The Navy in action

Taffrail

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THE NAVY IN ACTION

by
TAFFRAIL

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FOREWORD

THE very existence of Britain and the British Empire depends upon Sea Power, and in war, even more than in peace, the ships and the men of the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, and the Fishing Fleets are interdependent and indivisible.

I could evolve no title incorporating all the three great Sea Services; but "The Navy in Action" covers in some small part the work of all the seamen and the ships so vital to our welfare and the continuance of the war.

TAFFRAIL.

June, 1940.

THE LAST CRUISE OF THE 'ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE'

I

On September 30th the British steamer *Clement* was sunk near Pernambuco, off the coast of Brazil. The next day the Admiralty broadcast a message to all British merchant ships warning them that a German raider might be operating off the east coast of South America. The nature of the raider was not stated, though on October 2nd, by which time the *Clement's* crew had been landed, some newspaper accounts referred to her as a "pocket battleship."

Of the Admiralty's immediate and subsequent dispositions to meet the menace we know little, except that a systematic search was begun in all areas, and that on the western side of the South Atlantic there were three British cruisers of the South American Division under the command of Commodore (now Rear-Admiral) Sir Henry Harwood.

The Commodore's broad Pendant flew in the *Ajax* (Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse), a modern 7,000-ton cruiser of 32½ knots, armed with eight 6-inch guns. He had also under his orders the *Achilles* (Captain W. E. Parry)—a sister ship to the *Ajax*—of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy, manned largely from men recruited and trained in New Zealand; and the *Exeter* (Captain F. S. Bell), which was at home recommissioning on the outbreak of war. The *Exeter*, was the largest ship of the trio, a cruiser of 8,400 tons and 32 knots armed with six 8-inch guns.

But the menace of a "pocket battleship" at large was a real one. There were three such ships in the German Navy, vessels

of 10,000 tons and 26 knots, with six 11-inch guns and eight 5·9's. Better armed than any cruiser, and well protected against 6-inch gunfire, they are faster than any existing battleships. Indeed, the only ships in the Allied Navies both faster and better armed were the British battle cruisers *Hood*, *Renown* and *Repulse*, and the French *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*.

The *Admiral Graf Spee*, according to the published diary of one of her crew, sailed from Wilhelmshaven on August 21st. Skirting the coasts of Denmark and Norway, she passed out into the Atlantic between Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

The *Altmark*, the *Graf Spee's* tender, afterwards to become notorious, left Germany on August 5th and reached Port Arthur, Texas, twelve days later. Having completed with oil fuel for herself and the raider, she sailed again on August 19th.

On August 28th, three days before Germany's invasion of Poland, and six days before Britain and France declared war upon Germany, the *Graf Spee* and *Altmark* met at a rendezvous at sea and the pocket battleship was refuelled and provisioned. At the same time the *Altmark* received two machine-guns from the warship. On September 2nd, the day before the outbreak of war with Britain and France, the *Altmark* was repainted and had her name altered to *Sogne*, of Oslo.

Weighing all the circumstances, it seems probable that the *Admiral Graf Spee's* ostentatious sinking of the *Clement* and the liberation of her crew were deliberately done to mislead. Captain Langsdorff knew that his act must soon be reported. He probably wished it to be reported in the hope of attracting considerable Allied reinforcements for the protection of the

important trade in South American waters while he continued his depredations elsewhere. It was Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield who said at this time: “To find a needle in a bundle of hay is an easy task compared to finding a single raider, free to roam the seven seas in those vast ocean spaces in which British trade moves. It would be hard enough if you had perpetual daylight, permanently clear weather and a vast number of warships to hunt each quarry ... let us remember that the dispositions of our hunting forces were mainly the difficult and anxious responsibility of the Admiralty, from the First Lord downwards.”

The *Graf Spee* did everything to make it difficult. Having disposed of the *Clement*, she steamed eastward across the South Atlantic to pass between Ascension Island and Saint Helena. Between October 6th and 22nd, working on the trade route to the Cape of Good Hope in the eastern Atlantic, she sank four steamers, the *Newton Beach*, *Ashlea*, *Huntsman* and *Trevanion*. The officers and crews were transferred to the *Altmark*, with which the *Graf Spee* was again in company from October 14th to 18th. The raider’s oil fuel was replenished, and one of the prizes, the *Huntsman*, looted. As the German diarist writes ... “We take in a large quantity of provisions, of which the most valuable are transported from the *Huntsman* to the *Altmark* and *Spee*. The principal articles taken over were tea, hides, carpets, white shoes and tropical helmets.” We know also that the Germans were at pains to seize all instruments such as chronometers, sextants and binoculars.

The news of these sinkings was not made known until much later. Indeed, it was not until December 6th that the four vessels were announced as being long overdue and must be considered as lost.

Meanwhile, the *Graf Spee* steamed south-east and rounded the Cape of Good Hope. On November 15th she sank the small British tanker *Africa Shell* 180 miles north-east of Lourenço Marques at the southern end of the Mozambique Channel, and made a prisoner of her captain. A day later she held up the Dutch steamer *Mapia* to the southward of Madagascar, and released her.

The sinking of the *Africa Shell* was the first indication that a pocket battleship raider was at large in the Indian Ocean. It was not known at the time if this was the same ship that had been operating in the Atlantic. In any case, the Admiralty's dispositions in that ocean could not be relaxed.

Though it was not known until much later, the *Graf Spee* steamed south and spent several days on the normal trade route between the Cape of Good Hope and Australia. To Captain Langsdorff's disappointment, he sighted nothing; so he retraced his course round the Cape of Good Hope, and on November 26th rejoined the *Altmark* in the South Atlantic. The next two days were spent in embarking stores and oil fuel, and on the 28th most of the British officer prisoners from the *Altmark* were transferred to the *Graf Spee*.

The next thing heard of the raider by the public, though she was not mentioned by name, was on December 4th, when the Admiralty issued an official communique:

> "Information has been received that the s.s. *Doric Star* has been attacked by a German raider. As no further information has been received, it is presumed that she was sunk."

The attack occurred on December 2nd about midway between Sierra Leone and the Cape of Good Hope, the *Doric Star* being on her way home from Australia and New Zealand.

In spite of being fired upon to prevent the use of her wireless, the British steamer managed to get off her distress calls. Passed four or five times, her signals were picked up and relayed by other vessels.

On December 3rd those signals thus became known to Commodore Harwood, between two and three thousand miles away on the other side of the Atlantic. His three ships were scattered over two thousand miles, and concentration was vitally necessary if the raider, a pocket battleship, were to be met and brought to action with any hope of success.

The *Graf Spee's* secondary armament of eight 5·9-inch guns alone was equal to the eight 6-inch guns carried as the main armament of the *Ajax* and *Achilles*. Her six 11-inch guns gave her a huge superiority, the *Graf Spee's* broadside being 4,700 lbs. as against the 3,136 lbs. of the *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter* combined.

Knowing that the raider must be aware of the *Doric Star's* report broadcast by wireless, Commodore Harwood judged she would leave the area and cross the Atlantic towards him. Working it out on the chart and making the necessary allowances, he concluded that she could reach the Rio de Janeiro area on December 12th, the River Plate region on that day or the next, and the neighbourhood of the Falkland Islands on the 14th.

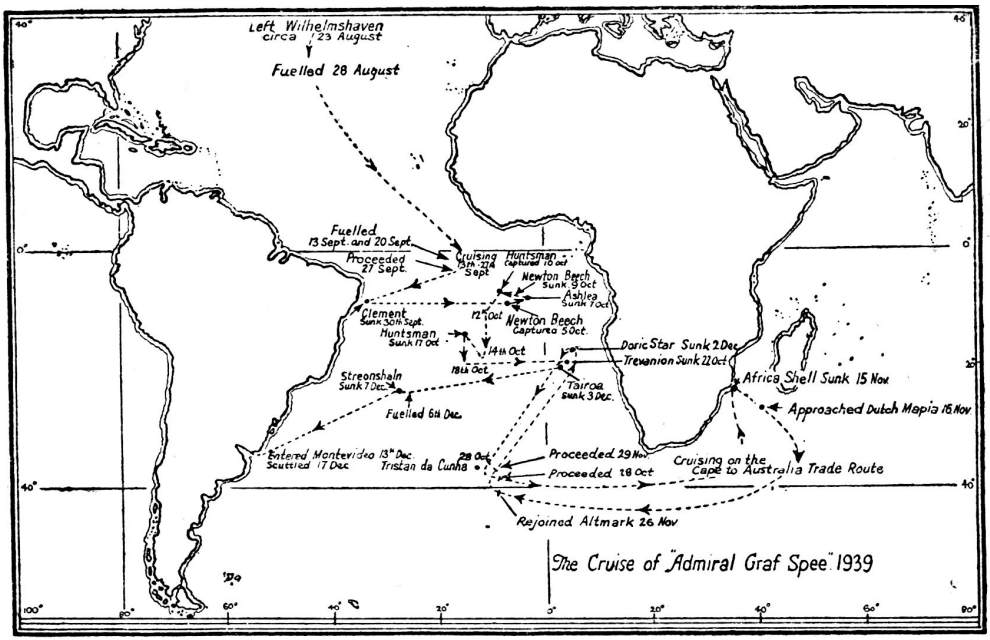
These areas are over a thousand miles apart, and there was nothing to show which of them the *Graf Spee* might choose as an objective. But weighing up all the circumstances, Commodore Harwood decided that the most important region to be protected was the area off the River Plate, which was used by a large amount of shipping. The trade was very

valuable, an almost certain bait for a raider bent upon destruction.

So the British Commodore ordered his squadron to concentrate at a rendezvous 150 miles out to sea off the River Plate estuary, and arranged that the ships should not be short of fuel when they arrived. These orders were sent in one short message, after which no further wireless was used. Signals would have told the enemy that British forces were on the move, and concentrating.

To revert to the *Graf Spee*.

Having sunk the *Doric Star* on December 2nd, the



The Cruise of "Admiral Graf Spee". 1939

raider doubled to the south-west, to catch the *Tairoa* early the next morning. She also was fired upon to prevent the use of wireless, though the operator continued to transmit until his apparatus was hit. Five of the *Tairoa's* crew were wounded.

