C—what ship is that?"

Promptly the Dutch ensign was hoisted, while simultaneously the "number" of the real *Zwaan* was made.

From the cruiser came another signal. Von Riesser had no occasion to consult the code-book. It was "I D—Heave-to, or I fire."

"Hard a-port!" he shouted, and telegraphed for full speed ahead.

Round swung the *Pelikan*, listing until five feet of her underbody showed clear. Even as she did so a couple of 12-pounders spat venomously, the shells passing perilously close to the towering hull.

Down fluttered the Dutch ensign. The British cruiser ceased firing. Ahead lay a bank of fog.

Von Riesser knew that he was in a tight corner, and it was in tight corners that the better qualities of the man showed themselves. For a few moments he stood motionless. Every second the *Pelikan* was slipping farther and farther away from the cruiser, which, hampered by her tow, was unable to stand in pursuit. Her skipper was somewhat mystified. According to the rules of the game the *Pelikan* had struck, yet he knew that of necessity the immense bulk must carry considerable way.

The British cruiser had no doubts of the blue liner with the broad black band, for the survivors of the *Nichi Maru* had been picked up by one of the patrolling vessels. Once more that mixed blessing, wireless telegraphy, had been brought into service, and a description of the raider sent far and wide. Already a number of light cruisers were on their way from Simon's Bay to intercept the *Pelikan*, while the blockading squadron off the east coast of Africa had been warned of the likely attempt on the part of the fugitive to gain one of the little-known and unfrequented rivers of the last of Germany's overseas possessions.

Von Riesser alternately kept glancing ahead and astern. The haze was beginning to envelop the monitor and her escort.

He shouted an order to a petty officer. The man doubled aft, bawling as he ran. Then from the ensign staff fluttered the Black Cross of the Imperial German Navy.

The cruiser's reply was a salvo from her quick-firers. Two shells struck home, one bursting on the poop and blowing the emblem of Germany to atoms, besides causing considerable damage to the deck. A second burst amidships, shattering a couple of ventilators, splintering one of the boats, and destroying the greater portion of the bridge. Fragments of metal and splinters of wood flew in all directions. Kapitan von Riesser narrowly escaped being hit. As it was, one of his officers and two seamen were killed outright, five others being seriously wounded, while the kapitan was thrown to the deck by the concussion.

For a few minutes the *Pelikan* was enveloped in smoke and spray thrown up by the shells that exploded on either side; but before the cruiser could get in another effective shot the raider was lost in the mist.

Von Riesser guessed, and rightly, that the cat was out of the bag, otherwise the cruiser would not have hoisted that peremptory demand to heave-to. He realized that his position was a hazardous one. Thousands of miles from a friendly port, sought by perhaps a score of British cruisers, and, moreover, running short of coal, the *Pelikan* stood a very small chance of dropping anchor in East African waters, except as a prize.

On the other hand, Fate, in the guise of the mist, had dealt kindly with the *Pelikan*. For the rest of the day she steamed westward. Down below the firemen toiled like Trojans, shovelling coal into the glowing furnaces. On deck the crew worked hard, clearing away the debris left by the British cruiser's shells. The wireless staff were busy "jamming" the numerous messages thrown out from various vessels, that were converging on the monitor and her escort for the purpose of cutting off the audacious *Pelikan*.

About an hour before sunset the mist cleared. The sea was still calm, although high overhead the ragged and greasy clouds betokened the approach of a southerly gale. The setting sun, a ball of bright yellow, set in a pale greenish-yellow sky, threw its slanting rays across the damaged bridge, almost blinding the look-out with its brilliance.

"Sail on the starboard bow," reported one of the watchers.

Von Riesser, who had practically recovered from the shock of being capsized by the explosion, had not left the bridge. He immediately gave orders to starboard the helm. At the present juncture he would not risk meeting even an unarmed tramp laden with military stores.

The stranger was the British light cruiser *Actæon*, of 3000 tons, and with a speed of slightly over 20 knots. Pelting towards the scene of the encounter between the *Pelikan* and her foiled antagonist, the *Actæon* was unwittingly approaching the fugitive. She, having the advantage of the light, recognized the German liner almost before the latter had noticed her presence.

As the *Pelikan* swung round, the *Actæon* followed suit, both vessels being now on slightly converging courses and about six miles apart. It was a question as to which of the two was the speediest ship—a question, seemingly, that events only could prove.

The sun set. The short period of tropical twilight gave place to pitch-black night, for the moon, now two days after the full, had not yet risen.

On board the *Pelikan* all lights that might be visible from outside were extinguished, save for one white light shown aft. The pursuing vessel displayed no lights, but her approximate position could be fixed by means of the dull-red glow of the flames that issued from her three funnels.

"Do you think she's gaining, von Langer?" asked the kapitan anxiously, after an interval of almost unbroken silence as far as the officers on the *Pelikan's* bridge were concerned.

"I am not sure," replied the ober-leutnant. "We do not appear to be gaining on her. It may be that we are just holding our own."

"Unless we can shake her off completely before sunrise we stand little chance," said von Riesser moodily. "We cannot stand up to her. Those guns would send us to the bottom in a quarter of an hour, long before we came within torpedo range."

"If we had but a dozen mines, sir——" began Unter-leutnant Klick.

"It is no use wishing for what we haven't got," snapped the kapitan. "And what is more, yon English ship is taking good care not to follow directly in our wake in case we were dropping mines."

There was silence for some moments. Von Riesser was deep in thought, his eyes fixed the while upon the lurid red tint on the horizon.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "I think I have it. Here, Herr Klick, see that the motor launch is cleared ready for lowering."

## CHAPTER VI

### The Decoy

Wondering at the inexplicable nature of Kapitan von Riesser's order the unter-leutnant hurried off. In a few minutes the sea-boat's crew, drilled for such emergencies, had provisioned and watered the twenty-five-foot motor-launch that hung in davits abreast of the after-funnel.

The securing chocks were removed, the falls manned, and the davits swung outboard.

"Motor-launch ready, sir!" reported the unter-leutnant. "Water and provisions are on board, and a hundred litres of petrol."

"I gave no orders for the boat to be victualled," exclaimed the kapitan. "No matter: it will waste too much valuable time to remove the stuff. Now, listen, Herr Klick. Everything depends upon the strict carrying out of my instructions. Place two men on board the launch—one to tend each of the lower blocks of the falls. Have ready a white light. See that the helm is lashed. I will slow down the ship, and turn her so that the launch will be slightly to leeward. At the word, see that the motor is started and the light exhibited. Then lower away smartly, and tell the men to hang on to the falls when they are disengaged unless they want to be a target for the English cannon."

"I understand, sir. You are using the boat as a decoy."

"Precisely, Herr Klick. Now, be sharp. With a vessel pursuing us at a rate equal to our utmost speed we cannot afford to lose precious moments in lying-to."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I say, you fellows, I think I'll go on deck and see what's doing," announced Sub-lieutenant Stirling.

His companions looked at him with feelings akin to amazement.

"What the deuce are you babbling about, old man?" asked O'Hara. "You know as well as we do that we are locked in."

None of the three prisoners had any thought of turning in. They had heard the crash of the British shells as the cruiser sought to wing the German raider. In spite of the danger of being hit, and what was infinitely worse, being drowned like rats in a trap in a foundering vessel—since it was more than possible that the crew of the *Pelikan* would take no steps to liberate the captives—the subs were in high spirits. They took it for granted that their release would be a matter of a few minutes only, since the lightly-built *Pelikan* would stand no earthly chance against the vastly-superior ordnance of the pursuing vessel. Then came a sudden cessation of the firing; yet the prisoners knew by the thud of the engines that the German ship was still pelting on her bid for safety.

Hours passed. There was no doubt in the minds of the three men that the *Pelikan* was being hotly pursued. The pulsations of the engines under forced draught was conclusive evidence on that point. The captive officers sat and talked, drawing conclusions as to what was taking place, until Stirling suddenly hurled a verbal bomb-shell by announcing his intention of going on deck.

"Don't be so rash with your assertions, Pat," replied Stirling in mock reproof. "It is certainly true that we are locked in. It is also a fact that I possess a very efficient screw-driver. I took the liberty of annexing it, as one of the carpenter's crew has been guilty of negligence. On board a British ship that screw-driver would, in the usual course of routine, find itself in the scran-bag; but since I'm not at all certain that such a visible cure for forgetfulness exists in the German navy, I have and hold the article in question."

"No need to brag about it, old man," said O'Hara. "You are not the only light-fingered gentleman of our little coterie. As these Germans had no compunction in entering the cabin and sneaking out hard-earned cash, I repaid the compliment by entering one of the officer's cabins, and this is what I annexed."



He held up a dark-green paper packet containing a dozen rounds of ammunition that fitted the automatic pistol.

"Steady!" exclaimed Denbigh. "You're looking for trouble with that thing, Pat. It's as dangerous as a shillelagh at Donnybrook Fair. And what's the object in breaking out?" he continued, addressing Stirling, who was fondling the screw-driver in anticipation. "If you're detected there'll be a rumpus. I don't suppose you'll do any good, and if you possess your soul in patience a little longer you'll be let out."

"Hanged if I can," retorted Stirling. "I must have a look round. I didn't ask you fellows to come. In fact, there's less risk for one than three."

"Have your own way, then," said Denbigh, who knew that when the Scot once made up his mind there would be no turning aside.

The lock was secured to the inside of the door. It was sufficient to keep out intruders, but quite inadequate to resist the application of the screwdriver. Working swiftly yet silently, Stirling removed the brass staple. Only the pressure of his boot against the door kept it shut. Cautiously he drew the door ajar. There was a light switched on in the passage. At the far end of the alley-way was the sentry on the aft-deck. The rest of the cabins were deserted, since the excitement of the chase kept all officers on deck. Having, then, no fear of detection the sentry was sitting on the lid of a chest, his face buried in a book.

"All clear," whispered Stirling. "S'long, you fellows. Expect me when you see me."

He gave another glance in the direction of the sentry. The man had not stirred. Softly Stirling crept out and tiptoed along the passage in the direction of the ladder leading to the upper-deck.

The noise of the engines, audible throughout the length and breadth of the ship, and the tramp of feet on deck, deadened the slight sound of his movements. At the end of the alley-way a curtain had been stretched in order to screen the light from the companion-way. Beyond, although there were men standing about, the place was in darkness.

Stirling took the risk. He knew that in the gloom there would be great difficulty to distinguish the uniforms of the German officers from his own. Lifting aside the curtain, he stepped forward with the self-confidence of a man accustomed to command.

The knot of seamen separated, the men clicking their heels and standing rigidly at the salute. In the darkness they recognized the officer but not the individual. Not for one moment did they suspect that he was one of the strafed Englishmen, whom they had every reason to suppose to be under lock and key.

Without interruption Stirling gained the deck. The shattered woodwork, just discernible in the darkness, showed him the result of the British cruiser's shells. He glanced aft. Far astern, the red blur that had so disturbed the equanimity of Kapitan von Riesser came as a solace to his mind. His surmises were correct. The *Pelikan*—or, as he knew her, the *Zwaan*—was being chased, but he could not quite understand why the pursuing vessel should be so far astern, since a few hours ago she was within range. He, of course, knew nothing of the event that led to the *Actæon* taking up the chase. Nor could he suggest any reason why the German liner should show a white light astern. It seemed contrary to every precaution necessary to shake off pursuit.

"May as well get for'ard," soliloquized the sub. "There seems a bit of a hullabaloo. I'll see what it is about. I don't suppose I'll be spotted if I keep clear of the crush. Hulloo! They're getting the boats out. Are they going to abandon ship, I wonder, or is it merely a matter of discretion, should the old hooker get plugged?"

With little difficulty Stirling took up his position under the lee of a ventilator. As he waited he heard fragments of the conversation between von Riesser and his subordinate.

Stirling was a poor German scholar; so much so that he was ashamed of the little German he knew. By sheer good luck, however, he recognized several of the words—sufficient to enable him to guess shrewdly the nature of the kapitan's order.

Stirling was very often lucky in that way. Even while he was hiding behind the ventilator he recalled a similar

instance. It was on the occasion of his entry examination to Osborne, and Stirling was in those days an atrocious speller even for a youth of thirteen and a half. In the dictation subject the lad found himself balked by the word "adaptable". He was on the point of writing "adaptable" when he caught sight of some letters stamped upon the pen he was using: "The Adaptable Pen". When the result of the examination was announced Stirling found that he had only just attained the minimum marks in English to qualify. Afterwards he was apt to remark that he owed his commission to a twopenny pen which might, for aught he knew, have been made in Germany.

"By Jove, they're going to use that boat as a decoy," soliloquized the sub. "I'll risk it. Hang it all! If I'm spotted there can only be a shindy. With our cruiser pelting up astern and Denbigh and O'Hara below, they won't dare to try any of their kultur tricks."

The launch was now level with the rail. The men told off to attend to the disengaging gear were already on board, while down below an artificer was trying to coax the motor. Apparently he had trouble, for he called out to one of his mates to pass something to him. At that moment Kapitan von Riesser gave an order, and the unter-leutnant and his men faced for'ard.

In a trice Stirling slipped quietly over the rail at the heels of one of the crew. While the latter made his way for'ard to the motor-room the sub entered the little cabin. It was, as he expected, empty. Not knowing whether any of the launch's crew would remain, Stirling crept under the seat and waited.

The *Pelikan* was losing way. Her engines had been reversed in order to bring her almost to a standstill in the least possible time.

"Lower away!" shouted a voice in German which Stirling recognized as that of Unter-leutnant Klick.

The racing of the motor, which the artificer had at length succeeded in starting, drowned all other sounds. The propeller, racing in the air, was revolving at terrific speed. Unless the launch were quickly put into the water the motor would soon be overheated, since no cooling device was possible until the pump sucked water into the jackets surrounding the cylinders.

The artificer, his task accomplished, swung himself on to the *Pelikan's* deck, while directly the falls were cast off the two seamen swarmed up the ropes. Almost before Stirling was aware of it, the launch was speeding forward.

"Time I made a move," muttered the sub. With the utmost caution he emerged from his hiding-place and made his way to the well. The bright rays of the lamp lashed to the ensign-staff enabled him to see everything on deck. One glance told him that he was the only member of the crew. Already the *Pelikan* was lost to sight in the darkness.

Stirling's first act upon taking command was to cut the lashings of the helm and to turn the launch in the same direction as the *Pelikan* had been travelling. He then looked for the supposed position of the pursuing cruiser. On the horizon were two glints of red light at, roughly, 15 degrees apart.

"Two of them," said the sub to himself. "The more the merrier. Another ten minutes and it will be seen whether I am smashed to smithereens by a British 6-inch shell."

As a matter of precaution he cast off the lashings of the lamp, placing it on a seat just inside the cabin. There it was within arm's reach, while the sub was not in danger of being temporarily blinded by the glare.

"That's the rising moon," continued Stirling, referring to the light to the east'ard. "The other glare is from the cruiser's funnels. Allowing her speed to be 20 knots, and this hooker's 12 or 15, she's gaining on me at about eight miles an hour."

Presently the newly-risen moon appeared in a rift of clouds. Its slanting rays silhouetted the outlines of a large four-funnelled cruiser, now less than a couple of miles astern.

"Time!" ejaculated Stirling laconically. Leaving the helm he made for the motor-room and switched off the ignition. Then, returning to the well, he raised and lowered the lamp several times in succession, dipping it behind the coaming in order to signal the "General Call".

A light flashed from the cruiser. Thank heavens it was not the spurt of a quick-firer but a steady white flare, to signify that the ship was in readiness to receive the message. "*Zwaan* has sent decoy adrift," signalled Stirling. "Probably altered course to south'ard. Please return and pick me up after end of chase."

A searchlight was switched on from the cruiser's after-bridge. For a few moments it played upon the now motionless motor-launch. Then, somewhat to Stirling's surprise and to his not altogether complete satisfaction, the cruiser began to slow down.

"It's all right for me," soliloquized the sub. "But it's hard lines on Denbigh and Pat. I'm afraid von Riesser has given our fellows the slip."

## CHAPTER VII

### Foiled by a Collier

For the rest of the night Denbigh and O'Hara awaited in vain for their comrade's return. They had no idea of the flight of time since, during the chase, the ship's bell had not been struck. In the screened cabin they sat, with the electric light switched on, for after their interview with Kapitan von Riesser on the subject of the attempted chloroforming, the current was not cut off after ten o'clock as was formerly the case.

"Faith! I'll go and see what he's up to," exclaimed O'Hara, removing the chair from the door. It was the only way to keep the door closed, since the replacing of the staple of the lock would have barred Stirling's return.

"Better not," objected Denbigh. "Either he's all right or he's all wrong. In the former case it wouldn't do to meddle with his business. Two stand double the risk of detection that one fellow runs. In the latter case, our going to look for him won't help matters in the least, because if they've collared him they will be on the look-out for us."

"S'pose you're right," grudgingly assented Pat. "We must stick it."

The chums "stuck it" for another two hours, then the sound of six bells (7 a.m.) announced the fact that it was daylight, and that precautions in the matter of noise were no longer necessary.

"The flunky will be here presently to open the port-hole," remarked Denbigh. "I think we had better screw on that chunk of metal. Stirling won't be coming now."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"Goodness only knows. Look here; we won't open the ball. Let's see if they know anything about his disappearance."

"The man will notice that the moment he comes into the cabin," objected O'Hara.

For answer, Denbigh crossed over to Stirling's cot, placed the bolster longwise and covered it with the blankets. Then, partly drawing the curtains, he stood back and surveyed the result of his handiwork.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed. "It would take a lynx-eyed detective to spot the game, especially when the port-hole is opened, because the bunk is dead against the light. Let's turn in. Old Fritz will smell a rat if he finds us up and dressed."

The two subs had barely settled themselves in their bunks and had switched off the light, when a key clicked in the lock and the German sailor deputed to attend to them stumbled in.

He was a taciturn fellow. Perhaps it was because he understood no word of English, and was unaware of the fact that Denbigh spoke German. He had, however, a habit of conversing with himself during the performance of his duties, and more than once Denbigh picked up information from the fellow's unguarded babbling.

This time Fritz was silent. Setting down a jug of hot water, he unlocked and opened the port-hole.

Having washed, shaved, and dressed, Denbigh and O'Hara made their way to the cabin in which was served their meals. Covers for three lay on the table. The steward was standing by in his customary manner.

Without a word the subs seated themselves. Presently Fritz came in to deliver a message from one of the ship's officers.

"Where's the third Englander?" asked the steward.

Apparently Fritz was fond of a joke at the messman's expense. Without a word he stooped and looked under the table; then drawing himself up, he replied:

"I cannot see him."

"Fool!" ejaculated the steward. "Don't try to be an idiot; you are one already. Where is the schwein-hund?"

"Too lazy to get up and have his breakfast, I suppose," replied Fritz indifferently. "He was fast asleep when I went in."

Having asked in broken English if the subs required anything further, and receiving a negative reply, the steward went out.

"Deucedly strange," said Denbigh in a low voice. "Those fellows know nothing. I wonder if von Riesser and his cheerful ober-leutnant have been up to mischief."

It was not until one bell in the forenoon watch that Stirling's absence was discovered. Denbigh and O'Hara were immediately sent for and closely questioned.

The interview was unsatisfactory, the British officers affecting ignorance of the time of their comrade's disappearance; while von Riesser, rightly guessing that Denbigh and O'Hara imagined he was responsible and was trying to cloak suspicion, was so emphatic in his assurances that he knew nothing of Stirling's whereabouts that his very earnestness caused the subs to misjudge him.

A thorough search was instituted, but, naturally, without the hoped-for result. Reluctantly, Denbigh and O'Hara came to the conclusion that their chum had either fallen in or had been thrown overboard.

Kapitan von Riesser was genuinely perturbed, not on account of the loss of the British officer, but for the additional complication that might ensue if the *Pelikan* should be captured. The idea of being taken prisoner obsessed the German commander. It loomed up in front of him like a gaunt spectre day and night. It spoke volumes for the fact that Great Britain was Mistress of the Seas.

He showed little or no elation at having evaded the cruiser that had doggedly held in pursuit until long after midnight. His pessimism was beginning to become infectious. Officers and men were downcast. Several times on the lower deck remarks were heard to the effect that it was an unlucky day when the *Pelikan* escaped from her nominal state of internment.

For the next three days Denbigh and O'Hara were "off colour". The mystery of Stirling's disappearance affected them deeply; but on the fourth day they cheered up considerably, for the *Pelikan* had intercepted a wireless message from a British cruiser. The message was in code, but one word occurred that shed a different light upon the mystery. The word was "Stirling". Von Riesser lost no time in informing the two British officers, and although the latter were unable to decipher the message it was evident that Stirling had been picked up by one of our patrols.

Shortly after daybreak on the fifth day of Stirling's absence, the *Pelikan* overhauled a large collier, outward bound from Penarth to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, with a valuable cargo of steam coal.

It was evident that the skipper of the collier had received no warning that a German raider was at large, for he allowed the *Pelikan* to get within three cables' length without exciting any suspicion.

When the latter peremptorily ordered the collier to heave-to and surrender, however, the stalwart old merchant captain showed the stuff he was made of, for without complying, he suddenly ported helm and bore down upon the liner, which had now hoisted German colours.

It was a forlorn hope, for the *Pelikan* could steam twice as fast as the collier and was much quicker on her helm.

"By Jove! that fellow has some pluck," exclaimed O'Hara admiringly, for, anticipating no resistance on the part of the would-be prize, Kapitan von Riesser had not ordered the British officers below. "But he's asking for trouble."

"Yes, poor chap, he's put himself out of court," agreed Denbigh.

Manoeuvring so that the *Pelikan's* guns could be brought to bear upon the collier without danger of carrying

away her masts, von Riesser gave the order to fire. Two shells did the mischief. Both burst amidships, sweeping away the bridge and chart-house, and with them the rash and gallant skipper and three of the crew.

Further resistance being out of the question the collier struck her flag. Splendidly handled the *Pelikan* ranged up alongside, and without delay the work of transferring the cargo commenced. Although the sturdy Britons who formed the collier's crew refused to lift as much as a little finger to help there were plenty of hands available from the *Pelikan*. The steam winches were manned, skips and whips brought into play, and sacks and sacks of badly wanted fuel were toppled down the liner's chutes.

"Stand by there, you men!" shouted Kapitan von Riesser, observing that the crew of the collier were provisioning and swinging out their boats. "I haven't said I was going to sink your ship. Come and bear a hand and we'll let you go."

Somewhere from the vicinity of the wrecked bridge came a hoarse voice:

"We want no favours from strafed Germans. Get your coal yourself if you want it. You'll have to jolly well look sharp, for the hooker'll be on her way to Davy Jones in half an hour."

"Himmel!" gasped the astonished kapitan, completely taken aback by the bull-dog audacity of the collier's men. "Quick, Herr Klick. Sound the well."

Accompanied by a couple of armed seamen the unter-leutnant hurried below. In a few minutes he reappeared.

"They've opened the valves, sir," he reported. "The sea is rushing in like a sluice. It is already up to the floor of the engine-room."

Von Riesser leant over the bridge rail and surveyed the deck of the collier forty feet below.

"Unless you close those valves I'll smash every boat you have!" he shouted.

A chorus of gibes was the only reply. The engine-room staff alone knew the position of the valves. It would take a stranger a couple of hours to locate them, and the men knew it.

"Smash away," they replied derisively. "Smashing private property is the only thing you Germans can do properly."

For a full minute Kapitan von Riesser lost all control of himself. He stormed and raved, cursing both in German and English, until he realized that during that minute the collier had sunk deeper in the water.

There was a rush on the part of the *Pelikan's* men who were loading the sacks in the vessel's holds, so fierce was the influx of the sea.

Above their shouts of anger and surprise arose the ceaseless taunts of the British crew. Having fully made up their minds that no quarter would be given the stalwart men decided to die game, and in their opinion the spirit of independence was best shown in heaping sarcasm upon the baffled Teutons.

Already the hawsers and springs holding the two vessels were straining almost to breaking point. Reluctantly von Riesser gave the order to cast off, at the same time telegraphing to the engine-room for half-speed ahead.

Somewhat to the surprise of the collier's crew no attempt was made by the *Pelikan* to interfere with them. Taking to the boats they hoisted sail and in twenty minutes the little flotilla was lost to sight.

It was a long time before von Riesser got over his fit of bad temper. Precious time had been all but wasted, for the only result of the enterprise was the addition of roughly seventy tons of coal to the *Pelikan's* sorely-depleted bunkers.

"By Jove! that was a nasty knock," remarked O'Hara to his chum. "It's a wonder old von Riesser hadn't ordered those boats to be stove-in. The lip those fellows gave him was enough to make a British admiral commit an act of

frightfulness."

"The old chap's frightened about something," replied Denbigh. "He's literally on toast. You see, what with Stirling's escape—for I feel confident that code message referred to his rescue—he's got to mind his p's and q's until he's through the cordon. Then, if he does, I guess he'll make it mighty hot for us."

Denbigh was right in his surmise, for as soon as Stirling had been taken on board H.M.S. *Actæon* and had made a report to the captain, the cruiser communicated with each of her consorts, giving the position of the *Pelikan* when last seen and the probable course.

Following this message another was transmitted to the Admiralty announcing the safety of Sub-lieutenant Charles Stirling, captured while on a passage home in the Japanese liner *Nichi Maru*. Instructions were asked as to the "disposal" of that officer.

Promptly came the reply temporarily appointing Stirling to H.M.S. *Actæon* as supernumerary, since it was recognized that his knowledge of the elusive raider might be of great assistance to the pursuing ship.

Within two hours of the *Actæon's* wireless message additional small cruisers, armed auxiliaries, and destroyers left Table Bay, while others were ordered from the Pacific Station to proceed to the vicinity of Cape Horn and guard both the passage to the southward of that place and also the intricate Straits of Magellan.

In the event of the *Pelikan* eluding the cordon in the Atlantic, and since it was known that her desired destination was German East Africa, the squadron operating in conjunction with the British military expedition was warned to exercise a particularly sharp look-out, both in the Mozambique Channel and off the East African coast between 4° S. and 11° S. lat.

Four swift destroyers of the Australian Navy were also given instructions to proceed to Mauritius and await orders. Thus the net was being swiftly tightened around the fugitive liner that alone flew the Black Cross ensign of Germany outside European waters.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Reinforcements

Under reduced speed, in order to economize her coal, the *Pelikan* held on her southerly course. By dint of careful stoking, her funnels emitted little or no smoke that might betray her position. At night every light was screened.

Fortune seemed to be favouring her, for without sighting a single vessel she reached the fortieth parallel, or considerably farther to the south'ard than she need do in ordinary circumstances in order to round the Cape of Good Hope.

The air was rapidly becoming colder, and her crew, being unprovided with warm garments, suffered acutely after coming straight from the Tropics.

While the work of repairing the damage done by the British cruiser's shells was progressing as well as the limited means at the disposal of the ship would permit, one of the crew slipped, and striking his head against the edge of an iron plate, was so severely injured that he died within two hours of the accident.

It was then that Denbigh and O'Hara had yet another example of the thoroughness of the German system. The usual practice would have been to sew the body up in a shotted hammock and throw it overboard, but Kapitan von Riesser had another plan.

One of the boats, with the name "*Zwaan*—Rotterdam" painted on the stern, was lowered. In it the corpse was placed and the boat turned adrift.

In due course, the kapitan hoped—and the crew, realizing that necessity knows no law, agreed with him—that the boat would be sighted by one of the British cruisers, and thus give the impression that the raider had sunk.

About four on the following morning the two subs were roused by the sudden increase of the revolutions of the propellers, and the frantic tramp of feet on deck.

"Hulloa, what's wrong now?" asked O'Hara. "They've got a move on for something."

"One of our ships in chase, I think," replied Denbigh. "As we are locked in we may just as well go to sleep again. I'd like to wake up and find the hooker hove-to and a prize."

"Not bad advice," rejoined the Irishman, turning over and rolling himself in his blankets. "Thank goodness it's not our watch. If these fellows carry on much farther we'll find ourselves on the way to the South Pole."