The *Graf Spee* moved on to the westward, and on December 6th again met her supply ship, to which she transferred certain officers and the crews of the *Doric Star* and *Tairoa*. The ships parted company the next day, and that evening the raider met and sank the British steamer *Streonshalh*.

There were now thirty-nine British officer prisoners in the *Graf Spee*, and the thirty men forming the crew of the *Streonshalh*. At daylight each morning, and again in the evening, they heard the raider's aeroplane catapulted off to seek new victims. It sighted nothing.

For four days the *Graf Spee* steamed south-west towards the River Plate. Captain Langsdorff may have expected to meet a British warship or two in that area; but according to the British prisoners on board, who enjoyed considerable liberty, the entire crew believed every word of the mendacious propaganda from Berlin, and that their ship was invincible. Most of the British Navy was already sunk, they thought, and all Germany believed that the *Hood*, *Renown* and *Repulse* were out of action, along with the *Ark Royal*.

At 7 a.m. on December 12th the *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter* reached their appointed rendezvous 150 miles eastward of the estuary of the River Plate. Commodore Harwood spent part of that day in telling his captains what tactics he intended using in the event of meeting a pocket battleship. The tactics were then exercised. The whole tenor of the Commodore's instructions was that his captains were to act independently so as to obtain and keep decisive gun range.

Daylight on December 13th broke cloudless and brilliantly clear, with full visibility. There was a breeze from the south-west, with a swell and slight sea from the same direction.

Steaming east-north-east at fourteen knots, the British squadron was in single line ahead with the *Ajax* leading, followed in turn by the *Achilles* and *Exeter*.

At 6.14 smoke was sighted on the horizon just abaft the port beam. The *Exeter* was told to investigate. Two minutes later she reported: "I think it is a pocket battleship."

The enemy was in sight.

The three British cruisers and their adversary were steering on converging courses, with the *Graf Spee* to the northward. The British at once started to work up to full speed, and to carry out the tactics practised the day before. The general idea was that the more powerful German should be simultaneously engaged from two different directions. Her six 11-inch guns were in two turrets, and Commodore Harwood's procedure would either cause her to concentrate one turret upon each of the widely separated British units, or to leave one of them unengaged.

The *Exeter*, the most powerful British ship with her 8-inch guns, altered course to the westward. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* moved rapidly off to the north-eastward, closing in on their much larger opponent.

And at 6.18, four minutes after her smoke had first been sighted, the *Graf Spee* opened fire at very long range. One of her turrets fired at the *Exeter* and the other at the *Ajax* and *Achilles*.

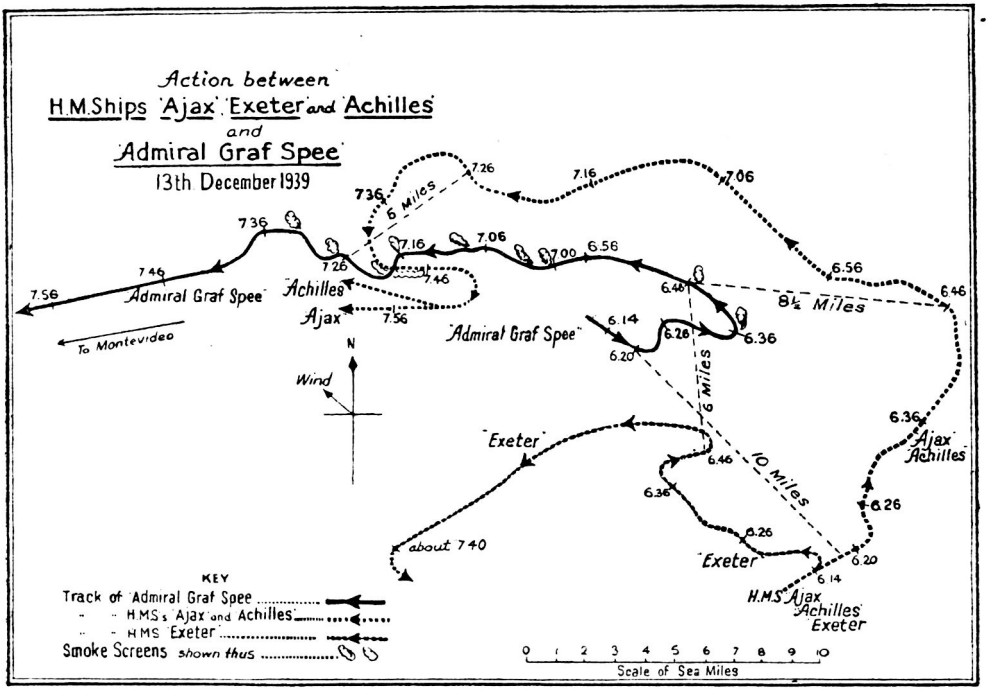
The distance shortened rapidly, and two minutes later the *Exeter* opened fire with her two foremost turrets containing four 8-inch guns at a range of 19,000 yards. Before long she brought her after pair of 8-inch guns to bear also. Her gunfire seemed to be worrying the *Graf Spee*, for before long the German concentrated the whole of her armament on the

Exeter. The first enemy salvo fell short, and the second over. The third "straddled," with one or more shell short and the others over.

At about the same time the *Ajax* and *Achilles* opened a rapid and effective fire with their 6-inch guns, the range closing fast as they drew ahead on the enemy.

The *Exeter*, meanwhile, came under heavy fire, and at 6.23 an 11-inch shell burst just short on hitting the water. Splinters rained on board, killing the torpedo tubes' crews, damaging the communications and riddling the funnels and searchlights. A minute later she received a direct hit from an 11-inch shell on B turret, immediately before the bridge. It put the turret and both guns out of action, killing outright eight of the fifteen Royal Marines who formed their crews. Splinters made havoc of the bridge, killing or wounding all the personnel except the captain and two others, and wrecking the communications of the wheelhouse.

For a few moments the ship was out of control, until those in the lower conning position took over the steering and the ship was brought back to her



Action between H.M.Ships 'Ajax' 'Exeter' *and* 'Achilles' *and* 'Admiral Graf Spee' 13th December 1939

course. The bridge was wrecked, and Captain Bell decided to fight his ship from the after conning position just before the mainmast. He made his way there, only to find that the communications had been destroyed. The steering was therefore changed over to the after steering position, and for forty-five minutes the captain conned his ship with a small boat's compass, his order to the steering position below being passed from man to man through a chain of about ten messengers.

The *Exeter* was still under heavy fire, and during this period received two more hits forward from 11-inch shells,

besides being further damaged by splinters from projectiles bursting short.

The *Ajax* and *Achilles* also were in hot action, their fire being so effective that at 6.30 the *Graf Spee* turned one of her 11-inch turrets upon them. Both the small British cruisers had already been under heavy fire from the German 5·9's, though without effect.

Shortly afterwards the *Exeter* fired her starboard torpedoes at the enemy. They missed, for the *Graf Spee*, disliking the British gunfire, turned through 150 degrees under a heavy smoke screen.

The *Ajax* and *Achilles*, which had been steaming at fourteen knots when the *Graf Spee* was sighted, had worked up to twenty-eight within twenty minutes of the order for full speed being given. The process normally takes two hours; but, as said one of the engine-room artificers of the *Ajax*: "We knew we were in action, and worked like devils to get the engines round." Their efforts certainly reflected the greatest credit upon the personnel of the engine and boiler-rooms.

The aeroplane of the *Ajax*, piloted by Lieutenant Edgar G. D. Lewin, was catapulted off at 6.37, to take up a position on the disengaged bow of the smaller cruisers. The operation was a matter of great difficulty, both the pilot, the observer and the aircraft itself being subjected to severe blast from the guns of the after turret, which were firing on a forward bearing.

At about this time the *Exeter* made a large alteration of course for the purpose of firing her port torpedo tubes at the enemy. She was again hit twice by 11-inch shells as she turned, one of them bursting in the fore turret and putting both 8-inch guns out of action. The other shell exploded inside the ship, did extensive damage and started a raging fire between

decks. As seen from the *Ajax's* aeroplane, the *Exeter* "completely disappeared in smoke and flame, and it was feared that she had gone. However, she emerged, and re-entered the action."

The devoted *Exeter*, bearing the brunt of the *Graf Spee's* much heavier metal, had suffered severely. Only one of her three turrets, the after one, was left in action. All the compass repeaters had been smashed and the internal communications destroyed, so that messengers had to be used for passing orders. Some of her lower compartments were flooded, and she was ablaze between decks. The ship was listing over and down by the bow; but still steamed at full power. Her port torpedoes were fired, and altering course towards the enemy she steered a course approximately parallel to the *Graf Spee's* and fought gallantly on with the two guns that remained, the officer directing them standing in an exposed position on the searchlight platform.

Many deeds of gallantry were performed in the *Exeter* in the space of just over an hour. One cannot recount them all, but there was the young midshipman who, when a shell burst over an ammunition locker and set it on fire, ordered two guns' crews to take cover. The locker exploded, wounding some men and setting alight to another locker. As soon as the main fire abated Midshipman Archibald Cameron, with the help of Able Seaman William G. Gwilliam, smothered the flames of the burning woodwork and threw the unexploded shell brass cartridge cases over the side. They were still hot, and at any moment might have exploded. Neither of these two showed the least regard for their own safety.

A Royal Marine, Wilfred A. Russell, refused all but first aid when his left forearm was blown away and his right arm shattered. Remaining on deck, he went about cheering on his

shipmates and putting courage into them by his great fortitude. He did not give in until the heat of battle was over. He later died of his wounds. Stoker Patrick O'Brien, ordered to make contact with the main switchboard, made his way through a compartment in which a heavy shell had just burst, and was filled with dense and deadly smoke, escaping steam and the fumes of high explosive. After making contact with the man in the forward dynamo-room, he returned along the upper deck and led a party of men into the reeking compartment.