Sleep, however, was out of the question. The two chums talked at intervals until the appearance of Fritz warned them that it was time to dress for breakfast.

After the meal the subs found, somewhat to their surprise, that they were not prohibited from going on deck, as was generally the case when another vessel was sighted.

It was piercingly cold. A heavy dew had frozen as it fell, rendering the decks very slippery. Several of the crew were at work with hoses, washing down the planks with salt water in order to clear away the thin coating of ice. So keen was the wind that Denbigh and his companion were glad to take shelter under the lee of the deck-houses.

Astern, at a distance of about two miles, was a long, rakish-looking craft, with two short masts and two funnels. She was painted a dark grey, almost appearing black. She flew no flag, but a signal fluttered from the foremast. Owing to the direction of the wind it was impossible, even with the aid of powerful glasses, to distinguish the flags, since the vessel was steaming directly in the wake of the runaway *Pelikan*.

Several of the latter's officers were aft keeping the mysterious craft under observation, while on the after-bridge Kapitan von Riesser and the officers of the watch were engaged upon a similar task.



Seeing the British officers appear the kapitan descended the bridge and strolled aft. Affecting surprise at finding Denbigh and the Irishman on deck he asked:

"What do you make of that vessel, Herr Denbigh? Is she one of yours?"

The sub shook his head.

"I really cannot say," he replied. "You see we've added considerably to our fleet since the outbreak of war, and I haven't been in Home Waters since October, 1913. She's coming up pretty fast, I should imagine."

"She is," agreed Kapitan von Riesser dryly. "But not so fast as you would like, perhaps. It is somewhat strange that she hasn't opened fire before now. Perhaps it is because your compatriots are afraid of hitting you," he added with a slight sneer.

"And for similar humanitarian reasons you have refrained from using your quick-firers, I presume?" retorted O'Hara.

"She's hoisting Argentine colours, sir," reported one of the *Pelikan's* officers.

He was right, for altering helm slightly the pursuing vessel enabled the flag to blow athwartships. At the same moment the signal that had been kept flying at the masthead could be distinguished. It read: "What ship is that?"

"Those colours may be an English trick," said the kapitan. "I'll carry on."

"By Jove, old man!" he whispered to his chum. "It looks as if we are dished this time. We were a little too premature in chipping the Old Man."

In an hour the pursuing craft had closed to slightly less than a mile. Still she made no attempt to open fire. There were, in fact, no guns visible.

"Hoist our proper colours," ordered Kapitan von Riesser at length. "It will be all the same in another twenty minutes' time whether we use our own ensign or any other."

The Black Cross ensign was run up. Its appearance was greeted by a prolonged blast on the stranger's siren, then from the extremity of the pursuing craft's bridge a man began semaphoring.

Although skilled in semaphore, neither Denbigh nor O'Hara could understand the message. The British system differs from the German, which again varies with the French and Spanish. Yet, peculiarly, the officers and men of the *Pelikan* could read the signal with ease.

Grave, anxious looks gave place to smiles, while one of the crew began to cheer—a demonstration that the kapitan quickly suppressed.

Von Riesser had now ascended the bridge. Still suspicious he ordered the torpedo tubes to be charged and the engines to be reversed.

Directly the overtaking craft noticed the falling off of the liner's speed her decks were black with humanity, and the air was rent with cries of "Hoch!" Then came the strains of "Deutschland uber alles", in which the *Pelikan's* crew joined lustily.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Denbigh. "What does it all mean? There's a small German colony afloat."

"Fraid so," agreed O'Hara.

As there was hardly any sea running the two vessels ran alongside each other. The new-comer had the name *San Matias* painted on her stern and on her boats and life-buoys. She carried no guns except a couple of small brass signalling pieces. Her officers and a few of her crew were South Americans, beyond doubt, but the rest of the crowded complement were of marked Teutonic origin.

The British subs stood at the rail watching the unwonted sight. No one offered to order them below. It was part of the business to let them see what was going on.

No time was lost. While a party of officers from the *San Matias* were being entertained by von Riesser in his cabin the Germans from her transferred themselves and their belongings to the *Pelikan*—nearly three hundred men of military age and bearing. Then came the work of transshipping stores from the capacious holds of the South American vessel. Carcass after carcass of oxen and sheep were brought on deck. From the oxen were produced long bundles wrapped in cloth. Every bundle contained four modern magazine rifles. Enclosed with the frozen mutton were small shells and rifle ammunition. As fast as the munitions were taken from their strange places of concealment most of the carcasses were dumped overboard, a few hundred being retained for food and stored in the *Pelikan's* refrigerators. Then came bundles of hides, each containing parts of machine-guns, until it looked as if the ship had enough material to equip an army corps.

Long before the *San Matias* had disgorged her warlike stores Denbigh had overheard enough conversation to enable him to solve the mystery.

The *San Matias* had been chartered by a number of wealthy German merchants in Buenos Ayres for the purpose of sending some hundreds of reservists to German East Africa. The presence of the *Pelikan* in the South Atlantic had been expected, and her progress, based upon reports from British cruisers and duly transmitted by spies to Buenos Ayres, reached the projectors of the scheme with remarkable promptitude. The arms and ammunition had been purchased sometime previously from a pro-German firm in New York, and sent to the Argentine to fulfil a fictitious contract for the Government of that republic.

The *San Matias* was then chartered, her owner, captain, and crew being heavily bribed to undertake the risk, comparative immunity being afforded by means of forged ship's papers and certificates of nationality of the "passengers". At the same time the report was spread in Buenos Ayres and Monte Video that the *Pelikan* had been sighted making for Bahia—a matter of two thousand miles N.N.E. of the estuary of the La Plata. British agents swallowed the bait and telegraphed the news to London, whence, in turn, the false information was transmitted to the patrol vessels specially detailed to search for the daring raider.

This report had literally done the trick. The northernmost group of British cruisers instantly converged upon the Brazilian coast in the neighbourhood of Bahia. The southern patrol remained in the vicinity of the Falklands. Thus the *Pelikan* had the chance of a free and uninterrupted run eastwards until she approached the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope. Although her adventures were by no means over, one source of danger had been removed.

The German reservists were certainly optimists. They firmly believed that Egypt had been wrested from the British, and that their role was to join the large army concentrating in German East Africa and march victoriously down the valley of the Nile and crush the remnant of the English in the vicinity of Khartoum. According to their idea and belief South Africa was in rebellion, and that German South-West Africa was once more a Teutonic colony. India, too, had revolted and joined the Turks, who had occupied Persia and Beluchistan. Mention was also made of the impending advance of the Turco-Germanic armies through Tibet and China to establish a vast empire from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and to avenge upon Japan the loss of Kiau-Chau. In short, the German armies were everywhere triumphant, although they could hardly understand why they should have to be smuggled out to sea when the German High Seas Fleet roamed unchallenged and the British navy skulked in harbours.

At length the last of the *San Mathias's* cargo was transhipped. The two vessels parted company, the Argentine returning to Buenos Ayres while the *Pelikan* headed eastward on her perilous passage round the Cape of Good Hope.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Midnight Landing

The sanguine spirits of the German reservists had the effect of cheering up the crew of the *Pelikan*. To confirm their assertions the former produced copies of newspapers printed under Teutonic auspices for the benefit of the South American republics.

Taking advantage of the information concerning the dispositions of the British cruisers the kapitan of the *Pelikan* stopped another collier at a distance of four hundred miles east of Buenos Ayres. For eighteen hours the two vessels lay side by side while the coal was being transhipped to the almost empty bunkers of the raider.

For certain reasons von Riesser did not sink the tramp after having depleted her cargo. Perhaps it was because the crew had offered no resistance; but it was just possible that the kapitan of the *Pelikan* had sufficient humanity to see that the turning adrift of a couple of boat-loads in the desolate South Atlantic meant practically slow and certain death.

From the time of the arrival of the German reservists von Riesser's demeanour towards Denbigh and O'Hara underwent a marked change. Rarely did he enter into conversation with them. He treated them with aloofness. This the subs minded but little; it was the restrictions placed upon their movements that riled them. They were now allowed only two periods of exercise on deck during the day—from ten till noon and from two till five—and kept within strict limits. A sentry was posted to see that they remained within boundaries specified, and orders had been given for none of the reservists, many of whom spoke English, to enter into conversation with them.

On the fifth day after falling in with the *San Matias* the ship's course was changed to S.S.E. This she held until further progress was barred by the presence of a large field of pack ice. Von Riesser, in order to avoid any possible chance of meeting any of the Cape Squadron, had elected to go south into the vast and desolate Antarctic before entering the Indian Ocean.

At length came the welcome order to steer north. Gradually the temperature rose as the *Pelikan* left the frozen seas astern.

Maintaining a steady progress the ship reached the vicinity of Mauritius, keeping well to the eastward of that island.

The *Pelikan* now underwent another change. From truck to water-line she was repainted—black on the starboard side and a light-grey on the port. An additional funnel, a dummy one made out of canvas stretched on a framework of hoop iron and wood, was set up.

"It looks as if this craft is going to get through after all," remarked O'Hara, as the *Pelikan* reached Equatorial waters without having so much as sighted another vessel of any description.

"Yes, rotten luck," said Denbigh. "I heard von Langer telling that fat major that another twenty-four hours would bring us in sight of land. I notice these fellows are preparing for their jaunt ashore."

The reservists were discarding their motley civilian attire and were being provided with drill uniforms that had at one time been white but were now dyed to a colour nearly approaching khaki. Each man wore a sun helmet, but instead of puttees, jack-boots of dark undressed leather were served out.

In the midst of these preparations a sail was reported on the starboard bow. Hurriedly arms were served out to the troops, the quick-firers were manned, and machine-guns placed out of sight but in a position that would enable them to be used with deadly effect should occasion arise.

"Down to your cabins, you Englishmen!" snarled the fat major, von Eckenstein, who had previously been in conversation with the ober-leutnant of the *Pelikan*.

"Are you in charge of this ship, Herr Major?" asked O'Hara. "Hitherto our orders have come from Kapitan von Riesser."

The major's only reply was to raise a cane that he held in his hand and to strike the Irishman sharply across the cheek.

O'Hara's hot Hibernian blood surged at the insult. Fortunately he managed to keep himself under control, but for an instant Denbigh felt certain that his comrade's hard fist would come violently in contact with von Eckenstein's podgy nose.

"I'm afraid that bounder will have cause to be sorry for this," remarked O'Hara, when the chums had retired to their cabin. He critically examined in the glass the reflection of his face, on which a weal was rapidly developing. "By Jove, it was lucky for him that you were there, otherwise I would have given him something by which to remember me to the rest of his days."

"Perhaps it is as well," rejoined Denbigh. "It hardly pays in the circumstances to argue the point with a Prussian."

Of what occurred during the next two hours the subs had only a vague idea.

Von Riesser realized that flight was out of the question. To attempt to do so would arouse suspicion, and since several swift cruisers were known to be off the coast, a wireless message would bring half a dozen speedy British warships upon the scene. He therefore decided to carry on, escape by a stratagem if possible, if not, fight in a final bid for liberty.

Since the waters adjacent to German East Africa had been declared to be in a state of blockade it was useless to hoist the mercantile flag of any nation, so the Blue Ensign of the British Reserve was displayed.

In less than half an hour the strange craft was plainly visible. She was a small tramp, also displaying the Blue Ensign.

Von Riesser heaved a sigh of relief. She was not an armed auxiliary, otherwise the White Ensign would have been used. More than likely she was one of the fleet of subsidized merchantmen carrying stores and munitions for the British Expeditionary Force operating against the sole remaining German colony.

The stranger hoisted a signal. It was in code and consequently unintelligible to the *Pelikan*. Von Riesser promptly replied by another hoist, the flags meaning nothing, but simply to puzzle the tramp.

The *Pelikan* held on her course, which, in defiance of the Rule of the Road at Sea, would bring across the bows of the other. That in itself was suspicious, but any alteration of helm would reveal the *Pelikan's* piebald sides.

At a distance of less than a mile the German vessel gave three blasts upon her siren, signifying that her engines were going astern. Nevertheless she was steaming ahead as hard as she could until deception was no longer possible.

An order from the bridge and the screens surrounding the guns were lowered revealing her formidable quick-firers.

"Heave-to, or I'll sink you!" shouted the kapitan through a megaphone, for the tramp was now less than two cables' lengths away and broad on the starboard beam.

The tramp, which proved to be S.S. *Myra* of South Shields, had no option but to surrender. She was unarmed and of slow speed. Having left Simon's Bay with a convoy under escort she had encountered the tail of a cyclone. Detained by temporary engine-room defects during the storm she had fallen out of station, and was now a couple of hundred miles astern of the rest of the convoy.

Slowly the Blue Ensign was lowered, and way taken off the ship. Within ten minutes a prize crew in charge of Unter-leutnant Klick was on board. The officers and crew were locked up below, and warned that any attempt at resistance would result in the instant destruction of the *Myra* with all on board.

The boarding-officer's report was to the effect that the tramp was heavily laden with warlike stores. He asked instructions as to the disposal of the prize.

Kapitan von Riesser's mind was very active now. With a successful issue in sight he was not inclined to send such a valuable prize to the bottom.

"Can you get the *Myra's* engine-room and stokehold staff to work, Herr Klick?" asked the kapitan.

"I can, sir," replied the unter-leutnant grimly; and he did, for by dint of threats he compelled the luckless men to undertake to carry on under his orders.

"Very good," continued the kapitan of the *Pelikan*, receiving an affirmative reply. "Follow me at two cables' lengths astern. I'll slow down to enable you to keep station. Be prepared to abandon ship instantly should occasion arise."

Later in the afternoon the *Pelikan* and her prize arrived off Latham Island, under the lee of which von Riesser had decided to remain the night, since it was too hazardous to enter the harbour he had selected during the hours of darkness.

Denbigh, who had been allowed on deck, recognized the island. He had served a commission on the flagship of the East Indies India Station when he was a midshipman, and was fairly well conversant with the African coast in the vicinity of Zanzibar and Dar-es-Salaam.

Latham Island is a dangerous, low-lying patch of coral and sand, of oval form, being barely 350 yards in length and 180 yards broad. In no place does it rise more than 10 feet above the sea. Its surface is quite flat, having been made so by the constant treading of myriads of sea-fowl, that have consolidated the sand collected on the coral substratum into a soft sandstone, which shines very white in the sun, but is difficult to discern at night or in a bad light.

When visited and surveyed by H.M.S. *Shearwater* in 1873, a stone beacon was erected on the island, but owing to the absence of mortar used in its construction, it was blown down by the wind. Coco-nut trees were planted at the same time, but the result was unsatisfactory, as the birds destroyed them.

Owing to the dangerous vicinity of the islands it was unlikely that any vessel would pass within several miles of it during the night, so the *Pelikan* stood a chance of remaining at the anchorage without fear of detection.

"We are not far from the Rufigi River, are we?" asked O'Hara. "Do you think that the *Pelikan* is going to run for there?"

"Hardly," replied Denbigh. "With the *Königsberg* as a warning I think she'll give the Rufigi a wide berth. It's my opinion that she'll have a show at getting into the Mohoro River. It's fairly close, and once we can pass the bar there's deep water for nearly twenty miles. I'm curious to know what we are doing off Latham Island, however. I think I'll try the Stirling trick and have a prow round on deck during the night."

"Only don't leave me in the lurch, old man," protested the Irishman, with an assumed look of consternation.

"I won't," replied Denbigh laughingly. "So don't lock me out."

Just before midnight the sub set to work with the screw-driver and succeeded in opening the door. Fortunately there was no sentry on the aft-deck on this occasion. Overhead there was a considerable amount of noise going on. It conveyed the impression that there were scores of men hard at work and trying to perform their various tasks with as little noise as possible.

Unseen and unheard, Denbigh gained the deck and mingled with the throng. There were seamen and reservists all hard at it, buckling in the starlight. Cautiously the sub looked about for a place of concealment, where he could hear and see everything that was going on in his vicinity without much risk of detection.

He glanced up. Overhead were the boats swinging inboard on davits. Side by side with them, and resting on the

booms or transverse steel girders, were some larger boats which could only be hoisted out by means of derricks. Between were several planks and spars lashed to the girders.

Awaiting a favourable chance, Denbigh nimbly ascended the iron ladder on the funnel casing that led to a platform just below the siren. After climbing a few rungs, he was able to swing himself across to the nearest boat, which was almost as large as a battleship's pinnace. It was roughly forty feet in length, and weighed nearly four tons.

"Look alive, men!" ordered Unter-leutnant Klick in his usual bullying tone. "The whole of the stuff must be sent ashore within an hour."

"Two boat-loads full, sir?" asked a petty officer.

"No; one. Get steam on the main hoist and lift out the pinnace."

"Hulloa!" thought Denbigh. "This looks like a proper jamboree. I stand a chance of getting nabbed. I wonder what the idea is of landing a quantity of gear on a sandbank like Latham Island?"

He heard several men ascending to make ready the slings for hoisting out. Promptly the sub retreated for'ard and crouched in the bows. Here, unless any material was likely to be stowed in his place of concealment, Denbigh had a fighting chance of escaping detection, for above him was a large grating that fitted between the bows and the for'ard thwart.

"Now, then, Herr Major!" exclaimed Kapitan von Riesser. "Are your men ready? At least twenty with shovels will be necessary."

"I cannot see that it is necessary," objected Major von Eckenstein. "It is a mere waste of time. I protest against this useless labour, when we ought to be making for the Mohoro River." And the Prussian officer clanked the tip of his scabbard loudly upon the deck, as if to emphasize his protest.

Von Riesser, judging by the sound of his voice, lost his temper.

"Once you are ashore, Herr Major, you are in sole command of these troops. Here I am your superior. If I choose to give orders to facilitate our retreat, should it be necessary, it is for you to carry them out. If you refuse, I will place you under arrest and report the matter to the military governor of the colony."

"If you would only explain what you propose to do, instead of giving orders that have no apparent reason, I am willing to assist you," said the major grumblingly. "This business is evidently the result of a sudden inspiration on your part, and I think it is only just that you should take others into your confidence."

"You are setting a bad example for the discipline of the ship," declared the kapitan in a lower tone. "It would be as well if we adjourned to my cabin. When you have heard what is proposed to be done, I think you will agree with me that such a step is certainly necessary."

"Carry on, Herr Klick," continued von Riesser as he moved away. "See that every article enumerated on the list is sent ashore. I hold you responsible."

A bare-footed seaman, leaping upon the bow grating, prevented Denbigh hearing more of what was going on below. The fellow bent and groped for the hook of the chain sling. As he did so, his hand was within a couple of inches of the sub's face. The man withdrew his hand so suddenly, that for the moment Denbigh imagined that he had been discovered. Then came the metallic click of the hook engaging with the wire hawser from the derrick.

To the accompaniment of the clank, clank, of the winch and the hiss of escaping steam, the pinnace rose from its resting-place. Swaying gently, it swung outboard and was lowered rapidly into the water.

For the next quarter of an hour the crew were feverishly employed in dumping stores and gear into the boat. There were cans of petrol, that gave Denbigh food for reflection, boxes of provisions, water-beakers, arms and ammunition, sailcloth, and shipwright's tools.

Then came an avalanche of picks and shovels, followed by a crowd of men who, perched in every available space, swarmed like ants over the deeply-laden boat.

The pinnacle was then cast off and taken in tow by a steam-boat. Denbigh knew this by the thud of the engines, but he was unaware that astern of the pinnacle was a twenty-seven-foot whaler.

The pinnacle grounded on the lee side of a sandbank, for there was little swell, although on the outlying coral reefs the sea was breaking heavily. Her work for the present done, the steam-boat cast off and returned to the *Pelikan*.

Without loss of time, the crew set to work to unload, and as the pinnacle rose higher out of the water during the course of operations, she was hauled closer to the land.

"Everything out?" asked a voice.

"I'll see, sir," replied a petty officer, and kneeling on the bottom boards, he peered under the row of thwarts.

Denbigh shut his eyes and trusted to luck. He knew that once his gaze met that of the searcher, the darkness would not screen him. A long-drawn minute passed, and then the man reported that the boat was empty.

"Good; leave a couple of boat-keepers in charge and join the party with the whaler," continued the officer. "If you cannot manage her, ask for additional hands, but I think you will be able to drag her up. The ground is hard and level."

Away went the working-party, leaving the pinnacle in charge of two seamen, who, having taken the strain off the bow cables, for the tide was rising, sat stolidly in the stern-sheets.

Above the distant roar of the surf, Denbigh could distinguish the thud of the pickaxes and spades. He would have given a lot to see what the diggers were doing, but the presence of the boat-keepers compelled him to crouch, cramped and cold in the bows. Although the day had been exceedingly hot, the night air was decidedly chilly, the sand radiating the heat with great rapidity the moment the sun set. Clad in light garments, Denbigh shivered and wished that he could stretch his limbs.

The boat-keepers felt the cold, too, for after a little while they began to swing their arms. Finally they jumped ashore and began to pace to and fro. Having warmed themselves, the men sat upon the sand, and produced pipes and tobacco. The sub distinctly heard the rasping of matches, and gradually the odour of South American tobacco assailed his nostrils. The men had begun to talk, desultory conversation soon working up into an animated conversation.

Cautiously Denbigh stretched his limbs. Then waiting until the numbness had practically disappeared, he grasped the gunwale and slowly raised himself until his head was level with one of the rowlocks, the poppet of which had fortunately been removed.

His range of vision was limited. In the bright starlight he could discern the diggers. Already the bulk of the stores were hidden, while at a distance of twenty yards from the cache, other men were excavating a long trench, by the side of which lay the whaler. The depth of the hole was now about five feet, and only the heads of the workers were visible from the pinnacle.

The sub waited and watched, keeping a sharp look-out lest the boat-keepers should return. Presently he became aware that his range of vision was changing. The rising tide was swinging the pinnacle diagonally with the shore.

Denbigh promptly returned to his lair. He was not a minute too soon, for just as he settled himself the boat-keepers returned and took up the strain on the bow ropes.

"A good rise and fall for neap tides," remarked one of the men. "If we get as much as this tomorrow we ought to be able to cross the bar. I don't fancy having to remain at anchor in this lagoon until the new moon with those English cruisers prowling around."

"Ach, we will take due precautions, Henrich," replied the other. "Once we get inside the reefs we are perfectly safe. It is the run across to the mainland that is the trouble. Come on, let us go back to our snug seat and have another smoke. It is indeed good to be able to tread dry land again, even if it is little better than a sandbank."

The men scrambled over the gunwale, and as soon as they were gone Denbigh took up his former position by the rowlock. He was just in time to see the whaler, lifted by a dozen brawny seamen and soldiers, topple bottom upwards into the trench. Without loss of time the Germans commenced to shovel back the soil. Others joined them, for the task of hiding the stores had been completed, and in a very short space of time the boat was quite covered, great care being taken to smooth the soft substratum until it showed no sign of having been disturbed.

The sub retreated to his hiding-place, for the men were beginning to return, straggling up in groups of threes and fours. The pinnace was backed out about half her own length and the men waded until they were able to climb on board.

They rowed back to the *Pelikan*. Once on the return journey the bowman, swinging his bare legs, caught Denbigh a blow on the forehead with his heel. Fortunately the fellow did not trouble to investigate, but the sub realized that it was a narrow squeak.

Arriving alongside the pinnace was hoisted out and stowed in its former place. The workers were dismissed, the watch changed, and quietude brooded over the ship.

"Now comes the rub," ejaculated the sub as he crept from his place of concealment. As agilely as a monkey he made his way along the steel beam until he gained the funnel ladder. Then he waited and listened. All was silence, save for the rumble of the surf and the subdued hiss of steam from the ship's boilers.

Unseen and unheard Denbigh gained the companion and descended the aft-deck. As he did so footsteps on deck told him he was barely in time. Cautiously he lifted the curtain that served to screen the light from the hatchway. The space beyond was deserted.

Swiftly he tiptoed to the door of the cabin. He tried the handle. The door refused to move. He knocked softly, thinking that O'Hara had fallen asleep. There was no response. Perhaps the Irishman had gone in search of him; but, if so, how could he have secured the door on the inside? Before Denbigh could knock again a steady tread resounded along the alley-way. The sentry on the aft-deck was coming towards him.



## CHAPTER X

### The Lagoon

Almost in an instant Denbigh decided how to act. He could have crept along the alley-way and surprised the sentry; but stunning the man would be of little use. Nor could he hope to bluff the fellow, since there was too much light to attempt to pass himself off as one of the *Pelikan's* officers. To retreat was impracticable, for someone, he knew, was on deck in the immediate vicinity of the companion.

Without hesitation the sub opened the door of the cabin adjoining his and entered quickly and silently. The place was in darkness. Whether it was tenanted or not he was unable to ascertain. Closing the door he stood stock-still and listened. He could hear no sound of a person breathing. For five minutes he waited, then began to grope until he found the edge of one of the bunks. The sleeping-place was empty. There were not even blankets and bedding. This looked promising.

He continued his exploration, testing the remaining bunks in turn, until he was able to come to the happy decision that by sheer good luck he had lighted upon an empty cabin.

The glass scuttle in the port-hole was closed, but there was no dead-light in position over the opening. In that case it would be too risky to switch on the light, until he had taken due precautions.

The dead-light squeaked shrilly on its hinges as he drew it to. He wondered whether the watch on deck heard the sound. He waited again. There were many footsteps descending the companion. He could detect von Langer's guttural tones, discussing some matter with one of the other officers.

"Dash it all!" ejaculated Denbigh, a cold perspiration standing out on his forehead. "What if I'm in that fellow's cabin?"

The men stopped outside the cabin. They were evidently indulging in horse-play, for once a heavy body struck the wall with a thud, followed by a chorus of boisterous laughter.

Then, to Denbigh's intense relief, the officers went along the passage. Once again he had been lucky.

Reassured he switched on the light. The cabin was bare of furniture. In one corner lay a pile of books and a couple of sea-stained portmanteaux. Hanging from a coat-hook was an officer's sword-belt. It was mildewed; the stitching of the holster had burst, the buckle was green with verdigris. Attached to the belt was a small, circular leather case secured by a strap.

Denbigh handled it gingerly. There was something hard inside. Curiosity prompted him to unbuckle the strap and open the case. Within was a pocket-compass. What was more, it was a spirit one and seemingly in good order. Without compunction the sub abstracted the compass and slipped it into his pocket.

As he did so he was startled to hear a deep groan. It seemed to sound close to his ear. He wheeled abruptly and shot a glance in the direction of one of the bunks, thinking that he had made a mistake in deeming it untenanted.

There was no one there. Again the groan was repeated. This time the sound seemed to come from the adjoining cabin—the one occupied by Pat O'Hara.

A hole in the bulkhead attracted Denbigh's notice. It was the aperture drilled by the Germans when they made their ineffectual attempt to chloroform the three British officers.

Through it Denbigh could see but a very small portion of the next cabin, but sufficient to observe O'Hara lying on his back in his bunk. He was writhing and groaning. His eyes were wide open and rolling in a horrifying manner.

Outside all was quiet once more.

"I say, old man," whispered Denbigh. "What's wrong?"

At the sound of his voice O'Hara raised himself. He tried to speak, but could not. With an effort he rolled out of his bunk and stood clinging to the edge for support.

"Open the door," said Denbigh peremptorily. "I cannot get in."

"If he's not able to it's the last straw," he soliloquized. "I'll have to give myself up and get assistance."

With a great effort the Irishman lurched across the floor and removed the chair which had been wedged against the lock. Then, unable to regain his bunk, he pitched inertly upon his face.

Denbigh waited no longer. He darted into the alley-way, not even waiting to see if everything were clear. The door opened easily. He entered, and lifting O'Hara as easily as a child placed him on his bunk.

"Felt jolly rotten almost as soon as you cleared out," muttered the Irishman. "Sorry, but I couldn't help it."

"I don't suppose you could," replied Denbigh, for O'Hara's regret was genuine. "I'll ring for assistance."

He touched the electric bell. Then, and only then, he remembered that he had to replace a portion of the lock. Grasping the screw-driver he set to work, and had just driven home the last screw when the lock turned, and a petty officer entered.