There were the engine-room artificers who, when a shell burst in the flat where they were stationed, stood fast in the dense fumes with the dead and dying all round them, and, though temporarily stunned, flooded the magazines and fought the raging fires. A wounded stoker, John Minhinnet, refused all attention until he was certain that the message he was taking had been delivered; while a man of the Fleet Air Arm, Eric Shoesmith, his clothes soaked in petrol from the damaged aeroplane, climbed to the top of the machine to free it for jettisoning. The ship was under heavy fire, and an 8-inch turret was firing on a forward bearing.

The Governor of the Falkland Islands sent a despatch to London describing the part played by the *Exeter* in the action. "Of the heroism of the wounded," he wrote, "much might be related. As an example of the way which they bore their fate, one man, with both legs shot off, said on inquiry that he was 'not doing so badly under somewhat adverse circumstances.' He died on shore."

In the words of Captain Bell, the behaviour of his officers and men was "superb." Her subsequent list of honours, like those of the *Ajax* and *Achilles*, contains the records of many deeds of individual bravery symptomatic of the fine spirit that

animated the men of all three ships while fighting a greatly superior enemy.

At 6.40 the battle had developed into what was really a chase. The *Graf Spee* had turned off to the westward under another smoke screen, and the *Ajax* and *Achilles*, now steaming thirty-one knots and still increasing speed, were steering to the north-westward. The four ships were in the form of a triangle, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* fine on the *Graf Spee's* starboard quarter, and the battered *Exeter*, still firing with her after turret with its pair of 8-inch guns, the only ones that remained, just before the *Graf Spee's* port beam.

Then an 11-inch shell burst just short of the *Achilles*, its flying splinters killing three men in the gunnery control position, wounding and half stunning Lieutenant Washbourne, the gunnery officer and several others, and wounding Captain Parry and Chief Yeoman of Signals Martinson on the bridge. Though none of the fire control instruments was seriously damaged, the position was temporarily out of action through the casualties in personnel. However, the *Achilles* continued to fire, the secondary position taking over the control until the main position again came into action a few minutes later.

It was here that Sergeant Samuel John Trimble, Royal Marines, severely wounded, stood fast without flinching or complaint during the rest of the action, bearing his injuries with great fortitude. When the medical party arrived during the subsequent lull he helped them to remove the wounded, and then made his own way to the sick-bay. His gallantry earned him the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

Many others, including a young ordinary seaman, and a seaman boy less than eighteen years of age, displayed the greatest bravery. The boy, Allan M. Dorset, was afterwards

awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for behaving with "exemplary coolness, despite the carnage around him," and continuing to pass necessary information to the guns.

The action continued fiercely, and at 7 o'clock the *Ajax* and *Achilles* were still pouring in a heavy fire. They had altered course more or less parallel to their enemy to bring all their guns to bear at a range of about 16,000 yards. Misliking the punishment, the *Graf Spee* laid another smoke screen to escape. Thereafter she made frequent use of smoke screens and large alterations of course to confound the British gunnery.

A little later, steaming as fast as their engines and boilers could drive them, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* again swung in towards the enemy to shorten the range. A few minutes afterwards the *Graf Spee* poured out another pall of smoke and swerved through nearly ninety degrees to port towards the damaged *Exeter*. It was first thought that Captain Langsdorff intended to finish off the crippled cruiser, but in a few minutes he again swung the *Graf Spee* to the north-westward to bring all her guns to bear on the *Ajax* and *Achilles* at a range of 11,000 yards. She opened fire with her 11-inch and 5·9-inch guns, though the shooting of the latter was ragged and inaccurate.

Commodore Harwood again turned to starboard to bring the concentrated fire of his two cruisers upon the enemy. The shooting was rapid and effective, a fire being seen amidships in the *Graf Spee*. The range was still shortening, and at 7.24 the *Ajax* swung round and fired her port torpedoes at a distance of 9,000 yards. The enemy must have seen them, for she immediately dodged by swinging through 130 degrees to port under cover of a smoke screen, and resuming her north-westerly course three minutes later.

It was just about this time that the *Ajax* was struck by an 11-inch shell which put both of her after turrets out of action, thus robbing her at a blow of half her armament. Apart from causing a number of casualties, the explosion damaged pipes and electrical gear, besides putting out the lights and starting fires. Once more officers and men worked valiantly—Lieutenant Ian D. De'ath, Royal Marines, in charge of a turret, at once going to the hatch which had been blown open and was vomiting smoke and flame, and setting a fine example of courage and presence of mind by giving the necessary orders to ensure the safety of the ammunition. Many others near the seat of the explosion showed commendable presence of mind and initiative in dealing with the heavy damage.

The *Ajax's* aircraft, which had been spotting the fall of shot for the two smaller cruisers, approached the *Graf Spee* to discover her damage. Coming under heavy anti-aircraft gunfire, she retired out of range.

The *Exeter*, meanwhile, fighting with her two guns that still remained serviceable, had been forced to reduce speed because of her damage. At about half-past seven this last turret could no longer remain in action because of flooding. She had lost sixty-one killed and twenty-three wounded in an engagement lasting just over an hour and a half. Badly battered by her greatly superior opponent, she had remained in action as long as a gun would fire. She disappeared to the south-east at slow speed, doing her best to repair her damage and make herself seaworthy.

The two lighter cruisers hauled round to the westward to close the range of the *Graf Spee* still further. Then the *Ajax's* aeroplane reported the approach of torpedoes, which the Commodore successfully avoided by a large alteration of

course towards the enemy. The *Ajax* had only three guns left in action, but their fire, with the eight guns of the *Achilles*, was so accurate and effective that the *Graf Spee* again turned away towards the west, zigzagging and making smoke.

A little later, galled by the British fire, the *Graf Spee* again swung to the south-west to bring all her heavy guns into action. It was then that the *Ajax* and *Achilles* stood on until the range had shortened to 8,000 yards.

Captain Langsdorff was afterwards reported in an Uruguayan newspaper as having said that the rapidity with which the British manœuvred upset his plans. He mentioned the "inconceivable audacity," "incredible manœuvres" and "heroic tactics" of the British Commodore. "The *Admiral Graf Spee's* advantage in gun range was thus neutralised.... I realised how dangerous the position was and resolved at all costs to break off the action."

It was at about 7.40 a.m. that it was reported to Commodore Harwood that the firing had been so rapid and continuous that there was a danger of running short of ammunition if the action were much prolonged. He therefore changed his tactics, considering it advisable to shadow the enemy for the rest of the day, and then to close in to decisive range at night to finish the work with his lighter guns and torpedoes.

To carry this into effect he turned away to the east under cover of a smoke screen, and held that course for six minutes before turning and resuming the chase. Just as the ships began to turn one of the *Graf Spee's* last shells carried away the main topmast of the *Ajax*, caused a few casualties and destroyed the wireless aerials. New aerials were speedily rigged.

Thus by eight o'clock in the morning the heavily-armed *Graf Spee* was steaming to the westward at twenty-two knots, with the two little British cruisers dogging her from astern. The *Ajax* was on the enemy's port quarter and the *Achilles* on the starboard, both at a distance of about fifteen miles.

That both ships had not been vitally damaged in the close range action was entirely due to the speed and skill with which they had been handled. The greatest credit was also due to the men in the engine and boiler-rooms, who had steamed their ships under full power while zigzagging like snipe. Down below in the boiler-rooms the blast of the guns caused the flame to leap out of the furnaces. But the stokers, many of them very young, never ceased their work or moved back from their boilers.

Meanwhile there were sixty-one British prisoners on board the *Graf Spee*, thirty-one merchant naval officers in one compartment, and thirty ratings elsewhere.

The officers were locked in a central room just below the aeroplane on its catapult. Twenty feet by seventeen, it had a small pantry and wash-room attached.

They had heard the urgent alarm signals when the *Graf Spee* sighted the British, and the heavy firing that followed. As one of them wrote: "We soon guessed it was something different from an unarmed merchantman, as the *Graf Spee* was soon vibrating heavily with speed and heeling over at times with quickly-applied helm. We could feel the ship shaken at times, but were unable to tell if it was from her own heavy guns firing, or from the impact of shots hitting her."

Said another: "You can imagine our feelings, knowing it was the intention of the attacking ship to blow our temporary

home out of the water.... Every time a shot hit us we all said, 'Well hit, sir!' But we felt like rats in a trap."

Their first definite knowledge of a direct hit was at about half-past seven, when a shell burst overhead, putting out all the lights but one, fracturing the deck-beams overhead, smashing the steel cover of the skylight and breaking the glass. Some shell fragments and debris fell into the room, but no one was hurt. By standing on a table they could see through the splintered glass that the *Graf Spee* was being chased, for she was steaming full speed to the westward with her guns firing aft. Heeling violently over to the action of her rudder, she was evidently trying to dodge the British salvoes. They wondered intensely why so powerful a ship was running away.

Taking turns to watch through a small screw-hole in the bulkhead, they were able to see the men at the ammunition hoists outside, who looked very concerned and glum. When a lull in the firing came many dead and wounded were carried past. Several witnesses described unwounded members of the *Graf Spee's* crew as being physically sick at the sights which confronted them.

It was not until nearly eleven o'clock that a German officer came to see if any of the prisoners were wounded. A voice shouted from outside, "Are you all right?" They replied, "Yes, but we want some coffee." There was none available, for the British shell had demolished the galleys, bakeries and store-rooms. After half an hour's delay a large pannikin of limejuice and water, with four loaves of black bread, were passed into the room, and the door locked again.

We left the *Ajax* and *Achilles* at eight o'clock shadowing the *Graf Spee* to the westward from a distance of about fifteen

miles, and about an hour later the *Ajax* recovered her aircraft, which had been up for two and a half hours.

Because of the *Exeter's* departure and his already heavy expenditure of ammunition, Commodore Harwood could not risk further prolonged day action with his greatly superior opponent. As already explained, it was his intention to close in after dark and finish off the business at short range.

But what of possible reinforcements?

The nearest British warship, the 10,000-ton, 8-inch gun cruiser *Cumberland* was at the Falkland Islands, 1,015 miles away, and at 9.46 the Commodore wirelessed her to steam to the River Plate area at full speed. In point of fact, the *Cumberland* had overheard confused messages which indicated an action was being fought, and had sailed immediately on the initiative of her commanding officer.

The Admiralty in London, too, had become aware that a battle was in progress. They had sent orders to the aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal* and the battle-cruiser *Renown*, which had been operating 3,000 miles away near the Cape of Good Hope, to proceed at once to the coast of South America.

The chase of the *Graf Spee* continued, and just after ten o'clock the *Achilles* had closed to a range of 23,000 yards. To shake her off the German yawed sufficiently to fire two three-gun salvoes, the second of which fell fairly close. Captain Parry promptly turned off behind a smoke screen and continued his task of shadowing from a greater distance.

Then, at eleven o'clock, a merchantman was sighted near the *Graf Spee*. She seemed to be stopped. A little later a wireless signal came through the ether: "*Ajax* and *Achilles* from *Admiral Graf Spee*. Please pick up lifeboats of English steamer."

But the s.s. *Shakespear's* boats were all hoisted when the *Ajax* came up with her. She was in no need of help. Captain Langsdorff's signal had probably been made as a ruse to delay his pursuers.

The shadowing of the *Graf Spee* continued throughout the rest of the morning and the afternoon. Soon after seven o'clock in the evening, however, the German once more swung round. Her guns flashed as she opened fire at the *Ajax* at 26,000 yards. The British cruiser hauled off under another smoke screen and continued to shadow from out of range.

By now it was sufficiently clear to all concerned that the *Graf Spee* was making for the estuary of the River Plate. A bank sixteen miles long, known as the "Banco Ingles," lay across the northern side of the entrance. It was possible that the *Graf Spee* would circle this large shoal and then dodge back to the open sea. To frustrate this possibility, at any rate to keep his enemy under observation, Commodore Harwood decided to separate his two ships.

The *Achilles* was already to the northward, and as soon as the *Graf Spee* passed Lobos Island—some sixty-five miles to the east of Montevideo—the *Achilles* was directed to continue the shadowing, while the *Ajax* went south-west to watch the southern end of the Banco Ingles.

It was sunset at twelve minutes to eight, and the *Graf Spee* was still visible from the *Achilles* as a dark silhouette against the bright sky over the horizon to the westward. Her distance was 25,000 yards. The better to observe her against the afterglow, which would linger for some time, the *Achilles* increased speed and closed on her quarry, hauling slightly to the north-westward as she did so. The *Graf Spee* resented the manœuvre, for a few minutes later she swerved under cover

of a smoke screen, and slammed off a salvo with her 11-inch guns. Once more the *Achilles* replied, turning away at full speed under her own smoke screen.

This action was witnessed by the captain of the Uruguayan cruiser *Uruguay*, whose report was afterwards published in the official Blue Book of the Uruguayan Government. He wrote:

> "At 7.50 p.m. the English ship on a westerly course opens fire when off Punta Negri, about eight miles from the coast and within territorial waters. The German battleship, which is now between the above-mentioned English vessel and the buoy E. of Banco Ingles, returns fire. The action continues in a W. direction. During combat the English ship throws out a smoke screen behind which she makes a complete turn. The other English vessel, which had stopped approximately twelve miles to the S. of Punta Ballena, hauled down her battle signal, which was immediately hoisted by the aforementioned ship, and then makes a W. course, taking no further part in the combat so far as we could see."

The statement about the *Achilles* being within territorial waters is not borne out by the facts.

However, after their brief interchange of shots just after sunset, the *Graf Spee* and *Achilles* resumed their courses to the westward. The pursuit was inexorable.

Just before half-past nine, by which time it was getting dark, the *Graf Spee* poured out another smoke screen to shake off the nimble *Achilles*. The attempt failed, whereupon the German fired a salvo of 11-inch, which the British cruiser dodged.

Twice more the *Graf Spee* fired single salvoes at the *Achilles* in attempts to drive her off. Captain Parry, however, refused either to be thwarted in his pursuit, or to open fire in return. Night was approaching, and his ship must be very difficult to see against the dark background over the horizon to the north-east. To have opened fire would give away his position by the gun flashes. Increasing speed, the *Achilles* was gradually creeping up on her quarry to keep her under observation. By ten o'clock she had closed to within five miles, and it was certain that the *Graf Spee* was passing to the north of Banco Ingles.

The afterglow of the sunset had vanished from the western sky, and very soon the shape of the *Graf Spee* became nebulous and indistinct against a background of low cloud and banks of drifting smoke. The better to keep her under observation, Captain Parry hauled slightly to the southward to get her silhouetted against the glare of the lights of Montevideo.

By a quarter to eleven the *Graf Spee* was about seven miles from the buoy marking the entrance to the dredged channel leading to Montevideo. If it had not been fully certain before, it was now clear that the defeated raider was about to seek the shelter of the neutral port.

At ten minutes past midnight the *Graf Spee* came to anchor in the outer roads.

A little later an English-speaking German officer, Lieutenant Hertzberg, entered the room occupied by the officer prisoners, most of whom were turned in in their hammocks.

"Gentlemen," he said, "for you the war is over. We are now in Montevideo Harbour. To-day you will be free."

"We couldn't believe it at first," one of the captains was to say later. "Then we noticed that the engines were stopped. Someone hoisted himself up and looked through the broken skylight, and sure enough there were the harbour lights of Montevideo...."

Then there were cheers, and a babble of excited conversation. There was no more sleep that night so far as they were concerned.

Little wonder.

Commodore Harwood had no means of knowing whether the *Graf Spee's* sojourn was likely to last for twenty-four hours or more, or whether she might soon make a dash for the open sea in the hope of catching the *Ajax* and *Achilles* before they could be reinforced. The *Cumberland*, with her 8-inch guns, was on her way up from the Falkland Islands, but it would be some time before she could arrive.

The *Graf Spee* could not be attacked at anchor in Uruguayan territorial waters. On the other hand, the estuary of the River Plate between Montevideo and Cabo San Antonio, on the Argentine shore opposite, is about ninety miles wide. It has two shoals in the entrance, one, the Banco Ingles, some seventeen miles south-west of Montevideo, with shallow water extending over twenty miles, and the other, the thirteen-mile patch of the Rouen Bank, more or less in the centre of the estuary, with a least depth of three and a half fathoms.

The various routes by which the *Graf Spee* might escape had to be watched as best they might by the two ships at Commodore Harwood's disposal. The situation, indeed, was one of some danger. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* were greatly inferior to their opponent, and the *Graf Spee* might emerge at the first gleam of dawn when she would be invisible against

the land and dark sky to the westward, while the two British ships would be silhouetted against the brightening sky in the east.

In telling his ships of his intentions, the Commodore began his signal with the brave words: “My object—destruction.” Then he outlined the necessity of keeping to seaward of the *Graf Spee*, and ordered the *Ajax* and *Achilles* to patrol well out during the night and to move back into the estuary after dawn.

The spirit of the officers and men was magnificent. There was no sleep for anyone, nor did they desire it.

One must imagine these two cruisers, without a gleam of light showing, rolling gently in the swell as they patrolled to and fro off the estuary. While men searched the dark mists and watched the dull glow in the sky which marked the position of Montevideo, others were clustered round the guns and torpedo tubes ready for instant action. Men in the engine and boiler-rooms were prepared for full speed at short notice. Those in the wireless cabinets listened to the faint scratching in their earphones which told of messages coming in through the ether, and of the *Cumberland* coming up at full speed from the south to join them. The wounded were looked after, and repair parties made good what damage they could during the hours of darkness.

For those in the *Ajax* and *Achilles* that long night of December 13th-14th was a period of expectation. They had been in hot action during the day, and were under no illusions what the dawn might bring. For all that she had fled, the *Graf Spee* was still a powerful opponent. One unlucky hit from one of her 670-pound 11-inch shell might finish a smaller cruiser.

Many of those wakeful men must have weighed up the chances in their minds. They would not have been human if they had not. But after the experiences of the day, and seeing the *Graf Spee* in full flight, they had a blind trust in their captains and officers, and supreme confidence in themselves.

"My object—destruction," the Commodore had signalled, and the news of it had percolated through both ships, as such signals invariably do. Their minds were at one with the Commodore's. Let the Commodore lead, and they would follow. If the *Graf Spee* emerged she should be taught another lesson, or they would sink alongside her. The loss of one or two small cruisers would not matter compared with the destruction or crippling of an enemy pocket battleship.

The night passed, and the first pale fingers of dawn came creeping over the sky from the eastward. As soon as full daylight came the two ships moved in towards Montevideo, keeping watch over what portions of the estuary they could. The day went by, but at ten o'clock that night the welcome *Cumberland* arrived from the Falklands, having made the passage in thirty-four hours.

The three ships patrolled to seaward during the night, the Commodore planning to shadow the *Graf Spee* if she emerged with the idea of concentrating his force far enough out at sea to deliver a concerted attack on the same lines as before.

Came the morning of December 15th, and another problem. Unless they replenished with oil fuel, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* could not remain indefinitely at sea with steam ready for full speed at short notice. But by wise prevision the Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker *Olynthus* was in the neighbourhood, and the *Ajax* was able to oil from her at sea, while the *Achilles* and *Cumberland* covered her. The operation was not easy, the

swell carrying away the securing hawsers; but the *Ajax* obtained the oil she needed.

On that day the Commodore had news that the *Graf Spee* had been granted an extension of time at Montevideo up to seventy-two hours so that she might make herself seaworthy.

The diplomatic representations to the Uruguayan Foreign Minister by the British and French Ministers, on the one hand, and the German Minister on the other, are hardly germane to the narrative. However, the British and French representatives urgently requested that the *Graf Spee* should not be allowed to stay for more than twenty-four hours under the terms of the Hague Convention of 1907, while the German pressed for an extension of fifteen days. The Uruguayan Government, basing its decision upon the report of a Technical Commission appointed by the Inspector-General of the Navy, decided that the *Graf Spee* might stay for seventy-two hours "for the carrying out of repairs necessary to ensure the seaworthiness."

The *Graf Spee's* casualties were thirty-six killed and about sixty wounded. According to the Technical Commission's report she had been hit at least twenty-seven times, including at least one hit in the control tower.

But waiting outside territorial waters, Commodore Harwood, as he himself wrote in his official despatch, "could feel no security that she would not break out at any moment." The strain of watching and waiting, in instant readiness for battle, was worse than the strain of battle itself.