The man hurried off for the ship's surgeon. It was nearly a quarter of an hour before the doctor arrived. He came prepared to deal with a trifling case, but when he saw the Irishman he looked grave.

Without expressing his opinion the surgeon went out. Nor did he again put in an appearance. He sent, however, some quinine and written directions as to treatment.

For the rest of the night Denbigh sat up with his comrade. As day broke O'Hara seemed easier. The internal pains passed off. His temperature fell. He was able to talk rationally. By noon he was practically well again. The attack had been sharp and rapid, but once over it seemed to leave no ill-effects.

Without being sighted by any of the British patrol vessels the *Pelikan* and her prize arrived off the entrance to the Mohoro River. Here the two ships slowed down until there was sufficient water for them to cross the outer bar.

During the interval Denbigh and O'Hara were peremptorily ordered to leave the *Pelikan* and take up their quarters on the *Myra*, the reason being that von Riesser was terribly afraid of illness, and in spite of the doctor's assurances he had a firm belief that O'Hara was suffering from yellow fever, malaria, black-water fever, and every tropical disease under the sun.

"Let him jolly well think so," said the Irishman joyfully. "I feel as fit as a fiddle now; and I'm not sorry for the change."

All the same O'Hara acted the invalid to perfection as he was rowed from the raider to her prize. Denbigh accompanied him, taking good care to bring all their scanty personal property that they had been permitted to save from the *Nichi Maru*, excepting the gold that von Riesser had ordered to be confiscated.

The *Myra* was in charge of Unter-leutenant Kaspar Klick and fifteen men. There were also the skipper, officers, and crew of the tramp, numbering thirty-two persons. The officers were given a fair amount of liberty, but the men were kept under hatches, to their no small discomfort in the tropical heat.

"Sorry I'm not able to make your acquaintance under more favourable auspices," was the greeting of Captain Pennington, the master of the captured *Myra*, when the two subs introduced themselves. "But I hope before many hours that we will be set at liberty."

"We've been hoping that for weeks," said Denbigh. "The luck those fellows get is astonishing."

"So I should imagine," agreed Captain Pennington. "I learnt at Cape Town that the *Pelikan* was given up as lost, as some wreckage and one of her boats were picked up in the South Atlantic. That is why our cruisers relaxed their

patrol, and were ordered to rendezvous at Zanzibar. There'll be a dozen or more on their way up."

"And any monitors?" asked O'Hara.

"Four, as far as I know," replied the *Myra's* skipper. "One was detained for repairs at Simon's Bay. The others must be at Zanzibar by this time. They will be invaluable for work inside the coral reefs."

"And the *Pelikan*—or *Zwaan*, as we are accustomed to call her—hopes to ascend the Mohoro River. Her draught is about twenty-two feet, and she may be able to lighten to eighteen."

"She won't do it," declared Pennington decisively. "It will be as much as she can manage to cross the outer bar. She'll be nabbed before she does that."

"When's high water?" enquired Denbigh.

"Let me see. New moon's on Friday. To-day's Saturday. High water, full and change, is at 4 p.m. I take it that it's the top of the tide to-day at eleven or thereabouts. They'll have to be pretty sharp about it to arrive off the entrance to the lagoon by that time."

As a matter of fact von Riesser signalled for the prize to steam full speed ahead, the *Pelikan* following at four cables' lengths astern. By 8.30 the *Myra* slowed down off the entrance to the Mohoro River.

There was a considerable amount of mist about, for the land breeze had not commenced to make its influence felt.

All that could be seen was a long, irregular line of coral reefs against which the ground-swell broke with a sullen roar into masses of milk-white foam. There were nearly a dozen visible gaps in the reef, the largest, bearing directly ahead, being marked by a couple of coco-nut palms.

At this point an island was in course of formation, there being a few feet of soil accumulated upon the coral. These trees marked the entrance to the lagoon, into which the Mohoro River made its way by means of three separate estuaries.

The Germans left nothing to chance. Way was taken off both vessels. A boat was manned and lowered from the *Pelikan* and rowed towards the entrance, soundings being taken methodically and frequently.

Having found the deepest water the officers in the boat signalled to the *Myra*, and at half speed the captured tramp crept towards the narrow passage.

Between the foam-swept barriers she made her way, until she lay quietly upon the peaceful waters of the lagoon.

The *Pelikan* prepared to follow.

"Ten to one she'll bump," exclaimed Captain Pennington. "There you are! I said so," he added, as the raider touched the bottom with a dull grinding sound. Still she carried way. Scraping along for nearly her own length she slid into deep water.

"Hope she's stove in her bottom," said O'Hara. "See, they're using her bilge pumps."

A signal was hoisted on the raider. What it meant the British officers were unable to say, but it was evident from the expression of the face of Unter-leutnant Klick that the damage to the *Pelikan* was but slight.

By this time the mist was rising. The mainland could now be discerned, low-lying ground densely covered with mangroves and backed by rugged hills at a distance of about ten miles from the coast.

The lagoon was quite three miles in breadth and extended in a northerly direction beyond the range of vision. Southward it gradually converged towards the coast, apparently joining it at a distance of five miles from where the

ships lay.

"An anchorage big enough to take the whole of the British Navy," declared Denbigh. "It's the bar that spoils the place, apart from the pestilential swamps. Do you see that peculiar isolated tree? It's a casuarina. It marks the principal entrance to the Mohoro—or did when I was here last, but these African rivers have a peculiar knack of altering their course entirely in a night."

"I suppose we are going straight up," remarked O'Hara. "There's depth enough for us."

"Goodness knows," replied his chum. "At all events the *Pelikan* can't."

Apparently the Germans had a good knowledge of the lagoon, for boldly closing with the land, the *Pelikan* dropped anchor within three hundred yards of the highest part of the shore, where a cliff rose abruptly to the height of thirty or forty feet. On the summit the ground shelved gently. There were several native huts to be seen in the clearing between the mangroves, while farther back was a galvanized-iron shed with a whitewashed roof.

Acting under von Riesser's instructions the *Myra's* anchor was let go, the tramp bringing up at a cable's length from her captor, and so close to the shore that when she swung her stern was within forty yards of the cliff. The water here was ten fathoms deep, the shore being steep-to, but in spite of the depth the bottom could be clearly seen.

"Suppose you vant to go 'shore, hein?" asked Unter-leutnant Klick. "No tricks. Plenty of shark about."

The German was right. Already the surface of the lagoon in the vicinity of the two ships was furrowed with diverging lines of ripples as the black dorsal fins of numerous tigers of the deep cleft the water.

"No, I don't think I want to bathe, lieutenant," remarked Captain Pennington. "It hardly looks tempting."

Kaspar Klick laughed boisterously.

"You see even der shark is der ally of Zhermany," he said.

"The information does not astonish me one little bit," rejoined the master of the *Myra*.

"Vot you mean?" demanded the under-leutnant, instinctively guessing that he had made a verbal blunder.

At that moment, when the German was beginning to exhibit signs of anger, another signal was made from the *Pelikan*, ordering the *Myra* to ship as much additional cargo from her captor as she could carry.

Until sunset the work progressed. Under threats from their captors the British crew were turned up from below and compelled to assist in handing and stowing the gear, for it was von Riesser's intention to lighten his vessel as much as possible, so as to attempt the inner bar at least a couple of days before the new moon.

Night put an end to the day's work, for not a light that could be visible from seaward was shown.

The two subs slept badly. Their cabin accommodation was indifferent compared with that on board the *Pelikan*, for Unter-leutnant Klick had appropriated the skipper's quarters, and Pennington and his chief engineer were obliged to share the small space that had been the mate's cabin, while that officer was told to occupy the same cabin in which Denbigh and O'Hara were placed.

They lacked the ventilating fan and the liberal air space. The cabin was low and stuffy. It had no direct communication with the outside air, as it opened into the state-room, where in normal times the *Myra's* officers used to have their meals. At present that limited space was still further restricted by the huge cases of military stores removed from the *Pelikan*. These had been struck down the hatchway and carried aft, where they remained under the charge of an armed sentry.

"Those fellows think they've got us safely under lock and key," said the mate, a burly North-countryman of the name of Armstrong. "They don't know that each officer of this hooker has a duplicate key to his cabin. I took jolly good care to keep mine, and I know where to put my hand on the key to this one. To-morrow, now I know how

we're berthed, I'll get that key."

At daybreak the work of transhipping the cargo was proceeded with before the miasmatic mists that hid the shore had dispersed. Two boats were dispatched from the *Pelikan* to the shore and returned laden with tops of coco-nut trees. Before noon the foliage was stowed below out of sight.

Just before high water the *Myra*, being loaded far below her Plimsoll mark, prepared to weigh and ascend the river. Even in her deeply laden condition she drew a good nine feet less than the *Pelikan*, and could negotiate the bar without much risk.

The cable was almost "up and down" and the anchor on the point of "breaking-out" when a warning shout came from one of the look-out men on the *Pelikan*. A bugle call for "General Quarters" followed in quick succession.

"Hulloa, that's great!" ejaculated Denbigh excitedly. He pointed in the direction of the passage through the reef. Heading for it was a small gunboat. Although the distance was too great for the British officers on the *Myra* to distinguish her ensign they had no doubts as to her nationality.

"She's one of our gunboats," announced O'Hara.

His assertion was confirmed by a flash, followed by a sharp bark as the *Pelikan*, unmasking her guns, opened fire upon the approaching vessel.

## CHAPTER XI

### Denbigh's Plan

At the opening of the engagement the prize crew of the *Myra* made a simultaneous rush to the tramp's rigging, in order to witness the destruction of the audacious but lightly-armed gunboat. Unter-leutnant Klick and another junior officer hurried to the bridge. Denbigh, O'Hara, and the officers of the *Myra* found themselves in sole occupation of the deck.

"Idiots!" exclaimed Denbigh.

"Who?" asked Captain Pennington.

"The *Pelikan's* people. If they had waited another five minutes, they would have found the gunboat jammed up on the bar. As it is she has room to manoeuvre."

Even as he spoke, the gunboat let fly with her puny 4-inch bow gun—the only one capable of being trained upon the powerfully-armed raider. Immediately a dense cloud of black smoke burst from the little craft, entirely hiding her from view.

"She's got it properly," exclaimed Pennington.

Slowly the smoke began to disperse. Into the eddying vapour shell after shell poured from the *Pelikan*. All around the sea was lacerated by the ricocheting projectiles, which threw columns of spray high into the air, the pure whiteness of the artificial waterspouts contrasting vividly with the dark background of smoke.

The Germans were shouting madly. It was their way of cheering, but it lacked the inspiring sound of a hearty British cheer. Then, with remarkable suddenness, the uproar of voices trailed away into a silence, broken only by the desultory firing from the *Pelikan*.

Under cover of the cloud of smoke purposely emitted from the gunboat, the British craft had swung round and was steaming away at her maximum of 13 knots, apparently undamaged by the salvos that had been directed towards her. The exultant shouts of the Germans were not renewed when they saw the small vessel turn tail. Too late they realized that they had thrown away their advantages by being too premature. The gunboat, having sea-room in which to manoeuvre, was speeding away, not in flight, but with the object of wirelessly the cruisers and destroyers. By letting their insignificant antagonist escape the Germans were bringing a hornet's nest about their ears.

Somewhat disconsolately, the *Myra's* prize crew descended the rigging and other coigns of vantage and regained the deck. They, however, knew that a loophole for escape remained. They were under orders to cross the inner bar and ascend the Mohoro River. That course was denied the *Pelikan* for the next four or five days. A high spring-tide was an absolute necessity for her to cross the barrier, and long before that time the British blockading squadron would be off the reefs, ready to pulverize the raider into a mass of twisted scrap-iron.

The time of high water had gone, and the tide was beginning to fall, when the *Myra* essayed the task of crossing the inner bar. There was no surf breaking at the mouth of the river, since the coral reef enclosing the lagoon effectually sheltered the shore. Only a few ripples marked the spot where the down-current met the submerged barrier. In a few minutes the great volume of water pouring down the river, having time to overcome the up tidal stream, would be surging furiously over the bar.

"I wish to goodness we could crock the steering-gear," said O'Hara in a low voice. "If the old hooker grounded on the bar she would prevent the *Pelikan* from entering."

"Not much use," objected Denbigh. "In fact, it would be more of a help to her than a hindrance."

"How's that?" asked the Irishman.

"Simply because the river would dig itself another channel across the bar, and its width being restricted by the stranded vessel, its depth would be even greater than the existing one. No, I think we can do nothing but sit tight and trust to luck, that the *Pelikan* will be sent to the bottom before Friday."

"And us?"

"You can bet your bottom dollar that a couple of armed cutters will be sent after the *Myra*."

Without touching even once the tramp crossed the dangerous patch, and was soon breasting the rapidly-increasing current. The river at this point was about 180 yards in width, and carried a depth of 30 to 40 feet for twelve miles from its mouth. On either side the banks were overhung with mangroves and coco-nut palms, from which myriads of birds, aroused by the unfamiliar noise of the tramp, rose screeching in the sultry air. The surface of the river was dotted with black objects resembling water-logged trunks of trees, but on the *Myra's* approach the seemingly inanimate objects were endowed with life and activity. They were hippopotami, that literally swarmed in the turgid water.

Having, as he imagined, navigated the *Myra* beyond reach of the British cruisers, Unter-leutnant Klick ordered several of the crew of the captured tramp on deck, and informed them that they were in future to assist in working the ship. Should any attempt to recover the vessel be made, the offence would be punishable with death. He also pointed out the impracticability of escape, since the river was infested with hippopotami, and the forests with fierce animals.

Just before sunset, the *Myra* brought up at a distance of about seven miles from the mouth of the river. The flood-tide, accompanied by a distinct bore, had now set in, and since the river was hardly wide enough to allow the tramp to swing, an anchor was let go astern and twice the amount of cable necessary paid out. Then, directly the vessel's way was stopped, the bower-anchor was let go from the bows. The stern cable was then hove inboard until the ship lay evenly between the two anchors.

The *Myra* had no stockless anchors, but those of the old Admiralty pattern.

"By Jove! how strong the current runs here!" remarked O'Hara, as the two subs watched the yellow stream surge past the ship. "If the ground tackle carried away there would be a jamboree. A new channel wouldn't form in a couple of days here."

Denbigh did not reply. He was mentally gauging the distance between the ship's side and the nearest bank.

"It's risky," he thought; "but there are no gains without pains. I'll have a shot at it to-night."

On being ordered to retire to their cabin the two officers found that the mate was already there. As Denbigh and his chum entered, he hastily stowed something in his pocket, but finding that they were not any of the German crew he withdrew the article.

It was a piece of soft wood about nine inches in length.

"What's the game, Armstrong?" asked Denbigh.

"I'm just knocking up a couple of dummy forelocks," explained the mate, opening his jack-knife once more. "I gave our fellows in the fo'c'sle the tip, and they'll get them in position as soon as the anchors are catted. I'm going to give these a coat of galvanized paint and I'll wager those German chumps won't notice the difference. Next time they drop the hook the pins will snap under the strain, the stocks will slip, and the old hooker will drag at the rate of knots."

"That's a good wheeze, Armstrong," said Denbigh. "But look here. I want you to do me a good turn. Have you the duplicate key of this cabin?"

"Sure I have," replied the mate.

"I'm going to have a shot at getting ashore," declared the sub.

"You'll be a fool if you try," said Armstrong bluntly and emphatically. "With this current running and the hippos barging about you wouldn't stand a dog's chance."

"I'll wait till slack water and take my chance with the hippos," rejoined Denbigh. "If I succeed in getting ashore I'll make my way along the bank until I reach the entrance. I'm rather curious to see what the *Pelikan* is doing."

"I'm with you," volunteered O'Hara.

"You'll stop here, old man," said Denbigh firmly.

"If I stop you stop too," was the Irishman's equally determined rejoinder. "Look here, old bird; it's not like prowling around the upper-deck. Once ashore we'll be all right. One may be jolly useful in helping the other. Besides, I've a loaded pistol."

"Might be handy," admitted Denbigh, secretly glad to have a companion for his enterprise. "But there's something you have which will be, I fancy, a jolly sight more handy."

"What's that?" asked O'Hara.

"The quinine the *Pelikan's* medico gave you. Our chief danger is, I fancy, the chance of getting miasmatic fever, especially after landing in saturated togs. A few grains will stave off a fatal illness."

"All right," agreed O'Hara. "Then it's settled I'm to go with you. What's your plan?"

"Nothing more than I have outlined," replied Denbigh. "We'll keep our eyes and ears open and see what steps the *Pelikan* is taking for defence. There'll be enough moonlight to see fairly clearly."

"Suppose you wouldn't like me to go with you?" enquired the mate.

Denbigh shook his head.

"No, thanks, Armstrong; you'll serve a far better purpose by remaining on board and screening our movements. Those fellows have set an anchor watch, I suppose?"

"Only on the fo'c'sle," replied Armstrong. "That is to say, they hadn't put a man on watch over the stern cable when I left the deck. But there's no knowing. They imagine that they are safe from attack. I suppose they are so long as the *Pelikan* remains afloat, so it's just likely that they'll be a bit lax. How do you propose to take the water?"

"By the stern cable," replied Denbigh.

"I know a better way," said the mate. "There's a rope ladder coiled up close to the engine-room fidley. If you can lay hold of it without being spotted you can make one end fast outside the rail and let the rest go. It won't be noticed before morning."

Methodically the two subs went about their preparations, for there was as yet an hour and a half before slack water. Denbigh knew that between the two periods of high and low tide there was an interval of six and a half hours, for the volume of fresh water descending the river retarded the rising tide by at least thirty or forty minutes. The chums had thus nearly seven hours at their disposal, of which there was moonlight until four in the morning.

The cabin was not electrically lighted, illumination being provided by means of a smoky oil lamp. Stripping to the buff the two subs blacked themselves all over by means of corks charred in the lamplight. Their clothes they lashed into a compact bundle, Denbigh stowing the pocket-compass in his, while O'Hara placed his automatic pistol in the middle of his clothing. Two handkerchiefs were retained in readiness to bind their bundles on the top of their heads.

"We may get ashore with dry gear," said Denbigh. "It's just a chance. We'll be lucky if we do. Now, Armstrong, that key, if you please. I'll borrow it and lock you in after we've left. It will disarm suspicion; and besides, we will be able to let ourselves in when we roll home in the small hours of the morning. Don't wait up, Mr. Armstrong."



The men smiled grimly. Even on the brink of peril they jested. Cheek by jowl with death they bantered each other.

The hour of slack water arrived. No longer the current surged noisily against the *Myra's* wall-sides. All was quiet save the occasional rasp of a huge amphibian along the ship's plating and the faint roar of a wild animal in the distant mangroves.

Cautiously Denbigh applied the well-oiled key to the lock. Softly the door was opened. In the "state-room" an oil-lamp burned dimly and smelt abominably. Its feeble rays were almost unable to penetrate into the recesses of the encumbered quarters.

Giving a final look round Denbigh fastened his bundle on his head and slipped out, followed by O'Hara. The door was closed and locked, Denbigh thrusting the key under the lashings of his bundle.

The deck was wet with a heavy dew that struck cold to their bare feet. Overhead the crescent moon shone a dull yellow through the haze. The shores were invisible.

Crouching close to the low bulwarks the two officers made their way amidships. Fore and aft awnings had been spread to protect the watch on deck from the noxious dew, but there were no signs of the seamen on duty.

In the chart-room a light, imperfectly screened, threw a narrow glare into the mist. The officer of the watch—one of the *Pelikan's* petty officers—was doubtless indulging in slumber, since it was quite unlikely that Unterleutnant Klick would have been out of his bunk to satisfy himself that all was well unless an alarm was raised by those on deck.

Cautiously the two blackened figures glided from the shelter of the bulwarks to the raised coaming of the engine-room fidley. Through the iron bars they could see the gleaming mechanism, now at rest, although steam was being kept at working pressure.

Groping, Denbigh felt his fingers come in contact with a cylindrical bundle. It was the rope-ladder enclosed in a canvas cover.

Returning to the side the sub lashed one end of the ladder to the upright of one of the davits. The other he allowed to drop. It touched the surface of the water with hardly a splash. Being too long for the purpose five or six feet of the ladder floated alongside. There was not sufficient current to trail it out.

Swinging over the bulwark Denbigh felt with his foot for the rungs. The rope creaked under his weight. He descended until his feet came in contact with the water, then he waited until he saw O'Hara's black form silhouetted against the moon-lit mist.

Thank heaven there were no hippos to be seen, although a splashing sound at some distance off told the sub that some sort of large amphibians were sporting in the moonlight.

The Irishman's foot lightly touching Denbigh's upheld hand that grasped one of the rungs aroused the sub to action. Three steps down did he take, then he released his hold and struck out into the unknown.

## CHAPTER XII

### A Perilous Journey

Twenty slow, deliberate, and powerful strokes did Denbigh take, then, treading water, he turned his head to see how his companion was progressing.

In that short distance the outlines of the *Myra* looked vague and distorted in the eddying vapour. Already the swimmers were practically safe from observation, since O'Hara, who was barely three yards away, looked indistinct in his cork-blackened disguise.

A dozen strokes more and the two officers were in the midst of a sluggish, turgid stream, their horizon bounded by banks of mist. Were it not for the moon, that shone dully through the haze, all sense of direction would have been lost. The water was warm and sickly-smelling. An odour like that of decaying flowers in an ill-ventilated room assailed their nostrils.

Once O'Hara gave vent to a partly smothered yell as his naked foot came in contact with a slimy water-logged tree. It was easy to imagine unpleasant things in that modern Styx.

At the sound Denbigh turned.

"What's wrong?" he asked in a whisper.

"Nothing," replied the Irishman. "Carry on."

He was swimming rapidly. His quick strokes betrayed his acute anxiety to traverse the stretch of water in as short a time as possible.

"Steady; don't splash," cautioned Denbigh.

A reply to his admonition came from another quarter, for almost in front of the swimmers rose a huge black object, quickly followed by another. In the semi-light the two men could see that these were enormous hippopotami, distinguish even their thick lips and wire-like bristles, and hear the business-like snap of their formidable teeth, capable of biting the side of a boat and shaking the craft like a terrier does a rat.

The two amphibians were gambolling. So intent were they that the swimmers were unnoticed, but for half a minute after the hippos had passed Denbigh and O'Hara floated motionless, not trusting to swim forward another foot.

At length, after a seemingly interminable space of time, the mangrove-covered shore loomed up against the moonlit sky. The banks, thrown into deep shadow, were invisible, until O'Hara, who was now leading, felt his foot touch the slimy ooze that fringed the shore.

With feelings of relief the Irishman waded to the bank and awaited Denbigh's emergence from the river.

"Thank God," he muttered fervently as Denbigh joined him. "Now, what's the move?"

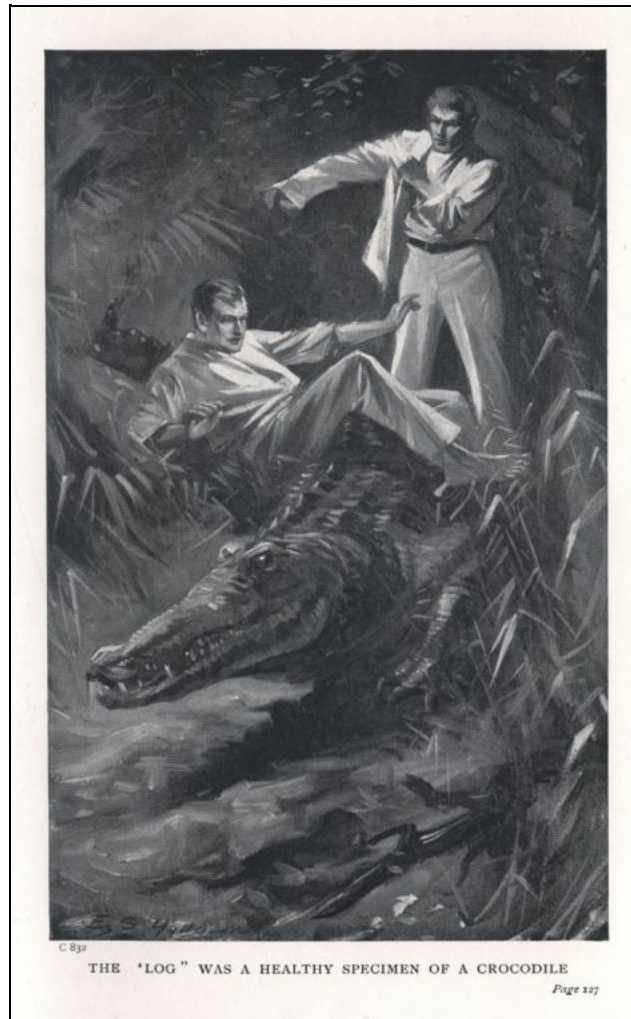
"Dress," replied his chum laconically.

The two men unfastened their bundles, and proceeded to sacrifice one of their scanty stock of handkerchiefs as a towel. To allow the foetid fresh water to dry on them would be courting a speedy attack of black-water fever.

"We can't see the *Myra*," whispered O'Hara. "How shall we know where to 'kick-off' when we return?"

"Bend that damp handkerchief on to one of the bushes," replied Denbigh. "We'll have to take jolly good care to  
\_\_\_\_\_"

His words ended abruptly, and he found himself sitting on the soft ground. In order to facilitate the dressing performance he had sat down upon what he imagined to be a log. The "log" promptly lurched forward and overthrew him. It was a healthy specimen of a crocodile.



### THE "LOG" WAS A HEALTHY SPECIMEN OF A CROCODILE

O'Hara gripped his chum's hand and literally lifted him to his feet. Both men took to their heels, with the now aroused saurian in pursuit. Luckily the animal was not quick at turning, and before it could do so the two subs placed a safe distance between them and their pursuer.

"There may be others," gasped Denbigh, who half-dressed was clutching the rest of his clothing. "The river bank is too jolly risky. I had my doubts about it. We'll cut inland and risk the forest. It's high ground, as far as I could judge when we came up stream. Therefore it ought not to be swampy. What's more, we'll save half the distance."

"And, possibly, take double the time," added O'Hara, who, although willing to risk the unknown perils of the mangrove forest to the partly-known adversities of the river banks, was rather doubtful as to his comrade's skill in navigation on dry land.

They halted in a little clearing to complete their interrupted task of donning their clothes. With their ears strained to catch the faintest suspicious sound, they struggled into their light cotton garments, that at the best of times were ill-adapted to the miasmatic night-mists of the East African coast.

"That's better," exclaimed Denbigh cheerfully. "Feel a bit more civilized. We might pass muster as a pair of Christy minstrels. Now, then, a few grains of quinine, and we'll be on the move."

O'Hara's reply was to release the safety-pin of his automatic pistol. Denbigh, who was studying the luminous face of the pocket-compass, smiled grimly.

"Now I'll admit that little toy may come in handy, old man," he remarked. "Since I lead the way, pray be careful how you finger the trigger. Nor'east by east is the ticket."

Before the adventurers had proceeded fifty yards, a rustling sound overhead brought them up all-standing. Some heavy body was moving from tree-top to tree-top with great rapidity.

"Doesn't sound very healthy," whispered Denbigh with a forced laugh. "I think I'll arm myself with a club."

He wrenched at a stout sapling. Instead of the stem coming out by the roots as he expected, it snapped off short. The fractured part tapered to a chisel edge. The wood was hard and close-grained.

"No, I'll use this as a spear," continued the sub. "It makes a nasty weapon to jab an animal with."

In silence the chums proceeded on their way. It was fair going between the trunks of the palms and mangroves, there being very little undergrowth.

"Ware mosquitoes," exclaimed O'Hara. "There must be a swamp somewhere about."

A swarm of these pestilential insects were buzzing around their heads, but, possibly owing to the protection afforded by the burnt cork, the mosquitoes did not press home the attack. Fifty yards farther the two men were stopped by a deep morass.

"Edge away to the left," suggested the Irishman. "I think I can hear running water. By Jove! Look at those fireflies. They're simply great."

Denbigh merely grunted. He was in no mood to study the beauties of nature. The marsh meant loss of valuable time.

Half a dozen small deer, disturbed in the act of drinking, came bounding towards them, until, finding themselves confronted by human beings, they stopped abruptly, then tore madly from the newest danger.

"Be careful!" urged Denbigh. "Those creatures have been driven towards us by some animal. Stand by."

Out of the deep shade ambled a huge unwieldy figure. It looked like a giant armed with a club. It was too big for a native: it was an enormous ape.

In a trice Denbigh and his companion dodged behind a tree; but quick though they were, the movement had not escaped the notice of the animal. Uttering a shrill cry, the ape bounded towards their place of concealment.

Denbigh's first impulse was to fly, but calmer counsels prevailed. Dropping on one knee, he held his improvised spear pointed towards the enemy, the butt planted firmly into the ground.

As well might a dog try conclusions with a motor-car. The ape's muscular hand gripped the pole and wrenched it from the sub's grasp, while Denbigh's endeavour to retain his hold resulted in his being thrown prostrate at the creature's feet.

Before the luckless man could realize his position there was a vivid flash and a sharp report, quickly followed by another and another. O'Hara had fired point-blank at the animal's head.

The next instant Denbigh was pinned under the lifeless body of his antagonist, for a chance-directed shot had struck the ape in the eye, and had penetrated the brain.

"Hurt?" asked the Irishman anxiously, as he assisted Denbigh to regain his feet.

"Am I?" asked the sub blankly.

"If you don't know I suppose no one else does," rejoined O'Hara.

"I thought the brute had me that time. Hulloo! where's my compass?"

A prolonged search resulted in the recovery of the precious instrument. Anxiously Denbigh revolved the case; to his intense satisfaction he saw that the luminous card was still sensitive.

"My word!" thought Denbigh, as the two men resumed their way. "Whatever possessed me to take this business on? Idle curiosity and the love of doing something to pass away the time, I suppose. After all, I can't see how we can help our squadron in the slightest. And here are we running the risk of being stranded in a beastly forest, and perhaps being chawed up by some wild animal. Well, we're half-way there, so I suppose we may as well carry on. I won't be the one to suggest chucking up the sponge and making tracks for the *Myra*."

The Irishman's soliloquies were on almost the identical lines, but as neither communicated his thought to the other, the consequence was that they both persisted in their hazardous adventure.

It must have been about one in the morning, when, more by good luck than by good management, the two British officers stumbled upon the clearing on which stood the galvanized iron house that they had noticed when the *Myra* lay at anchor in the lagoon.

Although no light was visible, there were men within, for the subs could hear the rasping of a file and the sharp whirr of a hack-saw.

"Steady!" whispered Denbigh. "Bear away a little. Remember we're close to the native village. Ten to one there'll be a crowd of dogs about, and our clothes, in spite of ill-usage, are fairly conspicuous against the dark background."

Twice they halted before they crossed a foot-track through the mangrove forest. At the second path, they had to wait until a party of German bluejackets had passed. The men were armed, and were accompanied by a score of blacks, who had been impressed to drag a small field-gun up the hill.

Unsuspecting the Germans went on their way, and the subs, after a safe interval had elapsed, continued their way to the shore.

Suddenly O'Hara gripped his companion's arm and pointed. Fifty feet below them, and at a distance of two hundred yards, was the native village. The huts were wrapped in silence. Only the women and children remained, for the men had been compelled to throw up earthworks to defend the lagoon from the anticipated attack. Outside the village stood two German soldiers armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, their duty being to prevent any of the inhabitants from leaving their huts during the night.

"It's not healthy that way," he whispered. "More to the left, old man. I can hear the surf."

Ten minutes more found them at the edge of the forest, and on the brink of the two cliffs, immediately opposite which the *Pelikan* had brought up and had fought her brief and unsatisfactory action with the British gunboat.

Bathed in the slanting rays of the moon, which was now on the wane, were the placid waters of the lagoon. Nothing could, it seemed, escape being detected up on that illuminated patch of sea.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Denbigh excitedly. "The *Pelikan's* cleared out."

## CHAPTER XIII

### Nocturnal Investigations

"We might have guessed that," remarked O'Hara.

"Oh?"

"Yes; don't you see, she was spotted by our gunboat. She couldn't get away up the Mohoro River until Friday, and rather than run the risk of being sunk at anchor she's landed her mob of reservists and has put to sea again."

"To be promptly snapped up? No; I don't care to admit your reasoning, old man. We haven't come all this way through that confounded forest for nothing. Listen!"

A faint, rapid throbbing was borne to their ears. The sound came not from the sea but along the shore to their left, where a projecting tongue of land limited their range of vision.

"Motor," announced O'Hara laconically.

"And not a marine one," added Denbigh. "Come on. We'll follow this path; it's a jolly sight safer than keeping to the shore."

Once again they plunged into the mangrove forest, following a beaten track that, judging by its well-worn condition, had been in existence long before the arrival of the *Pelikan*.

Suddenly Denbigh halted and held up his hand. Footsteps were approaching, not those of the naked feet of natives but the booted tramp of white men.

The subs took cover and waited, fervently hoping that the oncomers had not a dog with them. The party advanced slowly and haltingly, so much so that for the moment Denbigh imagined that their suspicions had been aroused.

But without once glancing in the direction of the hidden officers the men passed by. One was a petty officer of the *Pelikan*. Denbigh recognized him by his bushy beard. With him were four seamen, walking two abreast. The leading pair carried a roll of something wrapped in a painted canvas cover; the others bore a large reel of wire, paying out the thin cable as they went.

"H'm, telephone wire," muttered Denbigh. "That doesn't look as if the ship has cleared out. More than likely they've landed some of the guns to form a masked battery. It strikes me pretty forcibly that we'll have to investigate at both ends of the wire."

Not until the sound of the receding footsteps had died away—and it took an exasperating time—did the subs emerge from their place of concealment. The air was now almost free from mist. Occasionally patches of vapour drifted across their path, but generally speaking the miasmic belt ended at a distance of about half a mile from the sea.

O'Hara stooped and lifted up the wire.

"Let's cut the dashed line," he suggested.

"All in good time," replied Denbigh. "If we do so now they'll be buzzing around before we've made our investigations. I think we're on to a good thing."

Nearer and nearer grew the sound of the motor, until upon emerging from the grove the subs found themselves within a hundred yards of a German base.

At this point the ground sloped gently to the edge of the lagoon. Without any apparent attempt at concealment

two searchlights had been set in position. A dozen men in naval uniforms were standing around the projectors. The lights were "running" as was evident from the crackle of the carbons, but the shutters were closed, cutting off the rays. The current was produced by a dynamo, the power being supplied by means of the petrol motor, the pulsations of which had given the subs a clue to its position.

"What's the idea?" whispered O'Hara, indicating the unconcealed searchlight.

"A blind," replied his companion. "I guessed it. We'll carry on a little farther before we retrace our steps."

Another *détour* was necessary, but on plunging into the mangrove forest on to the other side of the clearing the Irishman's foot tripped in the telephone wire.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "You're right, old man."

Five hundred yards farther on the explorers almost tumbled into a deep pit, protected on the seaward side by sandbags, between which were stuck shrubs and branches of trees to screen the artificial work from seaward.

In the pit were two quick-firers, with basket cases of ammunition in readiness. Pacing up and down between the guns was a sentry, while under a tarpaulin supported by short poles were about a dozen sleeping men. Farther on was another excavation, but what it contained the British officers were unable to ascertain. The battery, it was evident, was manned by some of the reservists from the *San Matias*.

Denbigh, having taken a compass bearing of the entrance of the lagoon, nudged his chum, and they began to retrace their steps. Moving as rapidly as their sense of caution would permit, they again skirted the searchlight station and picked up the telephone wire trail in the woods beyond.

"We must not forget the time," cautioned the Irishman.

"By Jove, no!" replied Denbigh. As a matter of fact he had. The excitement of their discoveries had banished all thought of anything else. Even the perils of their return journey to the *Myra* had been lightly brushed aside. "Hang it all, there's that confounded mist again."

At a distance of a quarter of a mile from the searchlight position the path bent obliquely towards the lagoon. Here the trees grew right to the water's edge, the cliff at this point being roughly twenty feet above the sea.

"What's that?" whispered O'Hara.

A cable's length from shore, and just visible through the mist, was a large indistinct shape. At first sight it looked like a small island thickly covered with coco-nut palms.

"The cunning blighters!" ejaculated Denbigh. "That's the *Pelikan*."

It was the raider. Her masts and funnels were decked with branches; the whole tops of trees festooned her sides. The outlines of her bow and stern were concealed by trailing masses of vegetation. Viewed from seaward, against the tree-clad hillocks, the *Pelikan* could not be distinguished from her natural background. A short distance along the shore there was a gap in the line of cliffs. Here a boat was lying, with her crew standing about on shore.

"They're expecting someone," whispered Denbigh. "Let's move."

Not until the subs were a safe distance from the shore did they exchange opinions.

"The *Pelikan* is expecting an attack," said O'Hara. "So she is disguised. Some of her guns are taken ashore."

"Why not all?" asked Denbigh.

"I should not think so," was the reply. "They would be almost certain to keep those in position on the port side. They haven't abandoned the ship, otherwise the boat wouldn't be waiting to take somebody off to her. Hulloo, there they go!"

Two brilliant arcs of light swept across the lagoon. The searchlights had been unmasked and were directed towards the narrow gap in the coral reef.

"They've spotted something," continued O'Hara.

"Not necessarily," replied Denbigh. "Those lights are tantamount to a challenge. Our fellows will go for the searchlight, thinking that they are being worked from the *Pelikan*. Then the ship's guns and those of the masked battery will be able to open a converging fire. We'll have to stop their little game, old man."

"Can't see how," said O'Hara.

"No more can I at present," added his companion. "We've about three hours to daylight. We must allow an hour and a half at the very outside to work our way back to the *Myra*."

"If our fellows put the hat on the *Pelikan*, we may as well hang on and get them to pick us up. You can bet your bottom dollar they'll take good care to see that the *Pelikan* is properly done in."

"My dear fellow," protested Denbigh, "are we fit to introduce ourselves as British officers, even suppose the cruisers send a landing party ashore?"

"Don't care whether I am or not," replied the Irishman recklessly. "Whether I wear an evening dress of burnt cork plus a very disreputable uniform of white ducks, or whether I am immaculately arrayed in No. 1 rig, makes little difference. I am still Patrick O'Hara."

"S'sh!" whispered Denbigh, for O'Hara had unconsciously raised his voice during the delivery of his protest. "Let's have another look to seaward, and then we'll cut the telephone wire and clap on all sail for our involuntary home of rest. By Jove, it's getting darker! We'll be barging into something if we aren't very careful."

Upon regaining the top of the cliffs the subs saw something that indicated the impending attack. Lights were in position at the entrance to the lagoon. The British vessels in the offing had sent boats to sound and drop calcium-light buoys in the narrow channel, preparatory to making a dash across the enclosed stretch of water.

Even as the subs watched a masthead light blinked rapidly. Since the vessels were equipped with wireless, light signals were unnecessary for communication. Denbigh could only conclude that one of the attacking craft was ordering the boats to return.

"I say, old man," whispered O'Hara. "It's not going to be long-range gunnery. I believe they're sending a couple of destroyers in. If so, they're going to try a torpedo on the *Pelikan*."

Before Denbigh could reply a faint gleam played upon the rock-strewn beach. Lying at full length in the coarse grass on the top of the cliffs, which were here only about ten feet in height, the chums waited and watched.

Coming towards them was a big-built man in the uniform of a German officer. At intervals he flashed a torch upon the ground to guide his footsteps. Behind him came a soldier with his rifle slung across his back, and carrying a heavy valise.

"Von Eckenstein," whispered Denbigh, recognizing the bullying Prussian by his voice. "And with an electric torch, too. We'll bag those fellows, Pat. No, not that pistol, you chump. We'll jump on 'em."

Cautiously the two subs crouched ready to spring. Denbigh, grasping a stout stick that he had found in the place of the one broken by the ape, signed to his companion to use his powerful fists and tackle the major's servant.

Unsuspectingly von Eckenstein passed by. Just as he flashed the torch Denbigh leapt. Before his feet touched the sand his stick descended heavily upon the German's head. His sun-helmet was insufficient to save him. Without a groan the major dropped.

O'Hara had been equally successful in his share of the attack. Taking Denbigh literally, he had alighted fairly on the German soldier's head.



"I've killed him!" exclaimed the Irishman.

"Fraid so," agreed Denbigh. "But it's war, you know. Be sharp, drag them into the bushes. Our dear friend the major won't recover his senses in a hurry."

Taking possession of the torch Denbigh scaled the cliff and made his way through the mangroves until he was nearly twenty yards from the edge of the wood. From this point he could see the masthead light of the destroyer—for destroyer he felt sure it must be. He could now flash the torch with little risk of the glare being spotted from either the *Pelikan* or the masked battery.

He "called up", at first without meeting with success, but at length a steady white light gleamed from the offing. It was not from the destroyer that had been using her masthead light, but from one farther out to sea.

Rapidly Denbigh flashed the warning message:—

"*Pelikan* disguised, 400 yards to southward of searchlights. Masked battery 400 yards to northward of searchlights. Useless to attempt torpedo."

The white light vanished. With his nerves tingling with anxiety the sub waited.

Then through the darkness the destroyer's signalling lamp spelt out the single word:

"R-A-T-S."

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Neglected Warning

"Idiot!" snapped Denbigh under his breath. "Some irresponsible signalman acting the goat."

"Perhaps they think that our signal is a faked message coming from the enemy," suggested O'Hara. "Try them again: add your name and rank."

Denbigh repeated the message, making the additions his companion had proposed; but there was no reply—not even a facetious one.

The signalman of the destroyer was engaged in taking down another message from the shore, for the Germans, seeing the word 'rats' flashed from an enemy ship, came to the conclusion that it was a personal affront to themselves. Consequently the searchlights had been temporarily shut off and a signalling lamp brought into play to frame a fitting reply to the Englishmen's single-worded challenge.

"We must make a move," announced Denbigh, disappointed at his warning being ignored. "It will be daylight before we get back, if we don't hurry. I'd like to stop and watch the scrap, but we can't wait. They may not attack until close on dawn."

Already possessed of the German soldier's rifle, bayonet and ammunition, Denbigh led the way from the shore. As the subs crossed the path along which the telegraph line had been laid, Denbigh severed the copper wire in two places, making the cuts quite fifty feet from each other. The separated part he removed, rolling it into a small coil.

"They'll have a bit of a bother to find that, I fancy," he remarked. "Unless they bring a spare length with them that telephone will be useless for the next couple of hours."

"They'll know it has been deliberately cut, though," added the Irishman. "If we had wrenched the wire apart they might have thought that some animal had barged into it. There'll be some strafing over it."

As he spoke the air was rent by a terrific detonation, followed almost immediately by the bark of numerous quick-firers. The attack had commenced.

Without a word both officers turned and raced recklessly towards the shore.

As Denbigh had foreseen, two British destroyers took part in the attempt to settle the *Pelikan*. Deceived by the position of the searchlight on shore both boats headed towards the glare like moths to a lighted candle.

At a distance of five hundred yards from the edge of the lagoon the leading boat ported helm and let fly a couple of torpedoes from her midship deck-tubes. Straight as arrows sped the two deadly missiles, but instead of striking the hull of the *Pelikan* they exploded simultaneously against the rocks.

Instantly the guns on the raider and those in the masked battery on shore opened a furious fire. The leading destroyer, caught by the tornado of shell, was hulled again and again. With her funnels riddled like sieves, her deck gear swept away, and in a sinking condition, she turned for the open sea. Failing in that object her lieutenant-commander ran her aground on the outer reef just as she was on the point of foundering.

The second destroyer, blinded by the glare of the searchlights, and finding that she was the target for two distinct batteries, neither of which was in the spot where the *Pelikan* was supposed to be, turned about, screening her movements with smoke from her funnels.

Slowing down outside the lagoon she picked up the survivors from her consort and steamed out to sea.

From the Germans' point of view it was a victory: the British, undaunted by the loss of one of their boats, preferred to call it a "reconnaissance in force", with the object of compelling the enemy to unmask his batteries. The main attack would be made by long-range gunnery, and to that end the three monitors, then lying in Zanzibar

Harbour, were ordered to make for the mouth of the Mohoro River.

Denbigh and O'Hara, having the mortification of seeing the destroyers repulsed with loss—the action was over in five minutes—again set out on their return journey.

In spite of the aid afforded by the compass the subs found, on emerging from the forest, that they were a long way out of their reckoning. They had hit the banks of the Mohoro River right enough, but either a considerable distance above or below the spot where the *Myra* lay moored.

The mists had rolled away. It was now very dark, yet had the tramp been anywhere in the vicinity the subs would have been able to discern her. There were ominous sounds: those of huge creatures wading over the mud-flats. Hippopotami and crocodiles were emerging from the river.

"Up or down?" asked O'Hara.

"Neither, by this bank," replied Denbigh, gripping his rifle. "It doesn't sound healthy. We'll cut inland a bit and try our luck up-stream."

"Why up-stream?" asked the Irishman.

"Because I think I've tumbled to it," answered his chum. "I've been carrying this rifle on my left shoulder for the greater part of the last hour. I have also been holding the compass within a few inches of the steel barrel. It was a silly thing to do, I admit, but I didn't think of it at the time. Consequently the needle deviated and threw us out of our course. We've gone more to the left of our outward track, and that brings us down stream."

"It's getting light, I believe," remarked O'Hara after a ten-minutes detour.

"Yes," replied Denbigh. "It's the false dawn. It will get pitch-dark for a little while before the real daybreak. Push on. This light will serve us a good turn."

Once more the adventurous twain gained the river bank. This time their efforts met with success, for showing clearly in the half-light of the false dawn was the *Myra*.

"Nearly slack water," announced Denbigh. "We're in luck. Keep under cover in case the watch are feeling particularly energetic."

While awaiting the return of darkness, Denbigh retrieved the handkerchief he had left as a mark, and wrapping it round the breech of the captured rifle, buried the weapon in the soft earth. It might, he argued, come in handy within the next few days. Beyond that time the rifle would be rapidly attacked by rust, for on the East Coast of Africa the action of corrosion is almost as quick as in the moist air of the Gold Coast.

He was dubious concerning the bayonet. It had a much larger blade than the British article, and its back was furnished with a formidable double row of teeth to within six inches of the point. With it a man might fell a fairly large-size tree in an hour.

"Pity to waste it," declared Denbigh. "Only it's too long to hide under my clothes without great risk of its being spotted. On the other hand, it may come in jolly useful."

"Break it in two," suggested his chum. "Even four inches of the blade might be handy."

Wrapping his coat round the end of the blade in order to protect his hands, the sub brought the flat of the steel smartly against his knee. To his disgust the bayonet did not snap, as he fully expected it to do. It bent, and instead of flying back when the pressure was released it remained bent.

"Good old Solingen steel!" exclaimed Denbigh disgustedly. "Same rotten stuff that our cutlass-bayonets were made of in the '85 Soudan campaign."

All efforts to break the bayonet failed. The metal was so non-elastic that the sub gave up the attempt and hurled

it into the mud.

"Time!" he exclaimed. "It's getting dark again."

The men stripped, and made their clothes into bundles as before. To return to the *Myra* with their garments shedding streams of turbid water would never do, since they had no other clothes.

"Ugh!" ejaculated O'Hara as his feet touched the loathsome slime. "I can't say I'm hankering after a mud bath. Can't say I like the rotten turnip-smelling water any better."

"Dry up!" cautioned Denbigh under his breath.

"Wish I could," retorted the irrepressible Irishman. "Sure I'm wet altogether."

They swam side by side, making use of the "dog-stroke", as there was less risk of attracting attention by an involuntary splashing.

It was a nerve-racking ordeal, for the darkness was now intense. Hippopotami were noisy not so very far off; there was imminent danger from crocodiles, that, floating like logs in the water, were practically invisible until one was almost within arm's length of them. But on top of these unpleasant possibilities, the haunting dread that the rope ladder might have been removed was uppermost in Denbigh's mind.

As the swimmers approached mid-stream, they found there was still a strong current. It was indeed a hard struggle to make the ship. Well-nigh exhausted, the two chums gained their goal. Thank heaven the end of the ladder was still trailing in the water.

For some minutes the subs contented themselves by hanging on to the ropes and regaining their breath. Then Denbigh, assuring himself that the key to the cabin was still hanging from a cord round his neck, began to ascend. When his head was level with the bulwarks he peered cautiously along the deck. He could see or hear no one. Had a sentry been standing forward, it would have been possible to discern his outlines against the gloom. He would have much rather seen the fellow and made arrangements accordingly, than to be in ignorance of where the sentry was, since it was unlikely that all the watch on deck were skulking.

Denbigh ascended another rung and waited again. This time he heard voices speaking in low guttural tones. The watch were sheltering in the fore-peak.

Reassured on this point, the sub leapt lightly over the rail. As he did so his bare feet came in contact with something soft. He had pitched fairly upon a fat German, who, heedless of the risk of sleeping in the open air, had coiled himself up under the lee of the bulwarks.

The shock threw Denbigh to the deck. Quickly regaining his feet, he saw the astonished German struggling to rise. Before he could do so the sub dealt him a powerful left-hander. Missing the point of the Teuton's chin, Denbigh's clenched fist struck him heavily on the nose.

Thoroughly scared by the apparition of a stalwart black, the man took to his heels. Yelling with fear, his cries for assistance were rendered indistinguishable owing to the fact that he held both hands pressed tightly over his nose, which was leaving a purple trail on the deck.

"Come on!" hissed Denbigh to his chum.

O'Hara needed no second bidding. Clearing the bulwarks, he quickly cut adrift the ladder and raced after Denbigh, who was making with all possible dispatch for the companion.

For a brief instant Denbigh fumbled with the key; then inserting it in the lock he threw open the door.

"Back again, Armstrong," he announced coolly, for now all immediate danger was over. "Have you any clean water handy? We could both do with a good wash."

## CHAPTER XV

### Armstrong's Part

Restraining his curiosity, the mate of the *Myra* poured out some water into a tin bowl, and handed Denbigh a small piece of yellow soap.

"There'll be just time to scrub your figureheads," he remarked. "You'll have to turn in pretty sharp, or you'll be bowled out. They're getting a little bit excited on deck."

Realizing that it would be as well to act on Armstrong's advice, the subs, by dint of hard scrubbing and plenty of soap, succeeded in removing the burnt cork from their faces, necks, and hands. This done they donned their pyjamas and scrambled into their bunks, while the mate obligingly unpacked their bundles and laid out the garments with methodical precision.

Armstrong was not far wrong in his surmise. The excitement on deck bordered on a state of panic. Every man of the prize crew turned out. Unter-leutnant Klick, having heard a muddled version of what had taken place, ordered the man who had been jumped upon to state what he knew.

The seaman, still shaken and frightened, could only affirm that he was pacing the deck as conscientiously as a sentry should do, when the black figure leapt upon him from behind and felled him.

"From behind, say you?" repeated Unter-leutnant Klick. "How, then, could you see that he was black?"

"I must have spun round, sir, as I fell," replied the fellow. "I distinctly remember seeing that he was black and without clothing. He may be a native."

"Where did he go after taking you unawares?" asked the prize-master of the *Myra*.

"Over the side, sir, I think. I believe I heard the splash."

Kaspar Klick, however, had his suspicions. Not for one moment did he imagine that anyone would be so utterly reckless as to attempt to swim ashore and back again. The river, teeming with hippopotami and crocodiles, offered too formidable an obstacle. On the other hand, the mysterious assailant of the sentry might be one of several of the English prisoners, intent upon recapturing the ship. Had the faithful sentry been felled without uttering a sound, the plot may have succeeded; but when the seaman made enough bellowing to awaken the Seven Sleepers, the daring Englishmen probably thought better of it, and had retired speedily and discreetly.

Ordering half a dozen armed men to accompany him, Unter-leutnant Klick went for'ard. Over the hatchway leading to the forehold, where the *Myra's* deck hands were under lock and key, he found a sentry on duty. The man was most emphatic that no one had attempted to come on deck. The state of the padlock proved that.

Still dubious, the unter-leutnant descended the main hold. Making his way over a pack of miscellaneous cargo, he came to the for'ard bulkhead. A careful examination showed that no effort had been made to cut through the partition separating the two holds. He could, therefore, feel reassured that the original crew of the *Myra* had not attempted to put into execution a plot to recover the ship.

"Perhaps it is those harebrained officers we took from the Japanese liner," soliloquized Klick. "I'll go the rounds now I am about it, and see if those fellows have been up to any tricks."

Had the unter-leutnant gone aft as soon as he commenced his investigations, he might have noticed the tell-tale prints of wet feet, left by Denbigh and his chum as they scurried to the cabin. By this time the marks had almost vanished. The slight traces of dampness that remained were hardly noticeable in the gloom, for it was still dark, and 'tween decks the lantern gave but a feeble glimmer.

Klick inserted his key into the lock and threw open the door. The cabin was in darkness, until one of his men

flashed a lantern into it. The unter-leutnant sniffed suspiciously.

"Anyone awake?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Armstrong.

"You haf been a lamp burning," said Kaspar Klick accusingly. "It is again der regulations."

Armstrong's reply told the listening subs that he was "up to snuff". The prize-master had sniffed the odour of burnt cork; but since he had suggested that it was the smell of an extinguished oil-lamp, the mate did not contradict.

"Yes," he replied. "Mr. O'Hara hasn't been very well. I had to give him some quinine, and a fellow must have a light to see that he is giving the right dose."

"Ach! Is dat so?" asked the unter-leutnant. "Now, tell me dis. Herr O'Hara, did he go on deck since last hour ago?"

"No," replied Armstrong with perfect truthfulness. "I am certain he didn't. I'm a very light sleeper, and if he had moved I should have heard. Besides, how could he get out without a key?" asked the mate with well-feigned innocence.

"I tell you dis——" began Klick; but before he could carry out his intention a loud shout of "Wer da?" came from the deck, followed by an unintelligible hail, coming from some distance down the river.

Kaspar Klick waited no longer. Hurriedly he left the cabin, slamming and locking the door, and rushed on deck. Aft, a sentry at the ready was repeating his challenge. The first blush of the short tropical dawn revealed the presence of a four-oared galley speeding up with the tide.

"We're from the *Pelikan*, sir," announced the petty officer in charge, as the boat ran alongside. Without attempting to board the man delivered his message.

In spite of the closed dead-light Denbigh and his companions could hear all the fellow was saying.

"Herr Kapitan von Riesser sends his compliments," continued the coxswain. "He is anxious to know whether any of the English prisoners have escaped."

"No, certainly not," replied Kaspar Klick with righteous indignation in his voice, "our precautions are too elaborate to give the dogs a chance of that. But why has Kapitan von Riesser sent you with that question?"

"We've been in action, sir," declared the man.

"We heard the firing," remarked Klick. "And the result?"

"One English cruiser sunk, another driven on to the rocks," announced the coxswain, allowing his imagination to kick over the traces. "There were others. We would have captured or destroyed those, only——"

"Only what?" asked the unter-leutnant sharply.

"Someone cut our field telegraph. 'B' battery could not get in touch with the observation officer and so the rest of the enemy escaped."

"How do you know that the wire has been cut?" asked the unter-leutnant. "It might have carried away."

"A whole length of it has been removed, sir," reported the coxswain.

"Then it was the natives. They'll steal anything in the metal line. Kapitan von Riesser ought to have known that," replied Klick with asperity. "We look after our prisoners here. None of them has the faintest chance of getting out of the ship. Anything more to report?"

"Only that Major von Eckenstein is missing. He left the observation station to go to the *Pelikan's* landing stage and never arrived. Search parties were out when I left."

Unter-leutnant Kaspar Klick made no audible comment. Inwardly he rejoiced, after the manner of mean-minded men when they hear of misfortune overtaking those they dislike; for there was no love lost between the two representatives of the Kaiser's forces.