Before daylight on December 16th the three British cruisers concentrated in the southern part of the estuary, and the *Ajax* flew off her aircraft to reconnoitre the enemy, the pilot being ordered not to fly over territorial waters. The aircraft returned

later with the news that the mist over the land made it impossible to see.

News came through later that the *Graf Spee* was still in Montevideo, and was unlikely to sail that night; but Commodore Harwood could not relax his vigilance. In point of fact he had ceased to be a Commodore, for late that afternoon he received the Admiralty's signal promoting him to the rank of Rear Admiral to date December 13th, the date of the action, and informing him of the K.C.B. bestowed upon him and the C.B.s upon his three captains.

The *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Cumberland* spent that night patrolling as before, and on the morning of the 17th the *Achilles* replenished her fuel from the *Olynthus*, after which they continued to patrol off the Banco Ingles.

That same afternoon came messages that the *Graf Spee* was preparing for sea. It was expected that she would break out at any moment; but even after four days of weary and anxious waiting the British ships' companies were full of what their Admiral called "the most cheerful optimism."

At 5.30 there was news that the *Graf Spee* was weighing anchor. The three British ships, with their crews at action stations, moved towards the entrance of the five-mile dredged channel leading to Montevideo. The *Ajax* catapulted her aircraft, with orders to report the *Graf Spee's* movements with those of the German *Tacoma*, to which the battleship was known to have transferred a large number of men.

Captain Langsdorff had until 8 p.m. local time to decide whether to remain in Uruguayan waters and be interned for the duration of the war. During the afternoon his ship weighed one of her anchors after transferring her repair machinery to an attendant vessel. Twenty-one of her wounded men were

sent to hospital in Montevideo, and at 6.35, preceded by the harbour-master's tug, she was seen moving slowly out of harbour. A quarter of a million people watched her progress. By cable and wireless the eyes and ears of the whole world were upon her. In a certain room in London we knew of her departure in seven minutes.

The *Tacoma*, having embarked about 500 men of *Graf Spee's* crew, was preparing to follow.

When the *Graf Spee* passed out of sight of the watchers in Montevideo, she was steering a south-easterly course. Later she turned westward, steaming towards the entrance of the channel leading to Buenos Aires. She was then reported to have stopped in the estuary of the River Plate, and later to be moving south-westward very slowly, followed by six of her own boats.

We know what happened next from many observers, but here is the account broadcast by a German commentator:

> "At sunset the *Graf Spee* was seven and a half miles from Montevideo. She stopped and commenced manœuvring, while the British fleet waited. The *Tacoma* approached the *Graf Spee*, and vessels flying the Argentine flag also appeared on the scene. Boats were seen to leave the *Graf Spee*. At 7.55 the sun went down behind her.... Suddenly a purple flash 100 metres high. The proud ship exploded. The whole ship was burning, not a victim in the hands of the enemy. The ship was burning ... already only one flag was visible, and then the whole ship disappeared. The English cruiser sent planes over to investigate.... When it was known that all the crew had been taken off, no one in the

> world can realise the joy that was caused. I saw many men burst into tears, as we did. The moment was too great for us—these fine men, this proud ship.... Half an hour later the High Command announced that the Führer had ordered the ship to be destroyed....”

Captain Langsdorff had been in communication with Berlin by telegraph and telephone, and is known to have spoken directly to Herr Hitler. And an official German news agency announced:

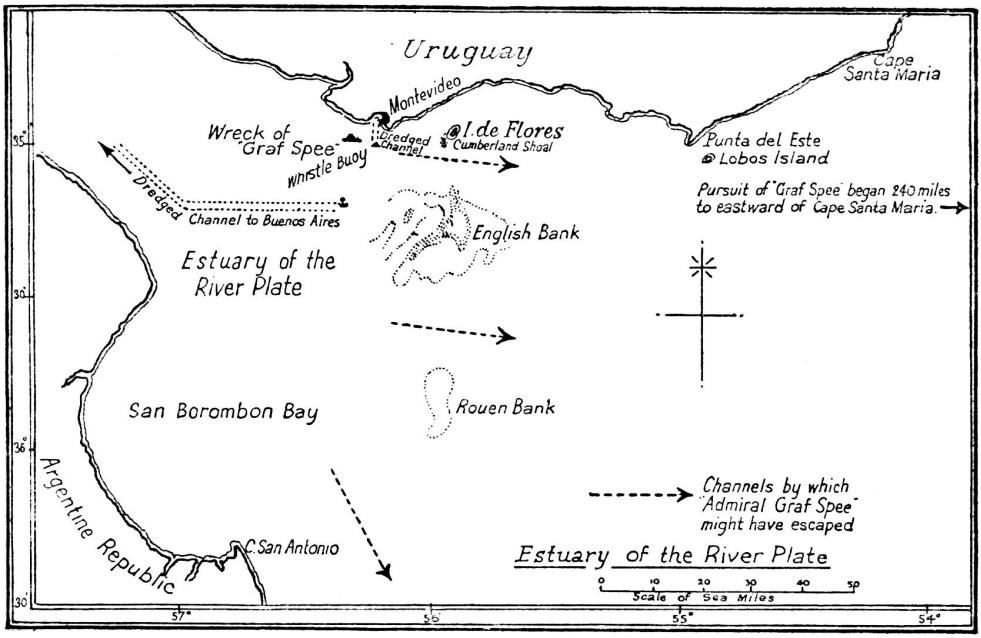
> “It is made known that the Führer and supreme commander gave the order to Captain Langsdorff to destroy the ship by blowing it up, inasmuch as the Uruguayan Government declined to allow the time necessary to make the ship seaworthy.”

At 8.54 p.m.[A] the *Ajax's* aircraft reported: “*Admiral Graf Spee* has blown herself up.” The three British cruisers steamed on towards Montevideo, going north of the Banco Ingles. On the way the *Ajax* stopped to recover her aeroplane, and the *Achilles* passed close by. Their decks were crowded with men, and a roar of human voices went rolling across the water as the ship's companies cheered each other—British and New Zealanders.

Switching on their lights, the squadron steamed past the whistle buoy marking the end of the dredged channel leading to Montevideo, and within about four miles of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. As Admiral Harwood wrote in his despatch: “It was now dark, and she was ablaze from end to end, flames reaching almost as high as the top of the control tower, a magnificent and most cheering sight.”

It matters little who gave the final orders for the *Graf Spee's* destruction. She was blown up about five miles from the harbour of Montevideo. A heavy explosion first shook the city, and a great column of smoke arose. Flames quickly began to spread the entire length of the ship. Five minutes later there came another rumbling explosion, which may have been one of the magazines. Much of the superstructure was blown away, but the funnel and control tower could still be seen outlined against the evening sky over a pall of thick smoke. Broken, she sank in about twenty-six feet of water.

Escaping oil fuel caught fire and enveloped the superstructure in flames. For a time an immense area of sea seemed to be blazing, the dramatic effect being enhanced as evening gave way to night and darkness came. There were more explosions, and the fire still raged next morning. At 9.45 a.m. the funnel gave way and toppled into the water, leaving the



control tower pointing skywards from the still smoking hull.

The battered remains of the once proud ship lay in a position where they obstructed the outer anchorage, and are visible to travellers voyaging to Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Those remains are not a monument to the prowess of the German Navy, but to British seamanship and gallantry.

As wrote a correspondent of the *New York Times*:

"This was a battle won when the *Graf Spee* was forced, despite her more powerful guns, to run for shelter under the naval fighting skill that is a tradition of the British Navy."

Of the *Graf Spee's* 1,153 officers and men, the thirty-six dead were buried at Montevideo, forty remained in hospital and twenty-two in the German Legation or on board the *Tacoma*. The 1,054 that remained reached Buenos Aires in two German-owned tugs and a lighter, where they were taken charge of by the authorities.

On the night of December 19th, in the Naval Arsenal at Buenos Aires, Captain Langsdorff shot himself with a revolver. It is said that before doing so he gave his camera and other personal effects to his officers as mementoes, and then summoned his officers and men and made them a final speech, in which he warned them of his intention, and said that he would have preferred to have gone out and fought to the end, but had been forbidden to do so by higher authority. His body was discovered in naval uniform wrapped in the folds of the ensign of the old Imperial German Navy, which he had entered in 1912.

The suicide was announced by the German Embassy at Buenos Aires: "The commander of the glorious cruiser *Admiral Graf Spee*, Captain Langsdorff, last night sacrificed

his life for his country by voluntary self-immolation. From the outset he decided to share the fate of his fine ship, and only powerful influences and due consideration of his responsibility for the successful disembarkation of the crew of more than 1,000 men led him to postpone fulfilment of his intention until his duty was done, and his superiors duly informed of the situation. This mission ended, he bowed to destiny, a brave sailor who has written another page to the glory of the German Navy."

On December 20th the High Command of the German Navy in Berlin issued another communique: "Captain Hans Langsdorff had no wish to survive the sinking of his ship. Faithful to ancient tradition and in accordance with the teaching of the officer corps to which he belonged for almost three decades, he took his decision.... The Navy understands and esteems this act. As a fighter and a hero Captain Langsdorff did what was expected of him by his Führer, the German people and the Navy."

Nevertheless, the news of the suicide came as a most unpleasant shock to German official circles. The propaganda ministry had difficulty in explaining why a man they said had won a battle and performed an act of honour had chosen to kill himself. According to the accounts of certain correspondents at Montevideo and Buenos Aires, Captain Langsdorff made a serious psychological error which undoubtedly contributed to the disillusionment and depression that led to his suicide. He mistook Montevideo's sincere homage to the dead members of his crew as a great popular Latin expression of approval of what he and his sailors stood for. He went on to Buenos Aires expecting to be welcomed with open arms, and found instead a great coldness.