"Very well; carry on back," he ordered. "You can reassure Kapitan von Riesser on the points he mentioned."

"There's something else, sir," reported the petty officer, producing a linen envelope from under a cushion in the stern-sheets. "I had to deliver this to you personally."

The German officer took the envelope and went below to read its contents. It was to the effect that the *Pelikan* had been lightened still more and that at high water she would attempt the bar. The *Myra* was to return down stream and stand by to render assistance if necessary.

Returning on deck the prize-master gave back to the coxswain the order, to which was added a notation that it would be complied with, and dismissed the boat. Then, grumbling at being turned out so early in the morning, Kaspar Klick retired to his cabin.

"Is that right about the sinking of one of our cruisers?" asked Armstrong, when Denbigh had translated the gist of the conversation, for in spite of the port-hole being closed every word had been audible.

"Hardly," replied Denbigh. "The Germans have a funny habit of magnifying the size and class of any and every vessel they sink. Unfortunately they sent one of our destroyers to the bottom. By Jove! doesn't this burnt cork take a lot of shifting?"

The two subs were busily engaged in scrubbing off their sooty coats, to make the rest of their bodies harmonize with their faces. Fresh water being strictly limited and yellow soap microscopic in size their task was not an easy one.

"Well, if they attempt to bring the *Pelikan* up the river," commented the mate of the *Myra*, "I hope they'll pile her up on the bar. If they succeed we'll have to try our hand. Don't I wish they'd let me have charge of the wheel for five minutes. Now what do you think of these? I call them champion."

He held out the two dummy forelocks, which he had completed in the absence of Denbigh and his chum. They had been coated with aluminium paint, while to give them a worn appearance he had rubbed charcoal over the paint. Only by actual handling, when the difference in weight between the real and the spurious article could be detected, could the deception be discovered.

"Capital!" exclaimed O'Hara, suppressing a yawn. "Oh, dash it all! This is the result of being out of bed when one ought to be enjoying one's beauty sleep. I'm turning in again."

"Also this child," added Denbigh; but before the chums could throw themselves upon their bunks a bugle sounded. It was the signal that another working day had begun, and that the prisoners had to turn out and assist their captors.

"Morning," was Captain Pennington's greeting as Denbigh and O'Hara came on deck. Then, making sure that no German was within earshot, he asked, "And what little game were *you* up to last night?"

"What do you mean?" asked Denbigh in surprise.

"Like you I have a liking for fresh air," replied the skipper of the captured tramp. "The Huns screwed down the dead-light to the port-hole, but forgot to enquire if I had a spanner. They saved themselves an unnecessary question, by the by, for I would not have owned up to being in possession of a very serviceable one. So during the night I opened the port-hole to get a breather. I was rather surprised to find a rope-ladder dropped over the side, and still more so to see two disreputable niggers, whom I recognized as you two, swarm down and take a cold bath. Also I had the pleasure of seeing the same dusky pair return, and had the intense satisfaction of hearing a German bellow

like a whipped child."

"Then we weren't so smart as we imagined," observed O'Hara. "Fortunate it was for us that you weren't a Hun."

Before the subs could enlighten Captain Pennington as to the nature of the mystery the unter-leutnant came up.

"You vill haf to vork, kapitan," he said without further preliminaries. "If you no keep your crew up to concert pitch trouble you vill haf. You men vill vork vatch and vatch, see?"

Captain Pennington merely nodded in reply. He realized that passivity was desirable; on the other hand, having heard of Armstrong's little plan, it would not do to show unwonted eagerness to assist in working the ship.

"Turn up der men," ordered Klick.

"One minute," interposed Captain Pennington. "We are not at sea now. My men have insufficient head-gear. It's risking sunstroke."

The unter-leutnant considered the affair for a few minutes. Personally he didn't care a rope's-end whether the strafed Englishmen had sunstroke or not, until it occurred to him that a number of invalids would hamper operations. Finally he gave orders for a number of solar topees or sun-helmets to be issued to the British crew.

It was eight o'clock in the morning when the *Myra* weighed. Already the sun was unpleasantly hot. There was no wind. Under the shade of the mangroves the mists still held, while the black mud left uncovered by the falling tide gave out a most noxious vapour.

To Denbigh's satisfaction Armstrong had been sent for'ard to superintend the weighing and catting on the anchor. The stern anchor had already been hove short.

Under the action of the steam winch the cable came home. Manoeuvred by means of the twin screws the *Myra* swung round in mid-stream, and as the "hook" broke out from the muddy bottom the tramp forged slowly ahead.

Half a dozen British seamen were on the fo'c'sle together with three Germans. The latter took good care to leave most of the work to the prisoners, so that Armstrong had a clear opportunity to withdraw the real forelocks from the anchors and replace them with the wooden ones.

"That's all serene," he whispered to Denbigh as he came aft. "Now there'll be trouble for the Deutchers."



## CHAPTER XVI

### The Disaster to the *Myra*

Arriving at the entrance to the Mohoro River the *Myra* made no attempt to recross the inner bar. Nor did she anchor, contenting herself with merely steaming ahead against the flood-tide at a slow speed that kept her stationary with the shore.

Just before high water the *Pelikan* hove in sight from behind a projecting tongue of land. She still retained her garb of palm trees. The subs noticed that she had a decided list to starboard. This, however, was not due to a leak but to the fact that her cargo had been trimmed so as to throw her on her bilge and thus lighten her draught.

Slowly she approached the bar, and promptly took ground. Gripped by the strong tide the stern portion swung round, throwing her almost broadside athwart the river.

Great was the confusion on board. Half a dozen officers were shouting simultaneously; men were rushing hither and thither, with no apparent object, while with her engines reversed, her propellers were throwing huge columns of mud and water.

Before the officers realized the danger the starboard propeller had shed its blades owing to their coming into contact with the bottom, while the port propeller was stopped after two blades had been badly buckled.

Cautiously the lighter-draughted *Myra* was backed astern until a couple of stout hawsers were passed to her from the stranded vessel.

Three times the tramp endeavoured without success to tow off the *Pelikan*, but on each occasion the hawsers snapped. By this time it was close on high water.

Meanwhile the raider's crew were working like men possessed, throwing overboard heavy gear that Kapitan von Riesser would have given thousands of marks to retain. Military stores of the utmost importance had to be ruthlessly sacrificed, unless the *Pelikan* was to remain a target for the guns of the British cruisers which were even now supposed to be on their way from Zanzibar.

On the fourth occasion a hawser was sent off to the *Myra*, while in addition the pinnacle was towed into midstream with a large anchor slung underneath her keel.

The anchor having been dropped, the cable was led to the *Pelikan's* steam capstan. Directly the chain took the strain the *Myra* began to tow, with the result that the luckless raider scraped heavily across the bar into deep water.

Kapitan von Riesser was delighted, in spite of the loss of stores and gear. The damaged propellers mattered little, since the *Pelikan* would never again attempt to put to sea. The *Myra* could tow her up the Mohoro River until she was out of range of the British cruisers' guns, and from that point the reinforcements for the German Field Force could proceed to the Rhodesian border and attempt to check General Smut's advance.

Amongst the troops was Major von Eckenstein, who had been discovered lying unconscious at the foot of the cliffs. He was badly battered about the face, and severely hurt internally. When he came to he was quite unable to account for his injuries. It was quite evident that from a combatant point of view the arrogant major was out of the running.

As soon as the *Pelikan* was in comparative safety the German troops were re-embarked. The quick-firers which had been landed, and which had served so good a purpose in repelling the British destroyers, were brought round by steamboats and again hoisted on board the *Pelikan*.

This done the *Myra* took her big consort in tow, and against the now strong ebb-tide slowly crawled up the turgid river.

Before the tidal stream had turned the two vessels had passed the spot where the tramp had anchored on the previous night. Without stopping they proceeded up-stream, the *Pelikan* keeping well under control by means of her rudder and a supplementary steering device consisting of a long spar towed astern to prevent the ship from yawing.

"By Jove! there's trouble ahead," observed Denbigh, pointing to a sharp bend in the river about a mile ahead. Here the tidal portion of the stream extended nearly 500 yards from bank to bank, while the actual channel was a bare fifth of that distance. On the starboard hand ran a long tongue of mud, round which the stream swept with great violence.

By this time a strong breeze had sprung up, blowing athwart the channel. The absence of trees close to the bank increased the difficulty, for there was no protection from the wind as it swept against the lofty side of the slowly-moving *Pelikan*.

Already the raider's semaphore was signalling to the *Myra* to cast off and anchor until the tide slackened.

With a grim smile on his face Armstrong winked solemnly at the subs. He said not a word, for several of the German seamen were standing by.

"Let go!" ordered Unter-leutnant Klick, directly he saw that the *Pelikan* had dropped her anchor.

Promptly the British seaman stationed at the compressor obeyed. The bower anchor fell with a sullen splash. Fathom after fathom of chain roared through the hawse-pipe.

Klick raised his hand as a signal for the cable to be checked. The *Myra* was still making sternway and showed no decided tendency to bring up. Another fifty fathoms of chain were paid out. Still the tramp dropped astern. She was now within half a cable's length of the *Pelikan*, which to prevent herself being in collision was obliged to veer out her cable.

"The anchor's not holding, sir!" shouted the German petty officer in charge of the fo'c'sle party.

"Then let go a second anchor," yelled Klick excitedly. "Make them look sharp, or we'll be foul of the *Pelikan*."

The unter-leutnant had no cause to complain of the lack of energy on the part of the prisoners. With the utmost dispatch the second anchor was let go. Before twenty fathoms, which alone ought to be sufficient to bring the *Myra* to a standstill, were paid out the whole of the cable of the first anchor had been made use of.

Suddenly a sullen roar was heard coming from down-stream. The Mohoro River at certain intervals, especially at extraordinary spring-tides, is subject to a bore. The bore is very erratic. Sometimes it is very much in evidence, at other times it is hardly perceptible; but there was no doubt that now it was of unusual magnitude.

Nearer and nearer came the wall of solid water, maintaining an unbroken wave towards the centre of the river. Close to the banks it broke heavily.

"Go full speed ahead or we'll be into you!" shouted Kapitan von Riesser frantically.

The *Myra's* engine-room telegraph clanged. Either by accident or design the British engineers were slow in replying. The tramp was only just forging ahead when the bore swept under the *Pelikan's* counter.

Round swept the raider, her stern just missing the *Myra's* taffrail. Fortunately her cables held, but not so the tramp.

With her engines going ahead and held tightly by the scope of her anchor-chain—for the anchors themselves, thanks to their dummy forelocks, were useless—the tramp headed uncontrollably towards the port-hand bank. In the midst of the tumult of water as the bore broke over her she struck and struck heavily.

In an instant the doomed vessel fell over on her beam-ends. With an appalling crash her funnels and masts went by the board. So sudden was the catastrophe that a dozen German seamen were trapped down below. Only by the narrowest margin did the British engine-room staff make their escape.

Of what occurred during the next few moments neither Denbigh nor O'Hara had any clear recollection. They found themselves standing on the side of the vessel. Captain Pennington, Armstrong, and Unter-leutnant Klick were there, too. Up for'ard the British seamen and half a dozen of the German prize crew were scrambling along the upturned sides, which were by this time barely three feet above the surface of the raging stream.

It was evident that the survivors had found only a very temporary place of refuge. The force of the current sweeping past the ship was wearing out a deep hole in the bed of the river, into which the *Myra* was slowly subsiding. To attempt to escape by swimming was almost an impossibility, as the water surged and eddied past, forming a dangerous whirlpool close to the stern of the vessel.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Armstrong. "This is a proper wash-out. We've done the trick properly this time."

"Yes, it's more than we bargained for," added the Irishman. "I would never have believed that a craft of this size would be swallowed up so quickly."

Meanwhile Denbigh could not help noticing the marked difference in the demeanour of the British and German seamen, who by this time were up to their knees in water, and were soon, unless help were forthcoming, to be swept off their feet by the rush of the flood-tide.

The Huns were shouting dolorously for aid; the *Myra's* men were either stoically silent or else inclined to indulge in grim jests at the expense of the bellowing Teutons.

Denbigh looked in the direction of the *Pelikan*. The crew were engaged in lowering boats, and taking an extraordinarily long time about it, owing to the pronounced list of the raider and also to the fact that her decks were encumbered with her disguise of vegetation.

Unter-leutnant Klick was trembling violently. He, of all the officers taking refuge on the side of the tramp, had managed to procure a life-belt. Even the contemptuous glances of the *Myra's* skipper failed to shame him.

Presently the first of the *Pelikan's* boats came tearing up-stream. It required all the strength of the oarsmen to check her way. An ironical cheer from the British seamen greeted her arrival.

"Women and children first!" they yelled derisively as the unter-leutnant and the surviving German seamen made a frantic rush for the boat.

Two of the Huns jumped short. Although good swimmers they were swirled away like pieces of straw, until, drawn into the vortex of the whirlpool, they disappeared.

The second boat, backing towards the deadly whirlpool, awaited the men's reappearance, but in vain. Then, attempting to run alongside the wreck, the frail craft bumped heavily upon a submerged part of the vessel and stove in a couple of planks. While two of the crew began to bale, the boat was swept several hundred yards up the river, for the remaining rowers were helpless against the flood.

Meanwhile the first boat, having rescued the unter-leutnant and the surviving German seamen, began to approach the wreck again; until Klick, in an agony of terror lest she, too, would meet with disaster, ordered the men to push off.

A third boat—a whaler—came upon the scene. Acting with great caution her coxswain brought her alongside and motioned to Denbigh and his companions to leap.

"Those men first," cried Captain Pennington, pointing to those of his crew who were still maintaining a precarious hold.

The coxswain understood and allowed his boat to drift down upon the handful of seamen. Coolly the British crew scrambled into safety, and the whaler, urged under the powerful strokes of the oarsmen, began to make her way aft.

Suddenly the almost submerged part on which Denbigh and his companions were standing gave a sickening

shudder and disappeared beneath the surface. A swirl of water, surging with irresistible force, swept the four officers off their feet.

The next instant Denbigh found himself struggling for dear life in the foaming yellow water of Mohoro River. In spite of his peril, he could not help contrasting his involuntary bath with that of the previous night. Then the water was warm, tranquil, and evil-smelling. Unseen dangers assailed him on every hand. Now the same river was nothing less than a broiling cauldron.

With almost superhuman strength Denbigh struck out. Already he was within the influence of the deadly whirlpool. Spinning round and round he kept his face from the vortex, striving, but in vain, to overcome the suction of the gigantic eddy.

He could see no signs of his companions. Either they had already disappeared, or else they had been thrown beyond the range of the inverted cone that marked the position of the whirlpool.

Even in danger of imminent death, the sub recalled an incident in the Clarence Victualling Yard, several years ago. He had been taken by his father to see the process of manufacturing ships' biscuits. In one building he saw flour sliding down an inclined plane into a mixing machine. Mingled with the flour were several large maggots, that gave the name to the creek that forms the approach by water to the Victualling Yard. Finding themselves disturbed, the insects tried to wriggle back, but in vain. Down they slid till caught in the mixer, finally to form part of the ingredients of ship's biscuits.

"And I'm almost in the same boat as those weevils," thought Denbigh grimly, as he completed a circle for the twentieth time.

He was nearing the vortex. The spiral motion became quicker. An irresistible force was dragging him down.

Suddenly Denbigh threw up his arms. He was physically played out. Like an arrow he shot into the pit in the centre of that mass of whirling water. The blaze of the African sun gave place to intense darkness. He held his breath, until his lungs seemed to be on the point of bursting.

As rapidly as he had gone down the sub was shot to the surface. Again he was within the range of the whirlpool, for its centre, instead of being stationary, was moving in an ellipse.

Unable even to struggle, Denbigh was again sucked down. This time, incapable of holding his breath, he swallowed a quantity of water. The pressure on his chest was excruciating. Then torture gave place to a strange calmness. On an instant, recollections of practically the whole of his past life flashed across his mind. The mental pictures faded away and all became blank.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A Bid for Freedom

When Denbigh opened his eyes he found himself in the now familiar cabin on board the *Pelikan*. There were several people in the limited space. He did not feel any interest in them. They irritated him. He wanted to sleep.

Gradually it dawned upon him that he had a narrow escape. Then he remembered that O'Hara was with him when he was swept off the side of the *Myra*.

"You there, Pat?" he asked, half afraid to put the question in case his chum was gone.

"Sure," replied a deep voice from the opposite bunk.

Denbigh attempted to sit up. He felt horribly sick. His head was whirling. It reminded him very forcibly and unpleasantly of his spiral flight around the vortex of the whirlpool.

"Lie still, Mr. Denbigh," said Captain Pennington. "You'll be fit all in good time."

"All right," agreed the sub. He was not in a fit state to do otherwise. "Where is the *Pelikan* now?"

The skipper of the *Myra* lowered his voice.

"Properly trapped. She cannot go another fifty yards up the river. We've spoilt her little game."

"Good business," murmured Denbigh, and turning on his side he fell asleep.

His escape was little short of miraculous. It was owing to the fact that he wore his solar topee fastened by a strong "chin-stay". The air-space between the double thickness of the sun-helmet possessed sufficient buoyancy to bring him to the surface, after being twice taken down by the whirlpool.

A few minutes previous to the disaster, the bore had exhausted itself at a point ten miles up the river, and the "rebound" had made itself felt just at the time when Denbigh made his second involuntary dive. The sudden slackening of the full force of the flood-tide had caused the whirlpool to cease, with the result that the sub floated unconscious on the surface of the river, when he was picked up by the *Pelikan's* whaler. O'Hara, Captain Pennington, and Armstrong had been more fortunate, for they had been swept clear of the influence of the eddy.

The result of Armstrong's plot had rather exceeded his expectations. The *Myra* lay athwart the channel, with less than twelve feet of water over her at high tide. Until the Mohoro River cut itself a new bed round the submerged wreck—which might take twenty-four hours or as many days—the *Pelikan* would be unable to proceed. Even if the obstruction did not exist, the raider was unable to proceed owing to the loss of her propeller blades.

The whole of the stores removed from the *Pelikan* to the *Myra*, as well as those originally in the tramp's holds, were hopelessly lost, including the bulk of the ammunition and arms intended for the German colonial troops. There were several hundred reservists still on board, with no facilities for their transfer up-country. Even had there been boats available for them all, the voyage up the Mohoro was fraught with danger.

On the other hand, to remain in the *Pelikan* was to court disease and famine, even should the raider escape detection by the British cruisers.

Kapitan von Riesser's position was far from enviable. He soundly rated Unter-leutnant Klick, who in turn tried to shift the blame upon the British sailors for their dilatoriness in letting go the anchors. Von Riesser had seen with his own eyes that the anchors had been let go promptly. He could not, therefore, accuse the *Myra's* original crew of conspiracy, since he had no evidence. The prospect of capture, too, made him treat the prisoners with far more consideration than he would have done had his position been a secure one.

The kapitan of the *Pelikan* was not, however, going to "knuckle under" without another effort. For the next

three days all hands were kept hard at work, in spite of the blazing sunshine by day and the miasmatic mists by night.

The guns previously landed on the shores of the lagoon and afterwards taken on board again were once more sent ashore, and placed in position so as to command a wide stretch of river. The *Pelikan*, being now moored fore and aft, had the remaining quick-firers mounted at the stern, so as to cooperate with the shore batteries in sweeping the approach by water.

Two miles down-stream a steel-studded cable was thrown across from bank to bank, and supported by barrels lashed in pairs at frequent intervals. The obstruction ought to prevent the dash by armed steamboats, even if unable to withstand the headlong charge of a destroyer.

The most formidable objects of defence were the two torpedo-tubes, which were removed from the ship and placed in position on shore four hundred yards below the chain boom. To enable the torpedoes to be fired, light piers were thrown out from the banks into twelve feet of water, the structure being hidden by boughs of trees and clumps of reeds. On the high ground at the back of the torpedo station searchlights were mounted. These were not to be used as a precautionary measure, but only to be switched on when an attack was visibly imminent. Von Riesser's principal aim was to remain hidden. If his retreat were discovered then he would put up a fight, and failing to win would surrender with a good conscience.

Long before the three days had elapsed Denbigh had quite recovered from the effects of his prolonged immersion. He had, with the rest of the captured British officers, little opportunity of finding out the actual steps that were being taken for defence. They knew that work was in progress, but during the removal of the torpedo-tubes and guns they had been sent below.

One discovery Denbigh made, and that was through overhearing a chance conversation between two German petty officers. It also accounted for the seemingly purposeless reluctance to confine the prisoners in the hold instead of attempting to chloroform them in their cabin.

The *Pelikan* was double-skinned, but the space between the double bottoms was far greater than is usual in marine construction. It had practically two hulls, one within the other, and in the intervening space were stowed quantities of warlike stores.

When the *Pelikan* had been boarded by a British patrol officer the deception escaped detection. Apparently the *Zwaan* was a harmless Dutch liner. The sub-lieutenant who acted as boarding-officer was not sufficiently versed in the ways of the wily Teuton. An examination of the hold revealed nothing suspicious, and the vessel was accordingly released.

Unfortunately for the Germans their plans had gone awry, for on grounding on the outer bar the ship had strained several of her plates, with the result that the space between the inner and the outer skin was flooded. Not only were the stores spoilt, but, in order to lighten her draught in addition to compensating for lost buoyancy, cargo more than equivalent to that flooded had to be jettisoned.

Having landed the quick-firers and torpedo-tubes, the crew of the *Pelikan* proceeded to increase the disguise of the ship. She was now a regular floating palm forest. So thick was the foliage brought on board and secured to the masts and upper works that sun-awnings were unnecessary. Even an observer in a seaplane, unless he were prepared for such a disguise, would fail to distinguish the raider in her garb of verdure.

"How do you feel for another jaunt ashore?" asked Denbigh.

"I can't say I am particularly keen on another swim," replied O'Hara. "Otherwise I've no objection to studying the fauna and flora of this delectable land. But what's the object?"

"It's about time we bade farewell to the *Pelikan*" replied Denbigh. "It's four days since that little affair with the destroyers, and our cruisers have apparently made no attempt to get even with von Riesser and his motley crowd. I'm rather curious to know what's doing?"

"I can't see how going ashore will help," objected the Irishman.

"It will if we get to the mouth of the river. If the cruisers are in the lagoon, well and good."

"And if not?"

"Then we'll have to exist as best we can till they do arrive."

"H'm," muttered O'Hara. "And the other fellows—Pennington and Armstrong?"

"We'll ask them to join our merry throng," answered Denbigh. "The more the better, once we get clear of the ship."

That same afternoon the subs broached the matter to the master and mate of the lost *Myra*.

"I must cry off, thanks all the same," was Captain Pennington's reply. "Happen what may my place is with my men. I have no objection to Armstrong going with you, but I hope you have carefully weighed the matter. If you miss being picked up by the boats of the squadron your plight will be an unenviable one. The climate, the wild nature of the coast, and the natives, who are certainly under German influence, are all against you. Personally I think you stand a better chance by remaining here and letting events take their course. The *Pelikan* is trapped. Capture or destruction is but a matter of time."

"True," admitted Denbigh. "But these fellows evidently mean to put up a stiff fight. They've been doing something down the river—probably throwing up masked batteries. If we could manage to find out what they are up to and can communicate the intelligence to our ships it would help matters."

"That's another consideration," said Captain Pennington. "In fact, your duty lies that way."

"Are you trying your luck with us, Armstrong?" asked O'Hara.

"I'd be only too pleased to have a cut at it," replied the mate. "Especially as Captain Pennington has no objections. How do you propose to get clear of the ship? You can't swim ashore, because there's nothing but slimy mud on the bank for some distance."

"There's a punt made fast alongside the port quarter," said Denbigh. "They don't hoist it on board at night, because it's there when we turn in and in the same place when we come on deck in the morning. They only use it during the day."

"And there's a sentry right aft," objected Armstrong. "He'd spot us as sure as daylight."

"Look here," declared the sub. "If I succeed in getting her alongside amidships will you be ready to swarm down and into her?"

Armstrong nodded in assent. O'Hara also expressed his willingness to attempt the enterprise.

The Irishman still had his pistol. He had taken an early opportunity of cleaning it after his immersion. The screw-driver had been lost in the *Myra*, but by this time the lock furniture was easy to remove, a coin doing duty for the hitherto indispensable tool. The three men also contrived to reserve a small quantity of food and a glass bottle filled with soda-water.

Captain Pennington and Armstrong had been berthed in the same cabin as the two subs. That facilitated matters, since the master of the *Myra* could cover his companions' tracks.

"They'll make it pretty hot for me when they find you've cleared out," he remarked. "I can stick that. I don't think they'll go to extreme measures with me. If they do they'll be sorry for it later on."

At the usual hour the officer-prisoners were ordered below. By ten o'clock all was still. The crew of the raider were no longer working by night. The bulk of the preparations completed they were given ample opportunities for rest, since it was necessary to conserve their energies for defence against the impending attack.

On deck a strict watch was maintained, but the attention of the sentries was mainly directed downstream, whence the sudden switching on of the searchlights was to be the signal of the approach of the British flotillas.

It was not until two bells (1 a.m.) that the three officers stole from their cabin. On deck all was in darkness. There was no moon. Every light was extinguished. A mist obscured the glimmer of the stars. It was one of those nights when it was really impossible to see one's hand in front of one's face.

Without interruption the three officers gained the shelter of one of the boats slung inboard with davits. Here, eight feet above the deck, they were in comparative safety. Groping in the stern-sheets Denbigh found what he expected—a hand lead-line.

Keeping the weighted end in the boat he dropped the coils overboard. Caught by the swirling current the line trailed out astern. His next task was to lower the boat's painter, which was to form a means of getting down into the punt.

Stealthily the sub lowered himself hand over hand until his feet touched the water.

"Good heavens, what a current!" he thought. "Well, if the lead-line parts it will be an end to this little business. Here goes!"

He slipped softly into the river, striking out against the current, and at the same time allowing the rush of water to sweep him down across the bows of the punt, which was about a hundred feet from the place where he had descended.

Suddenly something flicked across his head. It was the trailing lead-line. Grasping it he allowed himself to be carried past the side of the ship until he came within reach of the punt, which was made fast to the lizard of one of the swinging booms.

Still retaining the line Denbigh clambered over the stern. The punt was yawing in the tideway. He could see that it would be impossible to haul it against the stream unless he kept well off.

He groped for'ard. In the bluff stem he found a metal ring-bolt. Through this he passed the lead-line, making fast to another ring-bolt in the transom.

So far so good. His next step was to cut adrift the unwieldy little craft. Released from the hold of the two ropes the punt swung away from the ship's side, but showed little tendency to yaw.

Slowly Denbigh began to haul in the lead-line. Foot by foot the punt crept up-stream. Trimmed well by the stern she towed lightly, but the securing line was none too strong. His journey to the place where he had entered the water seemed interminable, but at length Denbigh felt the trailing painter of the boat in the davits.

He made fast. As he did so the punt swung in towards the ship's side, her gunwale making a resounding sound as it came in contact with the steel plating.

He could hear men's footsteps approaching. Through the darkness he heard a German sailor enquiring of his companion what the noise was. The fellow expressed his opinion that it was merely a hippopotamus, and the explanation being evidently satisfactory the men went aft once more.

Grasping the painter Denbigh jerked it three times. It was the prearranged signal for his comrades to rejoin him. Silently Armstrong slid down the rope, followed by O'Hara.

By this time they were growing accustomed to the darkness. Denbigh could see the white uniforms of his companions. He wondered whether they would be spotted once the punt drifted away from the ship's side.

Just above his head was a cluster of palm branches, suspended in a line from the rail.

"I'll take the liberty of removing some of their floral decorations," mused Denbigh. Then signing to his companions to lie down he covered them with the broad leaves, cut the log-line, and allowed the punt to drift at the



mercy of the strong ebb-tide.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Disappointment

"Any oars on board?" asked O'Hara, after the frail craft had drifted a few hundred yards down the river.

"Not a suspicion of one," replied Armstrong. "And the bore will be due in about an hour."

"Hands, lads!" exclaimed Denbigh cheerily. "Let us imagine we're taking part in a Fleet regatta."