Indeed, the defeat of the *Graf Spee* was as pleasing in all the Americas as it was in the British Empire. Commenting upon the suicide, another American correspondent was to write: "Inevitably the world will set this scene at Buenos Aires beside another in the cold, storm-swept reaches of the North Atlantic, when Captain Edward Kennedy, of the converted merchantman *Rawalpindi*, saw the *Graf Spee's* sister looming up in the mists. Captain Kennedy is buried in the North Atlantic. Captain Langsdorff will lie in a different kind of grave. And the world will be left to wonder whether there is not running, through all the brash structure of the Nazi regime, a melodramatically suicidal tendency."

Admiral Harwood was to write in his despatch: "I have the greatest pleasure in informing you of the very high standard of efficiency and courage that was displayed by all officers and men throughout the five days of the operation.... Within my own knowledge, and from the reports of the commanding officers, there are many stories of bravery, devotion to duty and of the utmost efficiency.... I am submitting separately a list of officers and ratings whom I consider to be especially deserving of award. I would remark, however, that the standard throughout has been so high that the preparation of this list has been very difficult.

"I would also like to place on record the honour and pleasure I had in taking one of H.M. ships of the New Zealand Division into action, and fully concur with the commanding officer of H.M.S. *Achilles'* remark that 'New Zealand has every reason to be proud of her seamen during their baptism of fire.' "

On February 23rd, 1940, 760 officers and men of the *Ajax* and *Exeter* and six of the Merchant Naval captains who had been on board the *Graf Spee* received a tumultuous welcome

from many thousands of London's citizens. The *Achilles* had reached Auckland, New Zealand, the day before, to receive another vociferous and wholehearted homecoming.

On the Horse Guards Parade those of the *Ajax* and *Exeter* were inspected by the King, while her Majesty looked down on the scene from a window in the Admiralty. Decorations and medals were then presented, and later the Queen moved among the bereaved relatives, speaking to all of them.

We may close with some lines from Mr. Winston Churchill's speech after the luncheon at the Guildhall which followed: "The brilliant sea fight which Admiral Harwood conceived and which those who are here executed takes its place in our naval annals; and I might add that in a dark, cold winter it warmed the cockles of the British heart. But it is not only in the few glittering hours—glittering deadly hours—of action which rivet all eyes, it is not only in those hours that the strain falls upon the Navy. Far more does it fall in the weeks and months of ceaseless trial and vigilance on the stormy, icy seas; dark and foggy nights when at any moment there may leap from the waves death and destruction with a sullen roar. There is the task which you were discharging and which your comrades are discharging. There is the task from which, in a sense, the fierce action is almost a relief.... The warrior heroes of the past may look down, as Nelson's monument looks down upon us now, without any feeling that the island race has lost its daring or that the examples which they set in bygone centuries have faded...."

THE CRUISE OF THE 'ALTMARK'

II

THE *Altmark*, afterwards to become notorious as the prison ship for officers and men of ships of the Merchant Navy captured by the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*, 299 of whom were rescued by the destroyer *Cossack* in the icy waters of Jösing Fiord on the night of February 16th, 1940, sailed from Kiel on August 2nd, 1939, with a cargo of 9,260 tons of fuel oil and 45,180 barrels of lubricating oil.

A ship of about 18,000 tons, with a speed of more than twenty knots, the *Altmark's* name did not appear in Lloyd's Register. She had the appearance of an ordinary tanker with the funnel well aft; but in the 1939 German list of "Die Schiffe der deutschen Kriegsmarine" was officially described as a supply ship.

According to the published diary of one of her crew, the *Admiral Graf Spee* sailed from Wilhelmshaven on August 21st. The *Altmark*, having left Germany nineteen days earlier, reached Port Arthur, Texas, on August 17th by way of the English Channel, the Azores and the Straits of Florida. Having completed with oil fuel, she sailed again on the 19th. On the 28th, three days before Germany's invasion of Poland, and six days before Britain and France declared war upon Germany, the *Admiral Graf Spee* met the *Altmark* at a rendezvous at sea about halfway between the Azores and Bermuda. The battleship was refuelled and provisioned, and the supply ship provided with two heavy machine guns.

On September 2nd the *Altmark* repainted herself light yellow and changed her name to the *Songe* of Oslo. Crossing the Equator on September 8th, she met the *Graf Spee* five days later, and again on September 20th and 25th. It was not until October 18th, however, by which time the raider had sunk the British merchantmen *Clement*, *Newton Beach*, *Ashlea* and *Huntsman*, that the *Altmark* became a prison ship.

Ten days later she again met the *Graf Spee*, and received more prisoners from the *Trevanion*, sunk on the 22nd. Then, while the battleship rounded the Cape of Good Hope, to sink the *Africa Shell* 180 miles north-east of Lourenço Marques on November 15th, the *Altmark* cruised in the South Atlantic well out of the normal track of shipping. The two ships met again on November 26th, when the raider was fuelled. They were in company for the last time on December 6th, by which time the *Graf Spee* had added the *Doric Star* and *Tairoa* to her list of victims. On that date all prisoners were sent to the *Altmark*, except the masters and certain other officers. Then, having fuelled and provisioned, the *Graf Spee* steamed off to the westward, and on December 13th was in action with the *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter*, with the result that we already know.

Captain Dahl, of the *Altmark*, had twelve armed seamen from the *Graf Spee* to assist him in guarding the prisoners. He had spent a considerable period of the last war as a prisoner in England, and had no love for that country. He was a strict disciplinarian, and the lot of the captives was far from happy. They were badly fed, suffered through lack of exercise and water, and were crowded in makeshift accommodation, "furnished," if it can be called furnished, with bedding, carpets and miscellaneous fittings taken from captured ships.

Until January 22nd, 1940, the *Altmark* was cruising in the South Atlantic, apparently waiting for orders from Germany. Then, homeward bound, she proceeded north, crossing the Equator on January 31st. On February 9th, somewhere near the trade routes in the North Atlantic, she sighted six British vessels, but took steps to avoid them. The snow-covered peaks of Iceland were sighted on February 11th, and it was passed during the next day. On the 14th she entered Norwegian territorial waters at some point off the Trondheim Fiord, and embarked a Norwegian pilot, who took her south through territorial waters.

A little further south she was stopped by a Norwegian destroyer, whose commanding officer requested to examine the ship. However, as the *Altmark* flew the German state colours and was regarded as a warship, it seems that the Norwegian officer considered he was only entitled to make certain that the vessel really was what she purported to be. Her papers are stated to have been in order, and the Norwegian was informed that the *Altmark* was homeward bound from Port Arthur, Texas, to Germany, and that her two guns were carried for defence against aircraft.

The *Altmark* proceeded on her way, but about 220 miles south-west of Trondheim, off Songesjöen, was hailed by another Norwegian destroyer, who wished to know if the *Altmark* had any persons on board who were nationals of a belligerent country. The reply given was that there were no such persons on board, which was a barefaced lie.

It is obvious that the commander of the Norwegian destroyer had suspicions as to the real position; equally clear that Captain Dahl, of the *Altmark*, considered it necessary to keep from the Norwegian authorities the knowledge that he had prisoners on board, even at the sacrifice of his own

personal honour. He obviously felt that if the Norwegians did become aware of the true circumstances, his plan of using some hundreds of miles of Norwegian territorial waters to ensure the safe conveyance of the prisoners to Germany would be frustrated.

But how the Norwegian authorities could not have known there were prisoners on board is incomprehensible. It had been broadcast all over the world since the previous December. Every neutral newspaper had carried the story, and the facts were known in Norway.

So the *Altmark* steamed on from Sognesjöen. The Norwegian admiral at Bergen, however, was not satisfied, and on February 15th, when the *Altmark* was about 100 miles from Bergen, she was intercepted by another Norwegian warship, whose captain asked to inspect her. This captain Dahl refused to permit, and the matter seems to have been dropped.

It was also discovered at this time that the *Altmark* had been using wireless in Norwegian territorial waters in contravention of the Norwegian Neutrality Regulations. A complaint was made by the Norwegian authorities, and Captain Dahl apologised, saying he was unaware of the prohibition. This matter was dropped also, though it was clearly incumbent upon the Norwegian authorities at least to discover the nature of the wireless messages sent, since they might well have constituted a serious infringement of neutrality calling for appropriate action. However, no such investigation was made.

Though the *Altmark* did not call at any Norwegian port, there is no doubt that she passed through the “Bergen defended area” which belligerent warships were prohibited

from entering under the Norwegian Neutrality Regulations. It must be presumed that the *Altmark* made the request to pass through the area, and that permission was granted by the Norwegian authorities, although the regulations made no provision for any exceptions. The reason for Captain Dahl's request was sufficiently obvious. Avoidance of the "Bergen defended area" would have forced the *Altmark* to leave territorial waters for the open sea, where she was liable to attack by British naval forces.

Since the Norwegian coast had been sighted on February 14th the prisoners had been keeping a look-out through a small peep-hole, and had instituted a system of one-hourly watches during the whole twenty-four hours. And on February 15th, off Bergen, two Norwegian destroyers and two torpedo-boats approached the *Altmark*, and one of the Norwegian officers came on board. By this time the prisoners were desperate—determined to make a bid for freedom. Their attempt has been described by Mr. G. A. King, the Second Engineer of the *Doric Star*, who wrote:

"Another effort was made to get out, but we were repelled with hoses, and the lights were turned out. The officers made the attempt with the idea of getting the men out afterwards. All this time we had been blowing S O S on whistles, and there were ships right alongside; but we were still not rescued. The other Norwegian ships were within fifteen yards of us, and they could not have failed to hear the noise we were making. We broke the hatch with iron bars and banged on this until we were repelled. We had almost broken free, except for about a couple of inches, but when they turned out the light it was useless. They had turned on the winches to drown the noise, but there was a small scuttle hatch over the top of where we were, and we managed to lift this up. The Fourth

Officer, Mr. Evans, put his head out of this hatch and blew on a pocket whistle, and this was the time when the Norwegians were on board. Two hundred and seventy-five men altogether made this racket, and it went on for fifteen to twenty minutes. We did not stop even when they turned on the water, so they stopped us by hitting us with pieces of wood and straps, and finally at the point of a gun. We knew if we did manage to get out that one or two of us would probably be killed, but we were prepared to take that risk for the benefit of the others. We were held up by the Norwegian destroyer for four hours, during which time we made a lot of noise. Then we stopped for five minutes, and then blew S O S, giving the international signal on pocket whistles. At six o'clock it was all over, the lights were turned on again and we were all terribly disappointed."