Leaning over the sides the men paddled with their hands, steering a course obliquely with the left bank of the river.

Once the punt tilted alarmingly as a dark heavy body rasped underneath. The denizens of the river were in evidence. The officers prudently suspended operations until the unwelcome intruder had disappeared.

"Hulloa, what's that?" whispered the Irishman. "Hippos right across the river."

The punt was bearing down upon a line of dark objects that were apparently forging ahead against the swift current.

"Back starboard!" ordered Denbigh promptly.

The punt, checked by the resistance of O'Hara's palms in the water, swung sideways. As it did so Denbigh gathered up the slack of the severed lead-line that still remained on board.

Retaining the ends he threw the bight across one of the black objects, at the same time lying at full length on the bottom of the boat. With a jerk that wellnigh capsized the crank craft the punt's way was checked.

"Your hippos are barrels, old man!" he exclaimed.

"Mines, perhaps," suggested Armstrong. "Be careful, for goodness sake."

"Not mines," declared Denbigh. "They wouldn't be floating on the surface. But it's some infernal contrivance. Haul closer and we'll investigate."

Warding off the gunwale from the plunging barrel Denbigh dipped his arm into the water. His hand came in contact with a heavy chain eighteen inches beneath the surface.

"A boom!" he announced. "By Jove! If we had a slab of gun-cotton handy."

"Hist!" exclaimed O'Hara warningly. "I can hear voices."

"It's time for us to go," whispered Armstrong.

Denbigh cast off. The barrel appeared to leap away from them, as the punt was swept down-stream.

"Not much use attempting to land at this point," said Armstrong.

"I don't know so much about that," rejoined Denbigh. "Personally I'm rather anxious to see what these fellows are doing ashore. Keep her going, Pat. We'll strike the bank in less than half a mile."

Paddling in silence the men pursued their tedious course athwart the current until a dull roar was borne to their ears.

"The bore!" exclaimed Armstrong.

"It will be quite ten minutes before it reaches us," replied Denbigh. "Stick to it, lads!"

The amphibians, with the keen instinct that nature bestowed upon them, also were aware of the approach of the foaming mass of water, for the centre of the river was literally alive with hippopotami and saurians that had not gone ashore for a nocturnal ramble. The crocodiles on the mud-flats were either making for deep water or else crawling higher up the banks out of the rush of the irresistible bore.

"Aground!" exclaimed Denbigh as the punt's bows touched the mud. "Check her from swinging round."

Armstrong promptly jumped overboard, to sink above his knees in the soft mud. Only by holding on to the gunwale was he able to keep himself from sinking still deeper.

"We can't land here," he announced. "We'll be in up to our necks."

"Must," declared Denbigh laconically, raising his voice to enable it to be heard above the now loud roar of the approaching bore.

Seizing the lead-line and bending one end round his waist Denbigh leapt overboard, threw himself at full length upon the mud, and working with his hands drew himself laboriously over the slimy surface. It was horribly exhausting work, but to his intense satisfaction he found himself making visible progress without sinking beyond a few inches in the ooze.

Ahead he could discern the dark outlines of the mangrove forest. It seemed an interminable distance away.

Presently his hand came in contact with the trunk of a tree, that had fallen and had been partly embedded in the mud. It afforded a precarious foothold, but proceeding carefully, Denbigh found that the farther end rested in comparatively firm soil.

Planting his feet against the trunk, the sub hauled at the lead-line with all his might. The flat-bottomed punt glided easily over the slime until its bows were within a yard of the fallen tree. Then, unexpectedly, the rope that had rendered such good service parted like pack-thread.

Denbigh, losing his balance, fell prostrate on the ground, which was here soft enough to break his fall but sufficiently stiff to prevent him from being swallowed up in the mud.

Quickly O'Hara and Armstrong jumped, and grasping their fallen comrade hauled him to his feet. They had barely time to gain the firm bank when the bore thundered past, sweeping the punt away like a straw. They had a momentary glimpse of its bows rearing high in the air on the crest of the foaming, breaking wall of water, then it vanished out of sight.

"Phew!" exclaimed Armstrong. "That was a narrow squeak."

"I'm in a horrible mess," announced Denbigh. "The mud of Portsmouth Harbour is eau de Cologne compared with this filthy slime."

"Good heavens, man! you're shivering," declared O'Hara. "That won't do. Here, take my coat. I don't want it. I insist."

Waving aside Denbigh's objections the Irishman made him take off his saturated garments, while the rest of the deficiency of the sub's wardrobe was temporarily made good by making use of Armstrong's silk scarf as a loin-cloth. The men realized that in the deadly African climate dry clothing was of utmost importance. The sub's saturated and mud-encaked garments were made up into a bundle to be washed and dried at the first opportunity.

"Now," said Denbigh, "I feel like a giant refreshed. We've plenty of time, for it's no use getting to the coast before sunrise. If you fellows like to wait here I'll go up along the banks and see what is at the shore end of that chain."

"It isn't going to be a one-man show," objected O'Hara. "We'll all have a chip in. You lead, if you will, old man."

I'll follow just far enough behind to keep you in view. Armstrong, will you bring up the rear?"

In single file and extended order the three officers made their way towards their objective. Keeping just below high-water mark they found the ground easy to walk upon, and, with one exception, free from the presence of crocodiles.

One huge brute barred their path, but on Denbigh hurling a heavy stick in its direction, the saurian turned and waddled towards the water.

Noiselessly, for the soft ground effectually deadened the sound of their footsteps, the daring explorers advanced.

Suddenly a hoarse voice broke the silence with a guttural "Wer da?"

Without a moment's hesitation Denbigh dropped gently to the ground. His companions followed his example, holding their breath in momentary expectation of hearing a bullet whizzing over their heads.

"It's all right, Schlutze," replied a voice. "The leutenant sent me to bring some more hands down. There's a boat broken adrift. She's grinding against the end of the torpedo-station pier."

"What boat?" asked the sentry, recovering his rifle.

"I do not know. It's empty."

"Not an English boat?" asked the man anxiously.

"When the English do venture they will attempt the attack with something bigger, my friend. The bigger the better, for they will never be able to pass here, with our excellent torpedo-tubes trained across the river. But I must be moving. Herr leutenant is in a great hurry. He does not want his piers damaged."

Denbigh remained lying on the ground. He waited until half a dozen Germans passed within twenty yards of him. He could hear their heavy boots clattering on the planks of the foliage-screened pier, although the structure was invisible from where he lay.

Finding that it would be too risky a business to attempt to pass the sentry, Denbigh crawled back to O'Hara, and by signs indicated that he was going into the forest. The three comrades, keeping close together, turned their backs upon the river and were soon swallowed up in the dense foliage.

Maintaining his direction by means of his spirit-compass, Denbigh held on until he came upon a clearing. Here the ground was furrowed with deep ruts. They had evidently been caused by the recent passage of heavy objects drawn upon rough sleighs. The dew-steeped ground bore the impress of many booted feet as well as, to a lesser extent, those of natives.

"They've been lugging up the quick-firers," mentally commented Denbigh. "I wonder where they've hidden them? Wish to goodness they hadn't employed niggers. I don't mind getting on the track of a Hun, but the blacks have an awkward trick of turning the tables upon a fellow when it comes to following a spoor."

He waited, revolving in his mind the problem that confronted him. His companions stood motionless and silent. They, too, realized that danger lurked in the dense bush.

Again Denbigh consulted his compass. The track on his left hand lay in a north-westerly direction. Assuming that it ran fairly straight, it would open out at the river banks in the vicinity of the temporary piers. In the other direction it showed a tendency to curve to the north-east.

"I'll try the right-hand track," decided the sub. "I suppose it will be out of the question to get those two obstinate fellows to remain here."

He put the proposal in dumb show, but both O'Hara and Armstrong vigorously protested against being left

behind.

The three officers again took shelter in the bush, keeping close and parallel to the beaten track. Twenty minutes' steady progress brought them to the edge of a large clearing. By the compass their direction was now due west, showing that they had described a large semicircle. They were now not far from the river. They could hear the swirl of the flood-tide. Towards the centre of the clearing were several indistinct objects that looked like gun-emplacements. Through the darkness came the sound of men's voices. A dog yelped, and was instantly told to be silent.

"This is no place for us," thought Denbigh. "Much as I should like to see what is over there, I think we'll shift. I'll try and see how this clearing bears for the river."

Fifty yards farther on progress was barred by a line of young trees. Groping, the sub attempted to find a gap, but to his surprise the stem he grasped gave way. It was merely the top of a palm tree lopped off and forced into the ground. The whole row was merely a screen to mask the guns from the river.

As the sub scrambled through the gap his foot tripped against a concealed wire, and a spurt of red flame stabbed the darkness accompanied by the sharp crack of a rifle.

Resisting the impulse to take to their heels the three officers backed cautiously into the forest. Already numbers of men were hurrying to the spot. Lights flashed upon the scene, revealing the presence of two searchlight projectors set up on platforms almost above the heads of the British fugitives.

In the confusion, for the German officers and men were shouting and aimlessly running hither and thither, Denbigh and his companions withdrew, until they found themselves at the place where a couple of hours previously they had landed from the punt.

"Full speed ahead!" exclaimed Denbigh. "It will be dawn by the time we reach the shore of the lagoon. I think we've seen enough to enable us to locate the enemy's shore defences."

"Through the forest, or by the river?" asked O'Hara.

"Both," replied his chum. "Two miles farther down-stream is the spot where we landed from the *Myra*. I can recognize it. You remember what we buried there?"

"Rather," replied the Irishman. "The rifle and the ammunition we took from von Eckenstein's man."

"It will come in jolly handy if we fall foul of more wild animals," continued Denbigh. "When we've recovered the rifle we'll follow the same track as we did previously. Let's hope we'll be in time to warn our cruisers, for from all appearances von Riesser hasn't played himself out just yet."

"You're taking into consideration the possibility that the Germans have left an observation post at the entrance to the river?" asked Armstrong.

"Rather," replied Denbigh. "Even if they hadn't posted a guard they'll have made arrangements with the natives to give them the tip. Best leg forward, lads. If we fail to see the White Ensign before another six hours have passed I shall be horribly disappointed."

In spite of Denbigh's assurances the men had great difficulty in locating the spot where the rifle and ammunition had been hidden. The lack of moonlight altered the appearance of the river completely. Landmarks and bearings were useless in the darkness; but at length the weapon was recovered little the worse for its experience. Having cleaned the dirt from the muzzle, the breech-mechanism having been protected when it was buried, O'Hara took possession of the rifle and the journey was resumed.

The short African dawn was breaking as the three officers reached the low cliffs overlooking the lagoon.

A grunt of disappointment burst from Denbigh's lips. The morning mists had dispersed. The whole of the reef was plainly visible. The horizon was unbroken by any object that could be recognized as a British warship.

Unaccountably the blockading squadron had disappeared.

## CHAPTER XIX

### "Our Luck's Out"

"That's done it!" ejaculated O'Hara.

"Perhaps," admitted Denbigh. "We'll have some grub and discuss the situation. It's good to sniff the open sea, after being cooped up in that pestilential river. That's one consolation."

The three chums ate sparingly, supplementing the provisions with the milk of a coco-nut. The soda-water was by common consent kept intact.

As soon as the sun's rays acquired strength Denbigh washed his mud-encrusted clothes in the sea and spread them out to dry.

"What's the programme?" asked Armstrong. "If we hang about here we stand a chance of getting nabbed. Our flight will have been discovered by this time, and they'll naturally conclude that we've made off towards the mouth of the river."

"Unless they conclude, from finding the punt jammed alongside the pier, that we've been slung out and drowned," rejoined Denbigh. "But we'll take no needless chances. We'll go north. Once we pass the clearing where the native village stands the coast ought to be fairly clear, and we can still command a view of the entrance to the lagoon."

Without incident the three officers made their way for nearly three miles along the coast. By this time the intense heat was making itself felt, and at O'Hara's suggestion they retreated to the cool of the forest, taking turns at keeping watch.

During the afternoon a native canoe appeared round a projecting bluff. The men had been fishing, for they brought a goodly haul on shore. Dragging the frail craft above high-water mark the blacks vanished in the direction of the village.

O'Hara, who was keeping watch, astonished his companions by giving them each a violent shake.

"What's wrong?" asked Denbigh, awake and alert in an instant.

"Nothing," replied the imperturbable Irishman.

"Then why this thussness?"

"Are you keen on a sea voyage?"

"A sea voyage?" repeated Denbigh.

"To Latham Island."

"Do you propose swimming there?" asked Armstrong with considerable asperity, for he had been disturbed in the midst of a much-needed sleep.

"There's a canoe awaiting us," reported O'Hara. "The sea's calm. To-night's the night. You told me that the *Pelikan's* people left a whaler and plenty of provisions and stores hidden on the island. With luck we ought to be able to fetch there, resurrect the boat, and make a dash for Zanzibar. We'd have the S.W. monsoon with us all the way, and if we fell in with one of our ships so much the better."

"Where's your precious discovery?" asked Denbigh.

Accompanying his chum to the edge of the cliff O'Hara pointed out the canoe.

"H'm, not much of a craft to make a voyage to a sandbank twenty-three miles from land," remarked Denbigh.

"We can work inside the lagoon for several miles and then keep close inshore until we reach Ras What's-its-name," continued O'Hara optimistically. "I've seen these native canoes miles out to sea before to-day. They seem pretty seaworthy."

While daylight lasted the three chums rested, after taking the precaution of gathering a supply of coco-nuts and roots. The subs eyed the latter with misgivings, in spite of Armstrong's assurances that they were both edible and nourishing.

As soon as the sun had set behind the boundless mangrove forests the daring trio made their way to the spot where the canoe was lying. The craft was about twenty-four feet in length, but only four in beam. With her half-dozen short paddles, a mast and sail, suitable only for running before the wind, and a stone jar half-full of water. Owing to the porosity of the earthenware the liquid was remarkably cool. A few lengths of net completed the equipment, but these were considerably left behind, since there was no need for unnecessary spoliation of the natives, even though they were, perhaps unwillingly, subjects of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The canoe was light enough to enable the three men to carry her down to the water's edge. Without delay they pushed off and headed for the reef.

Here, on the lee side of the extensive coral ledge, they were in comparative safety. The long line of foaming breakers thundering up the reef afforded a guide to the position of the ledges; it deadened all other sounds, and since no native boats would be likely to indulge in night fishing, there was little risk of detection.

"We have company, you see," remarked Armstrong, pointing to a phosphorescent swirl less than twenty yards astern. The disturbance of the placid water was caused by the dorsal fin of a huge shark, that, scenting a possible prey, was zigzagging in the wake of the frail canoe.

"We do so want to lose you; and we think you ought to go'," misquoted O'Hara, laying down his paddle and grasping his rifle.

"Hold on!" cautioned the mate. "You'll not only bring up every shark in the lagoon to make a meal of this beauty, but you'll arouse every native within hearing distance. Don't fire unless the brute gets too attentive; then use your pistol. It makes much less of a flash and report."

Hour after hour passed. The men took turns at paddling, since there was not a breath of wind. The shark still kept doggedly in company. As the canoe drew farther and farther away from the entrance to the Mohoro River the miasmatic mists gradually dispersed, until the three officers found themselves under a bright starlit sky, and on the placid surface of the lagoon there seemed one blaze of reflected brilliance.

"It looks as if we are nearing the northern limit of the lagoon," remarked Denbigh. "We'd better keep a sharp look-out for a passage through the reef."

"What if we don't find one?" asked Armstrong. "The last gap of any size we passed quite three miles astern."

"There's an opening of sorts," announced O'Hara, pointing to a dark patch in the otherwise unbroken line of surf. "My word! I believe there's a spanking breeze outside."

"Steady there!" cautioned Denbigh, as the frail craft approached the opening, through which long undulations sullenly rolled in from the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean. "If we get capsized heaven help us. Our old friend has brought up a few more of his pals."

The sub was justified in advising caution. Half a dozen sharks were close to the canoe. Emboldened by numbers, they swam around in ever-decreasing circles, until one monster, braver than the rest, rasped his skin along the side of the canoe.

As the craft tilted O'Hara aimed a blow at the brute with his paddle. With a swift movement of its powerful tail the shark disappeared, only to rise again and resume its embarrassing attentions.



"If those brutes' instinct isn't at fault there'll be a pretty mess-up," thought Denbigh. "They evidently have seen native canoes upset in the channel through the reef before to-day."

"Think it's worth while risking it?" asked O'Hara.

"No, I don't," replied his chum bluntly.

"We must hang on till daybreak, then," said Armstrong. "At dead-low water there may be a trifle less swell."

"Yes," assented Denbigh. "We'll land on the lee side of the reef. Gently with her; we don't want to be stove in against a sharp branch of coral."

Without accident the landing was accomplished. The adventurers found themselves on a broad part of the reef that was barely three feet above the surface. Seaweed and driftwood had already accumulated, showing that the coral was now only occasionally invaded by the sea. Fifty yards away the surf broke heavily, but fortunately they were out of range of the falling spray.

Almost in silence the three chums sat until the sun rose in a grey sky above the horizon. Overhead a few large birds flew seaward—both circumstances presaging a fine day.

The tide had now fallen, and, although there were several feet of water in the channel, a detached reef about a hundred yards from the main coral ledge, which had uncovered as the tide fell, completely broke the breakers for some distance on either side of its seaward end.

"All aboard!" ordered Denbigh. "With luck we'll fetch Latham Island well before sunset."

Broad on the port bow rose Ras Kimbiji, which Denbigh recognized by a peculiarly-rounded and isolated hill rising two miles beyond the point.

From this cape, he knew, Latham Island bore 23 miles due east.

"Step the mast, Pat!" he exclaimed. "The breeze is well in our favour. One thing, we are not over-canvased."

Therein he was mistaken, for the small spread of sail was more than sufficient to endanger the stability of the canoe. Since there were no reef points recourse had to be made to a "Spanish reef", which consists in gathering in a generous amount of one corner of the canvas and tying it into a knot. Even then the little craft literally bounded over the water. Before the S.W. monsoon Denbigh calculated her speed at seven or eight knots.

At the end of three hours the breeze increased, and the sail had to be still further reduced. Not daring to stand upright, the sub's range of vision was considerably limited. He was beginning to think that a slight error in the compass course had taken them past the low-lying and almost invisible sandbank for which they were steering.

"Breakers ahead!" shouted Armstrong.

For nearly five minutes the gaze of all three men was directed upon a patch of white foam in the midst of the dark-blue waters.

Then Denbigh broke the silence.

"We can finish off that soda-water now," he said. "That's Latham Island."

They drained the bottle. There was now no need to husband their scanty resources. Ahead lay the sandbank on which were hidden provisions in plenty.

"Down rag and out paddles!" ordered Denbigh.

The sail was quickly stowed and the mast unshipped. Under paddles the canoe was urged towards the lee side of the island, where a landing was easily effected.

Dragging the canoe above high-water mark the three chums, wellnigh "baked" by the heat, sat down upon the hard ground. Shelter there was none. The whole of the white surface simmered in the rays, both direct and reflected, of the tropical sun.

"Honestly I don't feel like work," remarked O'Hara. "It's too beastly hot. Besides, we've anticipated our timetable considerably. The sun's not crossed the meridian yet."

"It's a toss-up whether we set to at once or wait. In any case we stew," said Armstrong. "I vote we dig for an hour and knock off for the early afternoon."

"Yes," assented Denbigh. "That will, I think, be the better way. So bestir yourself, Pat."

"Where's the spot?" asked the mate.

"Almost at the other end of the island," replied Denbigh. "I can recognize it from the position of that jagged reef. Bring the paddles, they'll make excellent sand scoops."

Across the glistening sand they made their way until the three men came simultaneously to a dead stop.

Other diggers had preceded them, for where the whaler and the stores had been hidden was a large, partly-silted-up cavity.

The versatile Irishman was the first to break the silence.

Throwing his paddle to the ground he ejaculated:

"Dash it all! Our luck's out this time."

## CHAPTER XX

### Adrift in the Indian Ocean

"Wish to goodness we hadn't been so prodigal with our provisions," said Denbigh as the three chums ruefully surveyed the excavation. "It will be short commons, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Armstrong.

"Unless the fellows who have forestalled us have omitted to remove all the stuff."

"It looks as if they've made a clean sweep of most of the gear and burnt what they couldn't move. They've evidently poured petrol over the place and set fire to it. Now, what was the object?"

"Perhaps a landing-party from one of our ships destroyed the cache," suggested O'Hara.

"Possibly," replied his chum. "But, on the other hand, unlikely. It's my opinion that some of the Germans, finding that the *Pelikan* was held up, have made a dash for the island. In that case it is reasonable to suppose that they have fitted out the whaler, and are either making tracks for some navigable river lower down the coast or else they will attempt to capture the first tramp they fall in with."

"Not much chance of escaping capture themselves," said Armstrong.

"I don't know. Remember the case of the *Ayesha* with the *Emden's* landing-party. They managed to fetch home all the way from the Cocos Keeling Islands. These fellows, with luck, might reach Batavia and be interned by the Dutch Colonial Government."

"And here are we stranded on a desolate sandbank, with precious little grub in the locker," remarked Armstrong. "There's one consolation. We have a boat."

"Of sorts," rejoined the Irishman. "Since she brought us here she ought to take us back to the mainland, although it will be dead to windward."

"What's wrong with Zanzibar?" asked the mate. "It's only about fifty miles to the nor'-west. We've a breeze slightly abaft the beam. She'll do it all right, especially if we take some sand aboard as ballast."

"Right," assented O'Hara. "Let's make a start. It's a howling pity to lose the breeze, and it's a jolly sight cooler on the water than on this sun-baked sandbank."

Quickly the new plan was put into operation. The canoe was launched, and about three hundred-weights of sand thrown into her. On re-embarking the crew found that their frail craft was considerably "stiffer", and showed no great tendency to capsize when one of their number stood upright. In her ballasted state more sail could be carried, and, what was more, she could be steered a point closer to the wind.

All went well until about three in the afternoon, when, with disconcerting suddenness, the wind died utterly away. The crisp, crested waves subsided into a long, sullen, oily swell. The canoe, without steerage way, floated idly upon the water.

"Out paddles!" ordered Denbigh. "You and I, Pat, will take the first trick. At every thousand strokes one man will be relieved. Ready?"

Counting, the sub knew, was the only means at their disposal for arriving at an equal division of labour. It also gave them a rough indication of the progress made, since each stroke represented a distance of two yards through the water.

"See anything?" asked Denbigh at length.

O'Hara, who was by this time at the steering paddle, stood up, and shading his eyes looked ahead in the hope of seeing the friendly rising ground of Zanzibar Island peeping above the horizon.

"Nothing," was the reply, "except that there's a breeze coming."

As the freshening wind swept down the men thankfully laid aside their paddles and set up the mast and sail. For a few minutes the breeze held true, then swiftly veering it blew dead ahead.

Once more the sail was lowered and the paddles resumed. With the wind dead in their teeth the work was trebly increased.

Within half an hour it blew with considerable violence.

"Force six, at least," declared Denbigh, referring to the Beaufort Notation method of indicating the wind-pressure. "We're in for a dusting."

It was as much as they could do to keep the lightly made craft head to wind. Armstrong was busily engaged in throwing overboard the sand ballast. Drifting before the wind the canoe was in danger either of being swamped or else carried out into the broad Indian Ocean.

The men were already exhausted. The canoe was drifting rapidly in spite of their strenuous efforts. Yet she climbed the crest wave with an ease that gave them confidence. The loss of "ground", made good only by hours of sheer hard work, was the circumstance that troubled them most.

"We'll rig a sea-anchor," said the mate. "Unfortunately we haven't any weights to keep the sail up and down, but that can't be helped."

Quickly the foot of the sail was bent to the mast, the sheets were bent to the extremities of the spar by a span, and the halyard led from the centre of the span to the bows of the canoe.

Watching their opportunity the men heaved their clumsy sea-anchor overboard and anxiously waited the result.

To their intense satisfaction they found that directly the rope took the strain the canoe floated head to wind without any assistance on the part of the paddles. The crew were, therefore, able to rest, but with the disquieting knowledge that every moment they were drifting farther and farther away from their desired haven.

The three officers were in good spirits notwithstanding the privations they had undergone and were still experiencing. They realized that this was part of the game. They had taken chances, and fate, in the shape of a strong head wind, had been unkind to them. The idea of mutual recriminations never occurred to them. Their adventure was of the nature of a joint-stock concern. They had done their best, and were ready to stand by each other till the end in whatever form it came.

For some hours O'Hara and Armstrong dozed fitfully on the bottom of the canoe, regardless of the spray that dashed over their recumbent forms. Denbigh, crouched aft, kept an occasional look-out, while at intervals he baled with half a coco-nut shell.

The sea showed no signs of moderating. The prospect of spending a night afloat in a mere cockle-shell became imminent.

Just then the sub heard a faint cry. He looked in the direction from whence the shout came, but could see nothing. He was about to put it down to a freak of his imagination when the cry was repeated.

Fifty yards or more to leeward was a man hanging on to an upturned boat.

"Wake up, you fellows!" exclaimed Denbigh. "There's someone overboard."

Seizing the paddles O'Hara and the mate checked the drift of the canoe until its course would bring it close to the upturned craft.

"Steady!" cautioned Denbigh. "As close as you can to her bows."

His ready mind grasped the situation. Could he but effect a communication with the waterlogged craft a double purpose might be served.

Down swept the canoe. As her quarter slipped past the boat Denbigh leant over the side. With one hand he staved off the sharp stem, the metal-bound edge of which would have crushed the side of the canoe like an egg-shell. With the other he grasped the painter, which was trailing from the bow ring-bolt.

"Stand by and take a turn!" he shouted to the mate, throwing him the slack of the rope.

Promptly Armstrong, who was up for'ard, made the running part of the painter fast to the rope of the sea-anchor. With a jerk the canoe brought up fifty feet to leeward of the waterlogged boat.

Here, sheltered by the latter, and with her drift apparently reduced, the canoe was in relatively smooth water. The unfortunate seaman, rallying his remaining energies, struck out. Almost exhausted, he was on the point of sinking when Denbigh seized him by the hair.

It was a difficult matter to get the man into the canoe. He was a great hulking fellow. The safety of the three officers was gravely endangered, but proceeding with the utmost caution they hoisted him over the side.

"Do you recognize him?" asked Denbigh.

"Eh?" exclaimed his chum. "No; do you?"

"Rather," replied the sub. "He's one of the *Pelikan's* mob, and yonder craft is the whaler I saw buried on Latham Island. I'm afraid they haven't had much of a run for their money. But what's one man's meat is another man's poison. The whaler may prove a godsend."

"She will," rejoined Armstrong. "See, she acts as a perfect breakwater. We must be almost stationary, owing to her drag in the water."

"Even more than that," added Denbigh. "I propose when the weather moderates to have a shot at righting her. Since they provisioned her we are bound to find some tinned food in her after locker, for I don't suppose the whole lot of her gear was slung out when she capsized."

The sole survivor of the whaler's party was not long in recovering consciousness. His surprise at finding that his rescuers were the British officers whom he had last seen as prisoners on board the *Pelikan* was almost ludicrous. Soon he became communicative, and confirmed the sub's surmise that the whaler was bent on a minor raiding expedition.

The long night passed slowly. The last of the food supply had been exhausted. A few coco-nuts, which being freshly gathered contained liquid only, formed the sole sustenance of the four men.

With the dawn the wind fell but the sea still ran high. Eagerly the horizon was scanned, but nothing save a waste of tossing water met the eye.

"In another hour or so we'll be able to have a shot at righting the whaler," said Denbigh. "By that time the sea will have subsided. If you don't mind, you fellows, I'll have a caul. I have more arrears to make up than you have."

Quite worn out Denbigh stretched himself on the bottom of the canoe and dropped off into a sound sleep. It seemed to him that he had not closed his eyes more than half a minute when the mate roused him.

"What are those beacons on our starboard bow, do you think?" he asked.

Denbigh was awake in an instant. Looking in the direction indicated he saw three triangular objects at a distance of nearly three miles away.