Once more the *Altmark* was suffered to continue her voyage southward, apparently escorted by a Norwegian destroyer.

But the British Government was not unaware that the *Altmark* would be making for home, and on February 16th three reconnaissance aircraft of the Royal Air Force were on the look-out off the Norwegian coast.

From the height at which they flew the visibility was more than forty miles. Near the coast the sea was frozen over, with great tracks of clear water where the ice had been broken by currents or passing ships. Flying well outside territorial waters, the aircraft proceeded to examine the area from the extreme south point of Norway northwards.

Then, fifteen miles ahead, they saw first a smudge of smoke; then a ship with a black hull and cream-coloured

upperworks which could not be their quarry. Next, just before 2.0 p.m., they sighted a grey ship, with the funnel right aft.

Approaching at 1,000 feet, they inspected her, diving close under her stern, searching for a name. And there it was in letters a foot high—*ALTMARK*!

They took note of the position, and called up British patrolling forces by radio. The *Altmark*, they reported, was in latitude this and longitude that, steaming down the Norwegian coast at eight knots. The cruiser *Arethusa*, with the destroyers *Cossack* and *Intrepid*, were ordered to intercept.

According to an account afterwards broadcast by Captain Dahl, the *Altmark's* captain, on February 20th, he sighted a British cruiser and destroyer at 2.45 p.m. His ship, let it be noted, was being escorted by a small Norwegian torpedo-boat, the *Kjell*.

Captain Dahl said:

"When they were only about three miles away, the English cruiser signalled to me with his searchlight that he wanted to make me take a contrary course. Two destroyers repeated the demand with flag signals. As I was well within territorial waters, the signals were naturally ignored, and I continued my course along the coast. At about 4.30 p.m. one of the destroyers fired a shot which fell about 200 metres behind the *Altmark*...."

This shot was fired to cause the *Altmark* to heave to, not to hit her. It had no effect.

Captain Dahl continued:

"This did not alter the fact that the orders or wishes of the English ships did not concern us. As the English destroyers then approached closer and entered Norwegian waters, the *Altmark* went close in to the coast and continued her voyage

between the coast and an island which lies off the fiord. One of the destroyers had previously tried to get between the land and the *Altmark*, but its intention to push the *Altmark* off the coast was easily countered by manœuvre, and the destroyer drew off. At the same time a Norwegian torpedo-boat, which was accompanying us, had approached another English destroyer, obviously to demand that it should leave territorial waters. In any event, the destroyer immediately turned out to sea."

One of the British destroyers concerned was the *Intrepid*, which closed the *Altmark* a little more than 200 yards from the ice-fringed shore. To prevent the *Intrepid* coming alongside, Captain Dahl turned sharply to port and entered the small Jösing Fiord at seven minutes past five.

The *Intrepid's* captain at once asked the captain of the Norwegian torpedo-boat about the *Altmark's* British prisoners. He was told that the Norwegian pilots on board the *Altmark* stated that the ship had been examined at Bergen the day before, and had been authorised to travel south through territorial waters. The Norwegian officer stated that the *Altmark* was unarmed, and that he knew nothing of any prisoners. The *Intrepid*, therefore, withdrew outside territorial waters and awaited instructions from the Admiralty.

So the *Altmark* entered Jösing Fiord, which was covered with ice, though not thick enough to stop her. She was still accompanied by the *Kjell*, and another Norwegian torpedo-boat which had appeared in the meanwhile.

Wireless signals were passing between the British ships outside and the Admiralty, which was fully aware that the British prisoners were still in the *Altmark*. Captain P. L. Vian, of the *Cossack*, was instructed to propose to the captain of the

Norwegian torpedo-boat that a joint Anglo-Norwegian escort should accompany the ship back to Bergen to enable her to be properly examined by the Norwegian authorities.

Captain Vian carried out his instructions, but his proposal was declined by the Norwegian officer in accordance with the instructions of the Norwegian Government. Captain Vian then asked the Norwegians to accompany a British boarding party during the impending search of the *Altmark*. This also was declined, so Captain Vian was under the obligation of acting alone.

Jösing Fiord is about a mile and a half long, with an entrance about 200 yards broad, but widening higher up to a maximum of 500 yards. The entrance lies between steep, dark cliffs. There are various dangers in the approaches, and the narrow inlet, with its restricted anchorage, would not ordinarily be used except by small vessels with local knowledge, or provided with a pilot.

Captain Vian had no pilot, only the Admiralty charts and "Sailing Directions." Moreover, the *Cossack* was over 350 feet long, and destroyers are not the handiest vessels in restricted waters, or for manœuvring in floating ice. But where the *Altmark* could go with her pilot, the *Cossack* could follow without one. Her captain did not hesitate.

The night was brilliantly moonlit, and at about 10 p.m., according to Captain Dahl, a warship passed the entrance and shone her searchlight down the Fiord. Half an hour later she was seen to enter the fiord and stop near the Norwegian torpedo-boat. The Germans took the new arrival for a Norwegian, their assumption being strengthened—according to Captain Dahl—by an international code signal in Morse,

"Do you need a tug?" and the repeated demand, "Place a ladder at your stern."

In his broadcast Captain Dahl was injured innocence itself, oblivious to the fact that the *Altmark* had illegally passed through some 400 miles of Norwegian territorial waters.

"It appeared too extraordinary that an English warship should enter a Norwegian fiord to undertake anything against a German ship," he said naïvely. "We again with Morse lamp asked for the name of the ship, but received no reply. When the ship Morsed 'Turn about or I open fire on you,' there could be no further doubt that it was an enemy ship which had thereby committed the greatest unthinkable breach of neutrality. I therefore commanded the crew ... to swing out the boats, and sailed the *Altmark* further into the fiord, as a destroyer, which later turned out to be the *Cossack*, turned towards her. As in the circumstances it might be that the English would try to take the *Altmark* with them, I decided to strand the ship, or at least to damage the rudder or screws so that she should be useless. The English destroyer was thereby nearly forced on shore. As she passed, members of her crew who were standing ready sprang on board. They immediately spread over the whole ship...."

By the most skilful handling Captain Vian had managed to lay his bows alongside the *Altmark's* stern, and Lieutenant-Commander Bradwell T. Turner sprang on to the poop, caught a wire passed to him, and secured the two ships together. Turner was followed by a boarding party of two officers and thirty men, the former armed with revolvers and the men with rifles and bayonets.

Rushing forward, Turner made his way to the bridge where he found Captain Dahl and some of his officers working the

engine-room telegraphs. They were stopped, but the *Altmark* already had so much sternway that she grounded stern first on the rocks, nearly carrying the *Cossack* with her.

While Turner and a few of his men were getting control of the bridge, the rest of the boarding party, under a lieutenant and a gunner, were rounding up the German crew, some of whom had to be disarmed. Scuffles and scrimmages took place as the Germans were overpowered and put under guard. In the course of this Mr. John J. F. Smith, the gunner, was shot at and wounded in one of the alleyways.

Meanwhile, a boat full of Germans had been lowered and dropped on the ice, smashing it. These men remained in the icy water clinging to the lifelines until rescued at considerable risk by the British. Some of the armed guard from the *Graf Spee* escaped across the ice with their rifles. Reaching the shore, they opened fire. In the course of the whole incident six Germans were killed and some others wounded, though on the British side no shooting took place until Mr. Smith was wounded.

Once the *Altmark's* officers were under guard, Lieutenant-Commander Turner took Captain Dahl below to show him where the prisoners were shut up. The sentries with the keys had gone, so the British smashed the locks and burst open the hatches.

"About eleven o'clock we were keeping our regular watches when great activity was noticed on deck," one of the prisoners relates. "I was on duty, and the next thing I heard was an Englishman shouting down to our hatch, 'Are you British prisoners?' I answered, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'You're safe. We've come to release you.' Then there was a loud burst of cheering."

So those two hundred and ninety-nine officers and men of the British Merchant Navy came up one by one from the places where some of them had been incarcerated for four months, and mustered on the *Altmark's* forecastle to cheer and cheer again while waiting for the *Cossack* to come alongside bow to bow to take them on board and back to Britain. They landed on the afternoon of February 17th, to find a great crowd, with the usual pressmen and photographers, waiting to receive them.

To Captain Vian, of H.M.S. *Cossack*, a signal went out from the Admiralty: "The force under your orders is to be congratulated on having in a single day achieved a double rescue, Britons from captivity and Germans from drowning."

Captain Dahl, in the meanwhile, was complaining bitterly of his treatment by the British and their "brutal violation of Norwegian territorial waters." "The *Altmark* is now stranded," he said. "Her rudder is broken and one screw is damaged." Indeed, the *Altmark* remained aground for some time. She was towed from Jösing Fiord by a Norwegian tug and eventually reached Germany, limping all the way and still in territorial waters.

Not only was the *Altmark* escorted by Norwegian warships during part of her 400-mile passage through Norwegian waters to Jösing Fiord with the British prisoners on board, but on three occasions at least there was ample opportunity for proper investigations to be made as to her exact status. Moreover, the proposals for investigation made by the *Cossack* were refused. All this clearly constituted a failure on the part of the Norwegian Government to comply with the obligations of neutrality.

If it be genuinely true that the Norwegian Government was unaware that there were British prisoners on board, no British Government, knowing they were on board, could have neglected to take all the steps in its power for their rescue.

III

THE little Norwegian town of Narvik, with about 10,000 inhabitants, lies 135 miles north of the Arctic Circle, and about 30 miles up the winding Ofot Fiord, which opens on to the wider Vest Fiord between the Lofoten Islands and the mainland.

The Swedish frontier is little more than 20 miles away, and Narvik, connected by railway with the Swedish ore fields, owns practically the whole of its industry to the export of iron ore. The harbour, which is well sheltered and never freezes, was generally filled with steamers, and had wharves and jetties for their accommodation.

Much of the high quality ore used for Germany's war effort was shipped at Narvik, to be carried thence through nearly 1,000 miles of Norwegian territorial waters among and behind the islands where it could not legitimately be intercepted by British warships.