One glance was enough.

"Pat, you chump!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me you don't know what they are? And you must needs make Armstrong wake me out of my beauty sleep."

"Hanged if I can see hardly anything," announced the Irishman. "The salt's bunged my eyes up completely. What about it, then?"

"Those beacons, as you call them, Armstrong," replied Denbigh joyously, "are the tripod masts of three of our monitors."

"They are heading our way, then?" asked the mate.

"Either that or they're stern on to us. The former most likely. Stand by with the rifle. We must not let them miss us."

In about half an hour the three warships had approached sufficiently for their outlines to be discerned. They were moving at a slow pace—barely five knots. All that was visible of each of the monitors consisted of a low-lying hull of great beam, on which was placed a turret mounting two gigantic guns. Aft the turret was a small superstructure, culminating in a bridge and chart-house. Immediately behind the bridge rose a lofty tripod mast, its height being seemingly out of all proportion to those conforming to the recognized measurements of naval architecture. Perched above the junction of the tripods was a large square structure whence the fire-control arrangements were conducted, while a stumpy topmast completed the incongruity. Aft the mast was a single funnel. Two of the monitors were evidently sister-ships. The third was of a much smaller tonnage, although her armament was identical with that of her consorts.

"They're passing to windward of us," declared Denbigh. "Give them a couple of rounds."

Armstrong raised the rifle and fired. Almost immediately following the second shot a signal was run up from the leading monitor. Up fluttered the answering pendant to the mast of the smaller vessel, which immediately altered helm and bore down upon the canoe.

Slowly the rescuing craft approached. Her superstructure was crowded with interested spectators, while several of the crew, wading knee-deep, made their way to the submerged side of the monitor and stood by to pick up the derelicts.

The operation required great care for the unwieldy craft was yawing horribly. Being almost as broad in the beam as she was long, and snub-nosed in addition, she steered badly. By good seamanship on the part of her captain the monitor lost way at a distance of half a cable from the canoe.

"Cast off and out paddles!" ordered Denbigh.

Five minutes later willing hands assisted the three British officers and the German sailor to the ladder leading to the superstructure.

With feelings of thankfulness Denbigh, mustering his remaining energies, saluted the diminutive quarter-deck. It seemed almost heavenly to be once more under the shadow of the White Ensign. As he raised his hand to the brim of his weather-worn helmet a well-known voice exclaimed:

"Cheer oh! old man."

## CHAPTER XXI

### Von Eckenstein's Surprise

The speaker was Charles Stirling, now lieutenant and Acting-commander of H.M.S. *Crustacean*.

Stirling had literally fallen on his feet after he had been rescued by H.M.S. *Actæon*. Owing to his intimate knowledge of the East Coast of Africa and the Mozambique Channel, and having more than a nodding acquaintance with the troublesome raider now known to be in hiding in the Mohoro River, he had been given temporary command of the smallest of the three monitors sent from England to assist in the operations against German East Africa.

Notwithstanding his natural anxiety to learn how his former shipmates came to be adrift in a canoe in the Indian Ocean, Stirling insisted on Denbigh, O'Hara, and Armstrong being put into the sick-bay. All three men were almost exhausted. Even Denbigh's indomitable spirit had outworn his physical strength, while the Irishman was found to be affected with partial indistinctness of vision owing to prolonged exposure to the glare of the sun.

"You take it easy," was Stirling's parting injunction. "I promise I'll turn you out directly we sight the Mohoro Lagoon."

Reassured, Denbigh and his comrades in peril capitulated. Eighteen hours' solid sleep worked wonders, and although the Irishman was still suffering from painful inflammation of the optic nerve, the three officers had bathed, shaved, and changed into borrowed plumage before breakfast-time on the following morning.

After scraps of mutual experiences had been exchanged Stirling invited his chums to the bridge.

"The rummiest packet I ever set foot on," he admitted, "but she's a clinker. We've as fine a pair of 14-inch guns as a fellow could wish for. British made, too; they were manufactured in Canada. The old *Crustacean* does not belie her name. She has a decided tendency to crawl crabwise, and she's as unhandy as a balsa-raft in a gale of wind."

"Not very good points," remarked O'Hara.

"But she has her qualifications, Pat. She's said to be torpedo-proof——"

"Do you want a practical test, old man?" asked Denbigh.

"Um—no; that is, not particularly if it can be avoided. Why?"

"Because there are a pair of 60-centimetre tubes waiting to have a slap at you when you ascend the Mohoro River."

"Steady, old man," protested Stirling with a hearty laugh. "The river's not broad enough for the *Pelikan* to be lying athwart the stream. She must be quite twenty miles up the river."

"Say ten and you'll be nearer the mark," declared Denbigh. "She's trapped, and we have to thank Mr. Armstrong for doing the trick."

"Good man!" exclaimed the young skipper of the *Crustacean*, bringing his hand down upon the shoulder of the bashful mate of the *Myra*, after Denbigh had related the circumstances in which the *Pelikan* was prevented from ascending farther up the river. "I'll have to inform Holloway, our senior officer. He's under the same impression that I was. But what did you say about those torpedo-tubes?"

Concisely Denbigh explained the position and nature of the German shore defences.

"It strikes me pretty forcibly that you'll come in most handy," said Stirling. "It's not the *Pelikan* that is now our principal objective. She, apparently, is done for, unless the river forms a fresh bed round the hull of the sunken tramp. The batteries are our pigeon."

"You were saying that the *Crustacean* is practically torpedo-proof," Denbigh reminded him. "In what way?"

"She's of very shallow draught. Unless a torpedo were set to travel only a few feet beneath the surface—in which case much of the bursting power of the war-head would be wasted—the 'tin-fish' would pass harmlessly under her bottom. If, however, a torpedo did explode, there's a cellular space of more than twenty feet between the outer and inner hulls. These compartments are stuffed with something. I can't tell you because I don't know myself what the stuff is. All I know is that it's fireproof and its specific gravity is approximately the same as sea-water. Hence, in the event of a hole being blown in the shell of the outer hull our stability will hardly be affected."

At that moment a signalman approached and saluted.

"Senior officer reports approach of sea-plane parent ship *Simplicita*, sir."

"Very good," replied Stirling, then addressing his companions he added, "That's excellent. We are having a couple of sea-planes to spot for us. The *Simplicita*, an old light cruiser, has been fitted out as a floating base for aerial work. With luck they've managed to stow a couple of 'planes on her."

Before the *Simplicita* joined the flotilla the senior ship hoisted another signal. It ran:

"Boat under sail four miles S.S.W. *Crustacean* to proceed and investigate."

At her utmost speed, a bare six knots, the little monitor altered helm and stood off in the indicated direction. The sea was now calm, and there was hardly a breath of wind.

At Stirling's suggestion Denbigh, O'Hara, and Armstrong ascended to the fire-control platform. From this lofty perch a considerable expanse of sea could be swept by the aid of powerful glasses.

Away on the starboard hand could be discerned the faint outlines of the African coast, almost hidden in a pale-blue haze. Astern, but on a diverging course, were the monitors *Paradox* and *Eureka*, the former flying the broad pendant of the senior officer, Captain Holloway. Ahead, a small patch of greyish-white canvas marked the position of the boat to which the *Crustacean* was proceeding.

"That's not a Service rig," declared Denbigh, proffering his binoculars to O'Hara.

The Irishman waved them aside.

"No, thanks, old man," said he. "I'll wait. I don't want to crock my eyes any more than they are at present. I'll take your word for it that she's not one of our boats."

"She's a merchantman's cutter," asserted Armstrong. "I wouldn't mind laying odds that she's one of the *Pelikan's* boats making for Latham Island."

The mate was right, for on discovering the approach of the monitor the cutter altered her course, lowering her canvas and resorting to her oars in the vain hope that she had been unnoticed.

Twenty minutes later, the difference in speed of the monitor and her quarry being very small, Stirling ordered one of the four quick-firers to be discharged. The projectile, falling within fifty yards of the boat, had the desired result, for the men boated their oars and hoisted a square of white cloth as a signal of surrender.

"We seem fated to fall in with our friends the Huns," remarked Denbigh. "Armstrong has scored a palpable hit; they are some of the *Pelikan's* crowd. I recognize that fellow with a bandaged head as Major von Eckenstein."

Most docilely the boat's crew came over the side. There were, in addition to the major, a junior lieutenant of the *Pelikan* and seven seamen; the rest, to the number of about a dozen, were reservists transhipped from the *San Matias*. The military section had discarded their uniform and wore a motley collection of civilian garb. They were unarmed, having thrown overboard their rifles and ammunition upon the shot being fired to compel them to abandon flight.



The unter-leutnant had previously rehearsed a most plausible story with which to gull the Englishmen, but a look of comical dismay overspread his features when he recognized the officers who a short while ago had been prisoners on board the raider.

At last he mustered up sufficient courage to demand, somewhat haughtily, that he and his men should be accorded honourable treatment as prisoners of war.

"Certainly," replied Stirling blandly. "I am sorry that you should imagine otherwise. But, of course, the fact that Major von Eckenstein and his men have adopted civilian attire tends to put them on a different footing."

Von Eckenstein's face, or as much of it as was visible between the swathed bandages, grew pale. He remembered the incident when he slashed O'Hara across the face. Visions of reprisals rendered him terror-stricken.

"Forgive me, Herr O'Hara!" he almost shouted.

The Irishman smiled affably.

"Forgive?" he echoed. "There is nothing to forgive. You gave O'Hara a cut across the face. It raised quite a small weal. Judging by the state of your figurehead, I'm afraid my treatment of you on the shore of the lagoon rather disturbed the balance of exchange."

"You did this?" asked the major, dumbfounded at the information. "Donnerwetter! I thought——"

Sheer astonishment rendered him incapable of completing the sentence. He could not understand why the British officer received him with unperturbed courtesy. Evidently here was something adrift with the Teutonic gospel of hate.

"So you were making for Latham Island to resurrect the hidden stores?" asked Denbigh, addressing the unter-leutnant.

The young German officer was also completely taken aback.

"Yes," he admitted. "But how came you to know that we had stores buried there?"

"That's a secret," replied the sub. "But I'll tell you this. You would have found yourselves forestalled. Some of the *Pelikan's* men made a dash for the island, fitted out the whaler, and left the place as bare as an empty house. They did not get far. The boat was capsized and all on board perished, except one man, who is now a prisoner on board this vessel."

"Now, gentlemen," broke in Stirling briskly, addressing the major and the unter-leutnant, "I must ask you to go below, but before doing so I will take the liberty of examining the contents of Major von Eckenstein's pockets."

"Himmel!" gasped the major. "For why? According to the rights of belligerents my personal property is not liable to be confiscated."

"Your personal property—yes," replied Stirling. "Come, sir, no fuss, if you please."

Sullenly the German permitted a petty officer to remove the contents of his pockets. There was an order-book, containing a few pencilled memoranda; a pocket-book in which were papers seemingly of purely personal interest; some notes on a South American bank.

"Kindly remove your waistcoat," continued the inexorable Stirling.

Von Eckenstein shrugged his shoulders. If black looks could kill, Stirling was as good as booked to Davy Jones.

"This is a needless indignity," almost howled the Hun.

"On the contrary, a necessary precaution on our part," corrected the skipper of the *Crustacean*.

Sullenly von Eckenstein removed his waistcoat and threw it on the deck. Deliberately opening a penknife Stirling ripped open the back and removed an envelope of oiled silk.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "That is all we require for the present, Herr Major."

Gathering up the rest of his possessions, the major followed his companions in misfortune and disappeared below.

"Confidential orders from Potsdam to the German Governor of the East African Colony," announced Stirling. "Here, Denbigh, have a squint at it and see if I'm not right."

"How ever did you discover this?" asked O'Hara.

"Intuition, my dear old sport," replied Stirling with a laugh. "You told me about the cache on Latham Island. Also, you may remember relating a conversation between this von Eckenstein and Kapitan von Riesser, just before the stores were landed. Von Eckenstein objected—why? Because he thought the hiding-place ought to be on the mainland. He had a rooted objection to making a voyage in a smallboat. Hence it was reasonable to suppose that the Latham Island depot was for the major's particular benefit. The fact that he was forestalled has nothing to do with the main case. The *Pelikan* is in difficulties. Direct communication with the rest of the German land forces is out of the question. So the major is sent off to Latham Island with the Imperial dispatches in his possession. Then the unter-leutnant's instructions are to revictual and replenish stores, and take the major to the mainland, most likely to the Rufigi River. There there is, I believe, fairly easy communication with Tabora, the head-quarters of the German Colonial forces. Seeing us approach, von Eckenstein ought to have destroyed his paper, but he didn't—he trusted to his belief in our natural stupidity. I wouldn't mind betting that now he's bemoaning his fate and admitting that Englishmen are not the fools he supposed them to be."

Which was exactly what the battered and dejected von Eckenstein *was* doing.

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Monitors in Action

All that night the monitors lay, with lights out, off the outer bar of the Mohoro Lagoon. A council of war had been held on board the *Paradox*, when a fresh plan of action was drawn up. This was in consequence of the information Denbigh, O'Hara, and Armstrong had brought concerning the enemy's defences.

"This chart is radically wrong," declared Denbigh, when a chart of that part of the coast was shown to him. "The bend in which the *Pelikan* is lying is not shown. Apparently the topography is from an old survey."

"It is from the latest available information," remarked Captain Holloway, loath to deprecate the work of the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty.

"Available as far as the Germans would permit," corrected the sub deferentially. "They've had full control here for years. I'm not referring to the lagoon, but to the river. The depths, too, are inaccurate."

"I suppose you wouldn't object to a job to-morrow?" asked the senior officer, after he had listened intently to Denbigh's explanations and descriptions of the details of the Mohoro River.

"Not in the least, sir," replied the sub promptly.

"In a sea-plane?"

"Just my mark, sir; but I've had no flying experience."

"We would want you for registering duties," continued Captain Holloway. "You will have a flight sub-lieutenant as pilot. With your knowledge of the shore batteries and torpedo stations you will be able to render further important service. Very good; I'll arrange for the sea-plane to pick you up at dawn; that is, if it is not too misty. These tropical mists play the deuce with aerial observations."

It was arranged that the attack should open at seven on the following morning. The *Crustacean* was to lead the way over the inner bar, and devote her attention to the torpedo station. The *Paradox* was to shell the batteries concealed in the mangrove forest, while the *Eureka* was to patrol the lagoon and to cut off any attempt at flight on the part of the German troops, whose line of retreat would be pretty certain to be along the coast, since the thick forests and marshes to the westward made retirement to the hinterland almost a matter of impossibility.

Two hours before sunrise the crews of the monitors were called to "action" stations. They had previously bathed and changed into clean clothes, and had been given ample time to enjoy their breakfast. Clearing ship for action took but little preparation, since the monitors carried only what was necessary as floating batteries.

At the hour specified a sea-plane taxied gracefully to within fifty feet of the *Crustacean*. A boat was lowered from the monitor, and into this Denbigh stepped, to the accompaniment of the somewhat irrelevant remarks of his brother officers.

"Fine mornin'," was the flight-sub's greeting, as nonchalantly as if he were passing the time of day with a casual acquaintance. "Hop in. You'll find a belt fixed to the back of your seat. There's the wireless gear. See that lever on your left? That releases the paying-out gear of the aerial. Don't pay out too smartly. Ready?"

The blades glittered in the morning light as the propeller revolved and rapidly increased the number of revolutions. Slowly at first, then with accelerated movement, the sea-plane skimmed the placid surface of the lagoon. Then, almost before Denbigh was aware of it, the machine leaped upwards. The slight tilt of the seat was the only intimation that the sea-plane had parted company with the water, until the sub noticed the surface of the lagoon apparently receding with great rapidity.

Round and round spiralled the frail contrivance, tilting with an easy swinging movement as it climbed. Already

the monitors looked no larger than toy boats upon an ornamental pond. The irregular ground on either side of the river was merged into an expanse that betrayed no indication of height. Far beneath him Denbigh could discern a ribbon-like strip of silvery-grey. It was the Mohoro River.

"Distance lends enchantment to the eye," thought the sub. "And it is such a dirty river."

He mused feelingly. In his imagination he sniffed the foetid odours from the torrential yellow stream. He had a mental vision of a swim in the dark, with hippos and crocodiles for company. The reeking mud-flats, too, lay beneath him, their dismal and monotonous aspect obliterated by the charm of altitude.

Above the land the rapidly increasing strength of the morning sun was causing great irregularities in the density of the air. The sea-plane rolled violently. Twice she dropped through a sheer distance of a couple of hundred feet, owing to "air pockets", but the pilot, with the utmost unconcern, held her on her course.

Presently he turned and bawled something. The rush of the wind made his words unintelligible, but he pointed to the aerial release. Denbigh understood, and depressing the lever allowed a hundred and fifty feet of wire to be run off the reel.

Leaning over the side of the fuselage the sub brought his glasses to bear upon the waterway almost beneath him. He could distinguish the fatal bend in the Mohoro River where the *Myra* had turned turtle and had been swallowed up in the shifting sand. He could even discern her outlines as she lay on her side with ten feet of water swirling overhead.

Farther down-stream was something that looked exactly like an island covered with luxurious vegetation. It was the *Pelikan*. The disguise was really admirable. Had Denbigh not known of the means her crew had taken to hide her he would never have detected her presence.

But the *Pelikan's* hour had not yet come. Until the shore batteries and fortifications had been shelled out of existence she was to be left severely alone. With the *Myra's* crew confined on board the raider, the British monitors dare not open fire upon her.

Round circled the sea-plane, gliding down to within five hundred feet of the summit of the mangroves. Everything seemed quiet beneath. The whirl of the propeller and the rush of air deadened all other sounds. Here and there were clearings, like to one another as peas in a pod. For the first time in his life Denbigh felt uncertain.

Again he swept the river with his binoculars. Across the mud-flats, for the tide was now almost on the last of the ebb, he spotted two slender dark lines stretching towards the navigable channel. A little way down was a series of small dark objects thrown athwart the stream. They were the torpedo-piers and the barrels supporting the chain boom. Almost abreast of them was the screened battery.

At a sign from Denbigh the flight-sub trimmed the elevating planes. Up climbed the machine till at an altitude of six thousand feet she was visible from the distant monitors. Then she commenced to cut figures of eight, while Denbigh began to call up the *Paradox* by wireless.

Having made certain that the monitor had gauged the required distance the sea-plane volplaned to within a thousand feet of the ground.

The receiving telephones fixed to Denbigh's ears began to emit faint sounds that in Morse spelt out the words, "Stand by to register".

Twenty seconds later a lurid flash, followed by a terrific cloud of yellow and black smoke, leapt skywards from a spot in the mangroves. In spite of her altitude the sea-plane rocked violently in the torn air. For a moment Denbigh thought that the machine was plunging helplessly to earth.

The gentle tapping of the wireless receiver recalled him to a sense of duty.

"How's that?" spelt the dot-and-dash message.

Where the shell had burst a dozen or more trees had been literally pulverized. Others, their trunks lacerated by the explosion, had toppled at various angles against those that had withstood the shock. The "hit" was roughly two hundred yards beyond the screened battery.

From beneath the foliage covering the emplacements men peeped timorously. A dull-grey figure, bent almost double, was running for shelter. It was one of the German sentries.

"Right direction; two hundred yards over," wirelessed Denbigh.

Another heavy projectile screamed on its way, passing some hundreds of feet beneath the seaplane. It burst; but the sound like that of its predecessor was inaudible to the pilot and observer. The action of the detonating shells reminded Denbigh of an animated photograph, so effectually and silently did the work of destruction appear.

"A hundred yards short," registered the sub.

"Then how's this?" was the rejoinder.

Fairly in the centre of an emplacement fell the twelve-hundred-pound shell. High above the mushroom cloud of smoke flew fragments of wood and metal. When the dense vapour had drifted away in the sultry air it was seen that the work of that gigantic missile was accomplished.

A gaping hole fifty feet in diameter marked the place where the carefully-screened quick-firers had been.

Round the edge of the crater were smouldering sand-bags hurled in all directions like small pebbles. The two guns, dismounted, were sticking up at acute angles in the debris, their mountings shattered into fragments of scrap-iron metal.

There was no sign of life in the crater, nor in the partly uncovered dug-outs in its vicinity, but from a neighbouring position poured swarms of Germans, half-dazed and terrified by the explosion that had shaken their subterranean retreat like a severe earthquake shock.

The *Paradox* had completed her particular job.

Meanwhile a second sea-plane was registering for the *Crustacean*, her guns being directed upon the piers on which the *Pelikan's* torpedo-tubes had been placed.

Without once coming within sight of her objective the little monitor effected her mission with two shots, blowing both torpedo-stations to smithereens.

Nor was the *Eureka* less successful. A shell fired in front of the crowd of demoralized Germans as they fled through the mangroves literally roped them in. Panic-stricken they doubled back and disappeared in the dug-outs close to the wrecked emplacements, and the *Eureka*, having been accordingly informed, ceased firing.

"Now for the *Pelikan*!" exclaimed Stirling, as the sea-plane, having returned, put Denbigh on board the *Crustacean*.

"It will be an affair of boats, I suppose," suggested O'Hara. "With the flood-tide and on a dark night she ought to be captured with little loss to the boarding-party."

Two of the monitors were lying at anchor in the river. The *Eureka*, having to watch the coast, steamed slowly up and down the lagoon, her progress watched by hundreds of awe-stricken natives.

The question of how to deal with the *Pelikan* was under discussion, for Captain Holloway had convened another council of war at eight bells in the afternoon.

The boats carried by the monitors were not fit for cutting-out work, and although a certain means of destruction was at the command of the senior officer, he was reluctant to put his terrible resources into force on account of the presence of the *Myra's* crew on board the raider.

While the discussion was in progress, the majority of officers favouring a suggestion that the light cruisers should be brought up by wireless, a steam launch was reported to be coming down the river.

The launch bore a large white flag flying from a staff in the bows. In her stern-sheets was Ober-leutnant von Langer.

Received with naval honours, a guard being mounted on the quarter-deck of the senior monitor, von Langer came over the side, and announced himself as the representative of Kapitan von Riesser, of H.I.M. ship *Pelikan*.

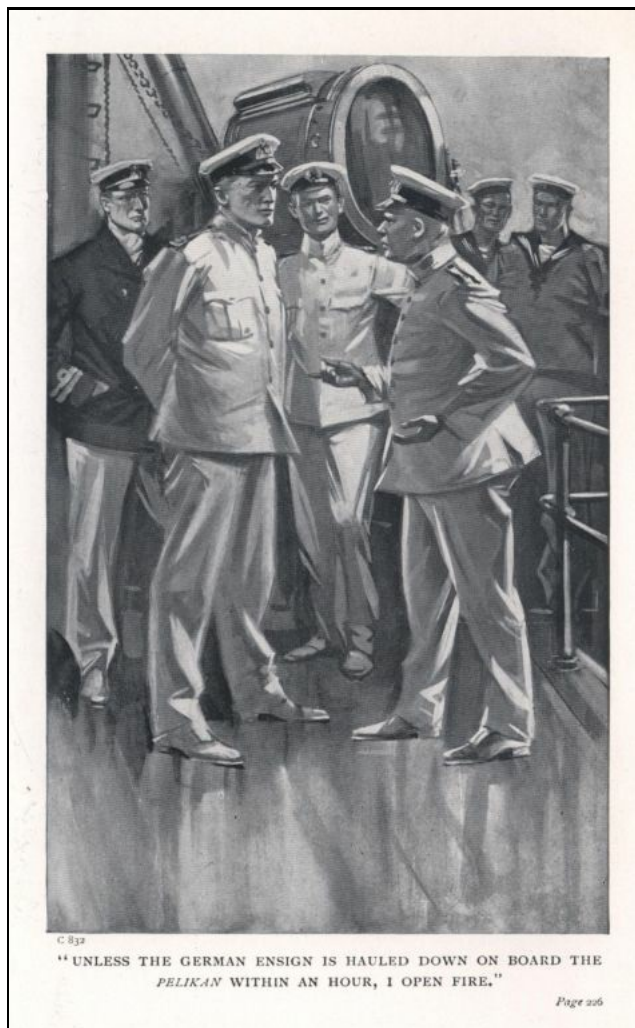
"Well, sir?" asked Captain Holloway briefly.

"I am here to discuss terms," said the ober-leutnant.

"Which must be unconditional surrender of men and material," added the skipper of the *Paradox*.

"Excuse me," said von Langer. "But we are not yet beaten."

"You are precious near it," said Captain Holloway. "Unless the German Ensign is hauled down on board the *Pelikan* within an hour I will open fire."



**"UNLESS THE GERMAN ENSIGN IS HAULED DOWN ON BOARD THE *PELIKAN* WITHIN AN HOUR, I OPEN FIRE."**

"If you do you must remember that there are many English prisoners on board," declared the ober-leutnant with the air of a man who has thrown down his trump card.

"Within one hour, unless the *Pelikan* is surrendered in her present state, without further damage to her stores, equipment, and hull, we open fire," was the British officer's mandate. "Return to your ship at once, Herr Leutnant, and inform Kapitan von Riesser that he must take immediate steps to safeguard his British prisoners, either by sending them down the river or else by placing them in a secure shelter on shore. I shall hold your kapitan and officers morally responsible for any of the *Myra's* crew who may be killed or injured in the forthcoming operations."

"You have yet to find the *Pelikan*," spluttered the German officer.

"Excuse me, sir, she is found," said Captain Holloway. "To show that I am not in the habit of speaking at random I will produce proofs."

He gave an order to a seaman, who doubled off to the quarter-deck companion-ladder. Presently Denbigh, O'Hara, and Armstrong, who during the interview had discreetly gone below, appeared on deck.

The ober-leutnant's jaw dropped. His podgy cheeks quivered with intense surprise.

"Donnerwetter!" he exclaimed. "This is a colossal shock."

With an effort he pulled himself together, clicked his heels and saluted the British senior officer. Then fumbling in his breast pocket he produced a document and handed it to the captain.

It was a formal surrender.

In it Kapitan von Riesser agreed to hand over the *Pelikan* at the hour of nine on the following morning.

"Very good," said Captain Holloway. "We are willing to give you a few hours' respite, but you are to clearly understand that nothing must be done in that interval that will affect the *Pelikan* from a military point of view. You must also send the *Myra's* men down by boat before sunset."

"To that I agree," replied von Langer, and stiffly refusing the invitation to have a glass of wine the German officer went over the side.

Von Langer's steam cutter was barely out of sight when a couple of German officers belonging to the land forces appeared on the bank, bearing a white flag.

Their business was quickly transacted. They desired to surrender forthwith and unconditionally the remaining troops under their command. Within an hour eighty-five men, many of them badly wounded, were shipped on board the sea-plane parent ship *Simplicita*. Out of the three hundred reservists who had transhipped from the *San Matias* to the *Pelikan* but thirty-three were untouched by the British fire.

Well before sunset the first of the conditions of the *Pelikan's* surrender was carried out. The steam cutter returned towing a whaler in which were the crew of the *Myra*. British reticence went by the board when they hove in sight. They cheered frantically like delighted children. Having been under the talons of the German Eagle, they realized more than ever before the world-wide power of Britain's sea-power.

Amongst them was Captain Pennington, who was warmly greeted by the officers of the *Crustacean*.

He reported that the *Pelikan* was being prepared for surrender; that her garb of palms was being removed, but as far as he knew no attempt had been made to throw overboard the remaining guns, or to destroy the stores and munitions.

"And to-morrow," remarked Stirling to his chum—"to-morrow we will redeem these."

And he held out Kapitan von Riesser's receipt for the gold that he had taken from the three subs when they were captured on the *Nichi Maru*.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### How the *Pelikan* Surrendered

As soon as darkness set in the monitors switched on their searchlights, the *Crustacean*, which was farthest upstream, training her projectors on the channel in the direction of the distant *Pelikan*, while the *Paradox* swept both banks with her powerful beams. In the lagoon the *Eureka* and the *Simplicita* directed their searchlights upon the shore.

About one bell in the middle watch the look-out on the *Crustacean* noticed two dark objects drifting downstream. At first he thought them to be a pair of hippopotami, but as their relative distance seemed constant and there was no sign of propulsion, he reported the matter to the officer of the watch.

"It's only a part of the boom, smashed by our shell fire," he remarked casually. "We'll get a lot of wreckage down with the ebb-tide."

Nevertheless he gave orders for the helm to be starboarded. The monitor, sheering to port under the force of the current until her cable was hard athwart her stem, missed the barrels, for such they were, by a good twenty yards. Steadily they drifted by, eventually stranding in the mud at a distance of two hundred yards from the *Paradox*. In half an hour they were high and dry, lying directly in the rays of the larger monitor's searchlight.

Twenty minutes later another pair of barrels came drifting down. The officer of the watch of the *Crustacean* executed a similar manoeuvre, but before the monitor sheered out of the track of the derelicts, the barrels were hung up one on either side of the bows.

"I can hear something ticking, sir," reported a seaman leaning over the low freeboard.

The officer hastened for'ard and listened.

"Nonsense!" he declared. "It's the bull-frogs on shore that you can hear, or else the lap of the water. They're only waterlogged barricoes. Push them clear with a boat-hook."

Three or four seamen tried to free the bows from the obstruction but without success. The barrels afforded little or no grip, and pinned down by the rush of tide refused to be thrown clear.

"Away sea-boat!" ordered the officer of the watch.

Quickly the boat was manned, and rowing well ahead of the *Crustacean*, was allowed to drop stern foremost until the coxswain was able to bend a rope to one of the barrels.

"Can you hear anything, Sanders?" asked the officer of the watch.

"No, sir," replied the petty officer.

As a matter of fact he was suffering from gun deafness, but from praiseworthy yet indiscreet motives he had kept the knowledge of his temporary physical defect to himself.

Ordering the men to give way, the coxswain jerked the obstruction clear of the *Crustacean's* hawse.

"Shall I make this fast alongside, sir?" he asked. "Perhaps you'd be likely to examine it in the morning."

"No," was the reply, "Tow it clear of the *Paradox's* hawse and cast it adrift."

The boat pushed off. The officer of the watch, returning to the bridge, watched the progress of the two barrels as they wobbled in her wake.

Suddenly his attention was aroused in another direction by a loud shout of; "Vessel dead ahead, sir!"



Sweeping round a bend in the river into the glare of the searchlights was the *Pelikan*. She was drifting broadside on, her length appearing to occupy the whole breadth of the deep channel.

"Action stations, there!" roared the officer of the watch.

A bugle blared. Up from below tumbled swarms of men dressed in motley array of a meagre description. The officers, berthed in the after part of the superstructure, rushed out. In thirty seconds the turret, with its pair of monster 14-inch guns, was surging round as a preliminary test of the turning mechanism.

At a glance Stirling took in the situation. The *Pelikan*, being not under control, had been turned adrift with the object of fouling and seriously damaging the British vessels lying in the strong tideway.

He telegraphed for half-speed ahead. The engine-room bell had not clanged a minute when the propellers began to churn. Hurriedly the cable was slipped, and the anchor with eighty fathoms of studded steel chain was lost for ever in the muddy bed of the Mohoro.

The youthful lieutenant-commander's first duty was to avoid the danger of being fouled. He could not go astern until the *Paradox* was safely under way. Regarding the *Pelikan* he was as yet uncertain whether to order the sea-boats to board her and drop anchor, if by chance her ground tackle were ready for instant use, or whether to sink the raider without further ado.

His deliberations were cut short by a tremendous explosion on the bank of the river on the starboard quarter of the *Crustacean*. Where the stranded barrels had been was a huge cavity in the mud, into which the water was pouring rapidly.

A few seconds later another explosion occurred well astern of the *Paradox*. The barrels were nothing more or less than deadly infernal machines. Had they exploded close to the side of either of the monitors it would be doubtful whether, even with their elaborate protection against torpedoes, they would have kept afloat after the terrific concussion.

Almost simultaneously the searchlights on the *Paradox* went out. Fragments from the explosion had put the two projectors out of action.

The echoes of the explosion had scarce died away when a shout was raised that the drifting *Pelikan* was on fire.

With startling suddenness lurid flames were belching from her decks. Spurts of red-tinged smoke eddied from her open scuttles. In a few seconds she was a mass of fire from bow to stern.

Slowly she drifted down-stream. At intervals her stern hung up in the mud, till, caught by the current, she would swing round and slide away from the bank. The flames reached well above her mastheads, yet there was comparatively little smoke. The roar of the devouring elements out-voiced every other sound, even the terrified noises of the denizens of the mangrove forests as they fled from the glare that rivalled that of the sun.

From the conning-tower Stirling ordered a shot to be fired from one of the huge turret-guns, but before the muzzle could be depressed a stupendous explosion shook sky, land, and water.

Denbigh, gripping the bridge rail, felt himself borne backwards by the furious rush of air. Temporarily blinded by the vividness of the flash, he was dimly aware of a series of crashes above and below him. The stanchion rails snapped off short. In vain the sub strove to regain his balance; he subsided heavily against the side of the chart-room, stunned by the terrific thunder-clap that followed the explosion.

Intense darkness succeeded the vivid brightness of the prolonged flash. The searchlights of the *Crustacean* had failed.

Slowly Denbigh sat up. He became aware that debris was littering the partly wrecked bridge. In vain he tried to pierce the darkness and discern the whereabouts of his companions. A hot, pungent smoke drifted past, causing him to splutter almost to suffocation.

Someone tripped across his legs. It was Stirling emerging from the conning-tower. He recognized the sub's very forcible language.

"Hold on," cautioned Denbigh, "or you'll be overboard. The bridge has gone to blazes."

As he spoke the *Crustacean* shuddered. Her bows rose slightly. With her hull still quivering under the pulsations of her engines she had run aground on a mud-bank on the port-hand side of the river.

Treading warily Stirling groped till he found the engine-room telegraph. Guessing the position of the lever he ordered "Stop". In the pitch-dark engine-room, for every electric lamp in the ship had been shattered, the artificers, facing death amidst the whirring machinery, succeeded in carrying out his orders.

Through the darkness came muttered exclamations and partly stifled groans. Down-stream the *Paradox's* siren, for want of better means of communication, was wailing in long and short blasts.

"I have brought up to starboard," was the message. "You may feel your way past me."

"There's no may about it," thought Stirling grimly; then, leaning on the twisted bridge rails, he shouted in stentorian tones: "The hands will fall in on the port side of superstructure facing outboard. Bugler!"

"Sir!" replied a boyish voice through the impenetrable gloom—a voice without a tremor save of excitement.

"Sound the 'Still'."

A silence brooded over the stricken monitor. Even the wounded forbore to groan. Then someone appeared from the superstructure bearing a couple of "battle lanterns". Lights, too, began to glimmer through the hatchways, while with admirable promptness the electrical staff set to work to renew the carbons of the searchlights and to test the circuits of the internal lighting system.

Already the wounded were being carried below by their messmates. Four scorched and maimed forms lay motionless on the low fo'c'sle. There was no need to bestow medical attention upon them.

By this time Denbigh was aware that besides Stirling and himself only three persons remained on the bridge. Neither of them was O'Hara. Nor could he find the mate of the *Myra*, who on the first alarm had hurried with the others to the bridge.

The sub made his way to the ladder. Two steps did he descend, then his foot encountered nothingness. The rest of the ladder had been swept out of existence.

Grasping the still intact handrail Denbigh lowered himself to the superstructure. Almost the first man he met was Armstrong, who was mopping his cheek with a blood-stained handkerchief.

"It's nothing," replied the mate in answer to Denbigh's enquiry. "Didn't discover until I went below."

"Seen anything of O'Hara?" asked the sub anxiously.

"Yes, I've just carried him below, and I was on my way back to look for you."

"Thanks," said Denbigh briefly. "And what's happened to O'Hara?"

"Only shaken, I believe. He was blown off the bridge with the signal locker for company. They both fetched up against a splinter screen. O'Hara swears it isn't much, but I have my doubts."

The two officers made their way across heaps of debris to the diminutive ward-room. Here lying on a cushion on the floor was O'Hara.

He turned to smile as Denbigh entered but the attempt was a dismal failure. His face was drawn and grey in spite of his tanned complexion.

"My leg feels a bit queer," he said in answer to his chum's enquiry. "No, don't bother about the doctor. He's got quite enough to do. I say, old man, von Riesser's giving us a run for our money, isn't he?"

O'Hara's sentiments were almost identical with those of the rest of the ship's company. Not a word was said concerning the treachery of the kapitan of the *Pelikan*, whose method of handing over his ship was far from being in accordance with the terms of the capitulation. The fact that von Riesser had outwitted them certainly gave them food for reflection, but the unanimous conclusion was that the fun was by no means over.

The falling tide left the *Crustacean* hard and fast aground on the slimy mud. With daylight the actual state of affairs could be discerned.

A quarter of a mile up-stream lay the remains of the much-sought-for raider. Only a few bent and buckled ribs and plates showing just above the water's edge marked the spot whence the devastating explosion had emanated. One of her funnels, looking like a distended concertina, had been hurled ashore and had lodged against a clump of palm trees. The mud-flats and the adjoining banks were littered with fragments of metal twisted into weird and fantastic shapes.

Down-stream lay the *Paradox*, now swinging to the young flood. The bore was not now in evidence, since it was the period of neap-tides, and the alteration in the direction of the tidal stream was scarcely perceptible.

The *Paradox* had come off comparatively lightly. To all outward appearances she was intact, with the exception of her wireless gear, the wreckage of which was already being cleared away. Beyond a certain amount of breakage of glass and half a dozen of her crew sustaining slight wounds, the damage done was not in proportion to the danger to which she had been exposed.

The *Crustacean* had suffered severely. Her fire-control platform and wireless gear had been swept out of existence. There were four deep gashes in her funnel, which was only kept in position by the chain guys. One half of the bridge had vanished; the remaining portion resembled a scrap-iron heap.

Her boats had been badly shattered save one, and that exception was the sea-boat, which was on her way back to the monitor when the explosion took place and escaped injury. Every bit of steel work exposed to the destroyed ship was pitted and blistered, while a heavy mass of plating from the *Pelikan* had embedded itself in the monitor's quarterdeck.

Below the water-line she was undamaged. On taking soundings in her well no abnormal quantity of water was found. With the assistance of the *Paradox* it would be a comparatively easy matter to release her from her mud berth at high water.

But other work was imminent. Every minute Kapitan von Riesser and the remainder of the *Pelikan's* crew were increasing the distance between them and their foes. Without delay steps had to be taken to bring the treacherous Germans to bay.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Landing-Party

No one could accuse Captain Holloway of tardiness. He had the reputation of being an alert and promising officer, and on this occasion he excelled himself. Within an hour after sunrise the landing-party from the flotilla was on its way to tackle the remnants of the *Pelikan's* crew; for almost as soon as the raider had been swept out of existence the British senior officer was drawing up his orders that the unexpected turn of events had necessitated.

Towed by the two steamboats of the *Simplicita*, four cutters from the *Paradox*, *Eureka*, and the seaplane parent ship set off up the river. Into the boats were packed one hundred and twenty officers and men drawn from each vessel of the little squadron. Each boat carried a quick-firer in the bows and a Maxim, in addition to stores sufficient to last a week or ten days.

The expedition was under the orders of Lieutenant-commander Bourne, while amongst the officers was Sub-lieutenant Frank Denbigh, with Armstrong in charge of stores. Much to his disgust Pat O'Hara found himself "turned down" by the Principal Medical Officer; the former's assurances that his ankle would improve with a little exercise being brushed aside by the latter, who knew perfectly well that days would elapse before the Irishman could set foot upon the *Crustacean's* deck, let alone the crowded stern-sheets of an armed cutter.

Before the boats were out of sight of the still stranded *Crustacean* two sea-planes ascended and flew swiftly inland. Without their aid the landing-party would be literally groping for their foes, since it was not known whether von Riesser and his men had taken to their boats or had set out through the mangroves towards the grass-grown hinterland.

Denbigh having more knowledge of the Mohoro River than any of the other officers—and his knowledge was limited to a stretch of less than ten miles—was navigating officer in charge of the leading steamboat.

While the other officers were sweeping the mudflat fringed banks with their glasses Denbigh directed his attention towards the turgid channel.

Presently a line of bobbing objects caught his vision. Ordering the leading stoker to ease down the engines he signalled by means of hand-flags to the steamboat astern to likewise reduce speed.

The objects that had attracted his attention were the barrels forming the boom across the river almost abreast of the wrecked torpedo-station. The *Pelikan*, he knew, had been moored above the obstruction. She had drifted down past them before she took fire and blew up. Unless the boom had been temporarily removed and afterwards replaced he could not understand how the raider could have descended with the ebb-tide without sweeping the line of barrels away.

"What's wrong?" enquired Bourne.

Briefly Denbigh explained.

"It would be as well if we sent a shell into one of those barrels," he added.

"Waste of good ammunition," objected the lieutenant-commander. "The steamboat can take it bows on at full speed ahead. She'll do it easily."

"That I do not doubt," replied the sub. "But I have an idea that those barricoes are filled with explosives, although we bumped into one of them when we were in a light punt."

Just then the P.O. telegraphist for wireless duties, who was ensconced in a small insulated cage on the rearmost cutter, received a message from one of the sea-planes to the effect that the Germans had been located. They had landed from the boats at a spot twenty miles above the former anchorage of the *Pelikan* and were making their way towards the hills.

"They're finking it," declared Bourne. "Everything points to a hurried flight. They may have swung the boom back in position, but I doubt the accuracy of your mine theory."

"Very good, sir," replied Denbigh. "Then you wish the steamboat to charge the obstruction?"

"Yes, carry on," said Bourne.

Denbigh was too accustomed to discipline to demur in the face of definite orders. He prepared to cast off the tow, for the steamboat was to essay the feat alone. The two cutters were to anchor until a passage had been cleared through the obstruction.

"Well, I hope I'm wrong," thought the sub as he ordered the leading stoker to "let her rip for all she's worth."

But before the boat could gather way there was a commotion in the water ahead. A large hippo, frightened by the unusual noises that had disturbed the usually peaceful river, made off up-stream.

Swerving neither to the right hand nor the left the huge animal bore down upon the line of floating barrels. It passed between a pair of them. For a moment it seemed that he had surmounted the massive chain, until the sudden displacement of the barrels showed that its body had fouled the hidden barrier.

The hippo reared in fury and terror, bringing its whole weight down upon the chain. Instantly a line of waterspouts shot high in the air accompanied by a simultaneous discharge of half a dozen mines. The sudden strain had ignited tubes of fulminate of mercury, which in turn had exploded heavy charges of gun-cotton. Had the boat been a hundred yards nearer not one of her crew would have escaped.

In silence Denbigh brought the steamboat abreast of the first cutter and re-established communication.

The lieutenant-commander stood up, and in a steady, clear voice exclaimed:

"Well done, Mr. Denbigh! My judgment was hopelessly at fault."

"That's all right, sir," replied the sub. He knew the effort that Bourne had had to make to tender his apologies. Having given his order in the hearing of the men it was the only course open to him. And Bourne was an officer who, although somewhat impetuous, was never afraid to acknowledge an error.

With the flood-tide the flotilla made good progress. Rounding the sharp bend where the *Myra* had disappeared, the boats entered a gently curving reach that apparently made a long horseshoe sweep. At this point the mangroves ceased. The ground became higher, the banks being precipitous in places, and covered with long rank grass.

"There are the *Pelikan's* boats," reported Denbigh, pointing to two large pinnacles lying against the banks to which they had been carried by the tide.

In answer to an enquiry the scouting sea-plane reported that further progress a mile round the next bend was barred by a series of rapids, and that the Germans had established a gain of nearly ten miles, and were approaching the bottle-neck formed by the extreme sinuosities of the river.

"Can you check them?" asked Bourne anxiously. He was not at all keen on a ten- or twenty-mile march through the rough grass. If the sea-planes could command the narrow stretch of ground between the horseshoe bend von Riesser's men might be headed off.

"We'll try," was the wireless reply.

Meanwhile the steamboat had cast off the tow, and the cutters still carrying way were steered towards the bank. Here, owing to the rush of the tide, there was fairly deep water close to the land, and fortunately an absence of mud.

Grounding twenty feet apart the boats disgorged their loads, the seamen leaping ashore in spite of the weight of arms and accoutrements. The Maxims, too, were landed and mounted upon light travelling carriages. The portable wireless apparatus was to accompany the landing-party, while the officers and men left behind were to land the

quick-firers, since they could not command the ground from the boats owing to the height of the banks.

Bourne realized that such things as reverses do happen, so he took precautions accordingly. The men advanced in open order, with flankers thrown far and wide.

From the top of a small hillock Denbigh watched the straw hats of the men out of sight as they marched through the long grass; then, knowing that some time must necessarily elapse before the landing-party came in touch with the enemy, he busied himself in preparing for the re-embarkation, should the operations prove to be shorter than Captain Holloway had anticipated.

With the turn of the tide the boats were taken out into mid-stream and anchored. Tripping lines were bent to the crowns of the anchors, the other end of each line being made fast to a watch-buoy, so that the operation of weighing would not be delayed by the fouling of the flukes in possible snags on the bed of the river. Gang planks were prepared in order that no hitch might occur should the men return at or near dead-low water, when a stretch of ooze separated the dry ground from the river.

For two hours Denbigh directed operations under the blazing sun. His men worked like niggers, knowing that they, too, were doing their bit although not in the actual firing-line.

At intervals came the faint detonations of a series of heavy explosions. The sea-planes were at work, attempting by means of bombs to arrest the flight of von Riesser's men across the narrow neck of land.

Late in the forenoon one of the sea-planes flew overhead. Without essaying to make a landing on the river, it flew down-stream, presumably to take in a fresh supply of petrol and bombs. In an hour's time it returned, and presently its opposite number flew overhead in the direction of its parent ship.

Slowly the day wore on. At frequent intervals Denbigh climbed the hillock and brought his glasses to bear upon the distant high ground.

Once or twice he fancied he heard the sounds of musketry and Maxim firing in the sultry air. Armstrong and several of the men were of the same opinion, agreeing that the firing was desultory and not constantly maintained.

At length darkness fell. No one had seen the sea-planes returning before sunset, and in addition to the great risk of making a night landing these craft are of little practical use except in daylight.

With the approach of night Denbigh ordered double sentries to be posted, and cautioned the boat-keepers to be alert and watchful for signals. Those of the men left behind slept or rested beside the quick-firers, protected from the heavy dew by boat awnings stretched on oars and boat-hooks.

For Denbigh sleep was out of the question. Muffled in a boat-cloak, for the off-shore wind blew chilly, he paced up and down with the mate of the *Myra*.

"What's that over yonder?" asked Armstrong.

"Flashes—musketry," replied Denbigh. "It's strange that we cannot hear the reports, for the wind is in our favour."

"Too steady for rifle-firing," suggested the mate. "Looks to me like a bush fire."

"By Jove, I hope not," said the sub earnestly. "The grass will catch like tinder."

A minute or so passed, then Denbigh lowered his binoculars.

"You're right, Armstrong," he said. "It is a fire. Those brutes have set the grass ablaze to cover their retreat."

"Hark!" exclaimed the mate.

Overhead came the unmistakable buzzing of an aerial propeller. One of the sea-planes, if not both, was

returning.

Seizing a flashing-lamp Denbigh directed it skywards. It was the only means at his disposal for communication.

"All right?" he asked.

A light blinked through the darkness.

"*Dash, dot. Pause. Dash, dash, dash*" it flashed; then it ceased abruptly. Nevertheless the answer was to the point. It was NO.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Accounted For

Before another quarter of an hour passed the long line of flames was visible to the naked eye. Fanned by the strong breeze the fire spread rapidly. It seemed as if its activity was by no means confined to the horseshoe loop formed by the river. It appeared to have obtained a grip upon the grass on the opposite bank. Once the flames attacked the mangroves there was no saying where the mischief might end.

Denbigh could do little to aid his absent comrades, who, for aught he knew, might even now be overwhelmed by the swift advance of the devouring elements. Turning out the men who remained he had the quick-firer ammunition removed to the boats. Then setting fire to the grass around the bivouac he cleared a broad belt nearly a hundred yards in diameter. At all events the main fire would be checked before the flotilla was seriously imperilled.

By the time that this work was completed the flames were within three miles of the camp. For a breadth of more than twice that distance the grass was blazing furiously. Lurid red tongues of flame licked the dark cloud of smoke that overhung the devouring elements. Already the air was reeking with pungent fumes. Grey ashes, caught by the strong wind, whirled past the anxious watchers or dashed lightly into their faces. Dark shapes, silhouetted against the red glare, tore madly from the advancing fire. They were the denizens of the grass lands flying for their lives. Undeterred by the water the panic-stricken animals plunged into the river, some of them in their terror frantically pawing the sides of the anchored boats.

"Dash it all!" muttered Denbigh. "Wish to goodness I'd cleared another hundred yards of the scrub. We'll be shrivelled up with the heat. There's still time."

Calling to his handful of men the sub ran into the open. This time, since the inner circle offered no grip to the flames, they could work without fear of the fire getting the upper hand.

In the midst of their preparations Denbigh heard a hoarse shout.

Stumbling towards him, half-enveloped in the haze that was the forerunner of the roaring furnace, were two men. One fell, picked himself up, and staggered after his companion.

Outlined as they were against the ruddy glare it was impossible to distinguish them, but as the British seamen ran forward to bear them into safety the men raised their arms appealingly.

"Help, kamarade, help!" they cried.

"Germans!" ejaculated Armstrong. "Where are our fellows?"

Denbigh could not give an answer. A glance in the direction of the wall of fire, now less than a quarter of a mile distant, told him that life was impossible in front of that barrier unless the fugitives were already in sight. But they were not. The sub set his jaw tightly.

"Where are the others—and the British seamen?" he asked in German of one of the men. The other was beyond speech.

"All gone! All gone!" replied the German.

"There's another, sir!" exclaimed a petty officer.

"Come on, stick it!" shouted half a dozen lusty voices in encouragement.

The third man was evidently in the last stages of exhaustion. He was gasping for breath as he ran, but the hot acrid air was fast choking him. He flung his arms above his head and pitched upon his face, with the burning embers dropping all around him.



A cloud of eddying smoke enveloped him. Then a gust of wind cleared the pall of vapour. The wretch was writhing. His clothes were smouldering as he lay helpless in the withering grass.

With a bound Denbigh cleared the shallow trench, and bending low rushed through the smoke. Burning ashes stung his face. What air he took in through his nose felt pungent and suffocating. The heat seemed to gnaw into his eyes.

How he covered that two hundred yards he never could explain, but at length, with a feeling of relief, he turned his broad back to the advancing flames and raised the now unconscious man from the ground. With almost superhuman strength he lifted the listless body upon his shoulder and began his bid for safety.

Almost blindly he ran till his gait slowed down almost to a halting walk. Dimly he realized that he was not alone. Some of the devoted seamen had followed him into the edge of the inferno.

Someone tried to shift the burden from his shoulders. He resisted. Why he knew not. Already his senses were forsaking him.

With a crash he fell upon his knees. He was up and staggering again, until, unable to withstand the strain, he rolled inertly upon the ground with his fingers gripping his throat. Then all became a blank.

He recovered consciousness to find himself lying on a pile of canvas in the stern-sheets of one of the boats. It was broad daylight. Overhead an awning had been spread to ward off the rays of the morning sun.

Almost in an instant he recalled the incident of the night of horror. The air still smelt vilely of smouldering vegetable matter. Wisps of smoke eddied betwixt the sun and the awning, throwing fantastic shadows upon the bellying canvas. The fire, then, had practically burnt itself out.

"Any signs of the others?" he asked.

Armstrong shook his head.

"The whole place is a mass of glowing cinders," he replied. "It is impossible to see more than a quarter of a mile in that direction. I'm afraid——"

"Any more survivors?" asked Denbigh. The mere movement of his facial muscles caused him exquisite pain, for his face was scorched and blistered. His hair and eyebrows had been badly singed. Altogether he looked a pitiable scarecrow. It is only on the stage and on the cinematograph screen that heroes preserve an unruffled appearance.

"No," replied the mate. "Not one, after the fellow you brought in. Did you know who it was?"

The sub shook his head, then winced, for the action sent a thrill of anguish through his body.

"Unter-leutnant Klick," continued Armstrong in answer to his own question. "He's still unconscious. We dare not move him to the boats. His skin is literally peeling off all over his body. Shall I have you sent down the river, old man? The chief petty officer is now in charge. Is he to withdraw the rest of the boats?"

"No," replied Denbigh with sudden firmness. "No; by no means. We'll wait until we can send volunteers to find traces of our fellows. Have the sea-planes passed over yet?"

Armstrong replied in the negative.

"How are the other Germans?"

"One is practically fit. The other is suffering from shock."

"Then send the fit fellow to me, please."

The man was brought to the boat. He was one of the *Pelikan's* firemen. Questioned in German he replied without hesitation. The fire had been started, he declared, not by the raider's crew, but by bombs dropped by British sea-planes. There was an action, but he and half a dozen more worked round by the two banks until they were almost cut off by the flames. He had reason to suppose that both the British and the German forces had been overwhelmed by the onrushing flames.

Throughout the afternoon Denbigh lay in torment in spite of the first-aid remedies applied by the only sick-berth attendant left with the base party. Hardly ever before had he felt the sweltering heat so acutely. The air under the awning was close and oppressive. It reeked both of the odour of the river and of the fumes of the smouldering grass. There was one compensation. The fire had effectually driven off the swarms of mosquitoes that otherwise would have increased his torments. He would have given almost anything to be back on board ship, with the sea breezes flung in through the open scuttle and the electric fans cooling the air. But stop he must until he had obtained definite information as to the fate of the landing-party.

"I doubt after all if there's much to grumble at," he soliloquized. "I might have been born to become a Tommy, and I might be stuck up to my thighs in mud and water in a trench somewhere in France. It's all part of one big business, and we're keeping our end up all right."

Then his thoughts took a turn in another direction. He was no longer a prisoner of war. In another few months he hoped to be back in England. What plans he would make to spin out that long-deferred leave! For the time being he was no longer in a vile African river, but in a pretty old-world garden in the homeland.

Suddenly his train of thought was rudely interrupted by a hoarse, almost frenzied burst of cheering. The boat-keeper, thrusting his head below the curtains to ascertain whether the sub was awake or otherwise, answered Denbigh's mute appeal.

"It's orl right, sir," he announced. "They've romped home; the whole bloomin' crush."

Following the downward course of the river was the landing-party, bringing with them forty-three German prisoners, including Kapitan von Riesser. Their own losses had been insignificant, for during the long-drawn-out action that was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the fire, one British officer and seven seamen had been slightly wounded. These were brought in by the stretcher-bearers.

The escape of the little expedition was due to their resourcefulness in fighting fire by fire. Finding that their retreat was not speedy enough to outpace the flames, Lieutenant-commander Bourne had given orders to set alight the long grass to leeward.

By this means, though suffering agonies from thirst and heat, the British and their prisoners escaped.

The career of the raider and her crew had been brought to a close, and before nightfall the boats of the flotilla had regained their respective ships.

\* \* \* \* \*

Frank Denbigh is sub-lieutenant no longer, but a full-fledged lieutenant with the letters D.S.O. tacked on to his name. He has just received his appointment to a brand-new battle-cruiser, and is about to serve with the Grand Fleet.

Pat O'Hara is still limping about on one foot somewhere in the Emerald Isle. He, too, has gained a step in rank, but rather envies his chum's good luck. Still, there is time for the light-headed Irishman to get fit again and be in at the death, when, it is to be hoped, the visions of the trident in the German fist will be shattered for good and aye.

And Stirling? In recognition of his services he is confirmed as lieutenant-commander of the monitor *Crustacean*. He is still looking forward to his leave in the Highlands, but meanwhile he is doing good work in a remote portion of the globe in upholding the glorious tradition of the real Mistress of the Seas.

[The end of Rounding up the Raider: A Naval Story of the Great War by Westerman, Percy Francis