On April 8th the British and French Governments announced the laying of mines at three points on the west coast of Norway "to deny the continued use by the enemy of stretches of territorial waters which are clearly of particular value to him." In justification, the Allied Governments cited the brutality of the German campaign against neutral merchant shipping and fishing craft, and the threats and pressure which compelled Norway to allow German ships passage through territorial waters, while Norwegian shipping was sunk and Norwegian seamen murdered.

"The Allied Governments can no longer afford to acquiesce in the present state of affairs by which Germany obtains resources vital to her prosecution of the war, and obtains from Norway facilities which place the Allies at a dangerous disadvantage," the official pronouncement said. Therefore mines would be laid to prevent the unhindered passage of vessels carrying contraband of war through Norwegian territorial waters, though they would not interfere with the free access of Norwegian nationals or ships to their own ports and coastal hamlets.

One of these minefields was laid near Bodō at the southern end of the Vest Fiord giving access to Ofot Fiord and Narvik, at which port, on April 8th, there were at least twenty-four merchantmen, including five British, nine German, seven Swedish, two Norwegian and one Dutch. Some of the German vessels were there for the purpose of loading iron-ore; but two at least were large cargo steamers of a type never seen at Narvik before, while on the afternoon of April 8th there arrived the *Jan Wellem*, of 12,000 tons, which was a whale-oil refinery ship carrying a large amount of oil fuel.

Two Norwegian warships, the coast defence vessels *Norge* and *Eidsvold*, were also based on Narvik, and apparently took turns in patrolling outside for the purpose of maintaining Norwegian neutrality.

On that same day, much further in the south, off Lillesand, on the Norwegian shore of the Skagerrak, a German transport, the *Rio de Janeiro*, was intercepted and torpedoed by a British submarine. Bound from Stettin to Bergen, she carried German troops in uniform.

In the early morning of April 9th Germany invaded Denmark and Norway—Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim

and Narvik, among other ports, being occupied by German troops.

The circumstances in which they were put ashore are already well known. At Narvik, according to competent eye-witnesses, between 1,500 and 2,000 soldiers landed at 5 a.m. and obtained possession of the little town without serious resistance.

Some of these troops are said to have come from the *Jan Wellem* and various German cargo-ships, where they had been concealed. Others were landed from German destroyers, which ran into harbour at dawn in the midst of a heavy snowstorm. It was disclosed in German broadcasts that most of the soldiers in the destroyers were Austrian Alpine troops, herded together like cattle for a voyage of over 1,000 miles. For most of the journey there was a heavy sea; and according to the German commentator the soldiers learned to know its "most violent and impressive nature."

The *Eidsvold* was sunk in the Fiord outside. According to the testimony of Captain Charles Evans, master of the British steamer *North Cornwall*, the *Norge*, which opened fire on the German destroyers, was torpedoed in the harbour. Captain Evans saw a huge explosion amidships, and the ship broke in half and sank in about a minute. He heard the cries of men in the water.

Ninety-seven were saved of the 400 odd which formed the crews of the *Norge* and *Eidsvold*, and at this time, let it be noted, Germany was not at war with Norway. The invasion and seizure of the ports was declared to be a "peaceful occupation."

So Narvik passed temporarily into German hands.

It was obvious that the German decision to invade Denmark and Norway had been made long before the Anglo-French announcement about the laying of mines. Troops cannot be concealed in cargo ships, or sent on board warships or transports for voyages up to 1,000 miles, in a matter of twenty-four hours. The plans, carefully worked out, were prepared long beforehand. Indeed, the British minefields were laid at daylight on April 8th, and the day before British aerial reconnaissance over the North Sea had discovered German battle cruisers, cruisers and destroyers on their way north. The British Fleet promptly left Scapa Flow to intercept and bring them to action.

On the afternoon of April 7th, the British destroyer *Glowworm*, of the minelaying force detailed for the Vest Fiord, lost a man overboard in heavy weather and stayed behind to pick him up. At eight o'clock the next morning, steaming north to rejoin her force, she sighted first one, and then two, enemy destroyers. She promptly engaged them, and they retired under a smoke screen.

The *Glowworm* next reported an unknown ship at the northward. Her last wireless message ceased abruptly; for within a few moments she was in action with an enemy cruiser and several destroyers. Sunk after a gallant fight against overwhelming odds, some of her crew were picked up by the Germans.

At daylight on April 9th, off Narvik, the British battle-cruiser *Renown* was also in action with the *Scharnhorst* and *Hipper*. It was blowing a full gale with a heavy sea and fierce snowstorms when the *Renown* opened fire at 18,000 yards. The *Scharnhorst* replied, but almost immediately turned away, the *Renown* chasing at twenty-four knots with the seas breaking over her forward turrets. The German, heavily hit,

ceased firing, and retired at full speed to the southward, the cruiser *Hipper* coming into action and throwing a smoke screen across her wake.

Firing was intermittent because of the squalls of snow and sleet shutting out the view; but did not finally cease until the Germans disappeared at a range of 29,000 yards.

On this same day the main portion of the British Fleet was at sea in about the latitude of Bergen, when it was continuously attacked by German aircraft. Various mendacious reports were put out by the German radio of battleships and cruisers being sunk or seriously damaged. In point of fact two cruisers were slightly damaged by splinters, while one heavy bomb struck the flagship *Rodney*. The thick deck armour withstood the impact, and her only casualties were ten wounded. The cruiser *Aurora* was subjected to five successive bombing attacks which all failed. The destroyer *Gurkha*, however, which was accompanying the *Aurora*, was hard hit and sank after four and a half hours, all but fifteen of her crew being saved.

More or less simultaneously with these operations, British submarines were busy in the Skagerrak and Kattegat taking heavy toll of the transports and supply ships keeping up communication with the German forces in Norway.

On the afternoon of April 9th, five British destroyers, the *Hardy*, *Hotspur*, *Hostile*, *Havock* and *Hunter*, were in the Vest Fiord between the southern part of the Lofoten Islands and Norway. From what the First Lord of the Admiralty afterwards said in the House of Commons, their orders were to attack the enemy who had got into Narvik, and especially to destroy the store ships in which they had smuggled their soldiers up the Norwegian corridor, and on which they must

depend for working up the efficiency of their defences. It was to be expected that the enemy had landed a certain number of guns in the twenty-four hours they had been there.

The British flotilla was under the command of Captain Bernard A. W. Warburton-Lee in the *Hardy*, and at four in the afternoon he closed the Norwegian pilot station at Tranoy, at the mouth of the waterway leading to Narvik. Two officers were landed to discover what they might. They learnt that Narvik itself was in German hands, and that there were in the fiord at least six enemy destroyers, ships larger and more powerfully armed than the *Hardy* and her consorts.

The news was sent back to the Admiralty by wireless. "Shall I go in?" Captain Warburton-Lee asked.

The Admiralty thought the operation so hazardous that one o'clock on the morning of April 10th they replied that the Captain must be the sole judge of whether to attack or not. Whatever he did, whatever happened, the Admiralty would support him.

To a man of Warburton-Lee's mettle the answer could not be in doubt. He had served much of his thirty-two years in destroyers, and was imbued with all the dash and élan of the destroyer service. Back to the Admiralty in Whitehall, 1,300 miles away, went the message—"Going into action." He intended to attack at dawn.

Captain Warburton-Lee signalled to his flotilla informing them of his plan, and at three o'clock, when it was still dark, the five ships ceased their patrol and formed up in line ahead.

There was a slight easterly breeze, with mist and heavy snow—so difficult to see that the ships had to use electric clusters to keep touch. Led by the *Hardy*, they groped their way through the grey void into the one and a half mile wide

entrance to the Ofot Fiord. So low was the visibility that, except once, when they nearly struck the rocks at the water's edge, they never sighted the high, snow-covered hills on either side. The Ofot Fiord is really a deep submarine valley with depths of a hundred fathoms and more within a stone's throw of the shore. Towards the entrance the depths in the centre run down to three hundred fathoms, or 1,800 feet. In the fiord off Narvik there are a hundred fathoms and more, the harbour itself shallowing to twenty fathoms and less.

Creeping on at moderate speed, the British flotilla was off Narvik at ten minutes to five. It was snowing hard. The harbour is a roughly circular pocket about a mile long and the same distance across with an entrance about half a mile wide. Detailing his other four ships to patrol outside, Captain Warburton-Lee took the *Hardy* in alone. One must imagine her rippling through the calm water in the grey half-light of the dawn with her crew at action stations, and the guns and torpedo-tubes manned. The hearts of all on board must have been beating a little faster.

A merchant ship was anchored near the entrance, and for the moment nothing else could be seen. Passing her, however, the *Hardy* sighted a dense cluster of ships lying at anchor off the town. With them was a large enemy destroyer.

It was a matter of split seconds. Turning to port the *Hardy* increased speed and fired torpedoes. As she was swinging two more enemy destroyers came into view, at which she fired torpedoes and opened fire with every gun that would bear. Amid the roar of her 4·7's there came the thud of a deeper explosion as one of her first torpedoes found its billet. A burst of red flame shot into the air from the first enemy destroyer. It was accompanied by an upheaval of spray and smoke, and showers of bright sparks which looked as though some giant

had taken a running kick at a bonfire. Burst asunder, the German sunk, to carry her dead and dying with her. The unwounded cast themselves overboard into the icy cold water.

The attack seems to have come as a surprise; but on her way out, having fired her torpedoes, the *Hardy* was hotly engaged by the five-inch guns of two German destroyers and more artillery mounted ashore. Then the four other British came in hot-foot to the attack, their guns roaring out against the enemy and smiting them savagely, and torpedoes wreaking havoc among the densely clustered transports and store ships.

Then the *Hardy* came in a second time, to be heavily engaged by the heavier guns of the destroyers and shore batteries, and to hammer away in return. She withdrew, and her consorts came in again, firing once more at the shore defences and destroyers. The enemy guns ceased firing, though six torpedoes passed close by the *Hardy* as she made her way into the open fiord.

Captain Warburton-Lee led a third attack; but opposition seemed to have ceased. One destroyer and six supply ships or transports were thought to be sunk or sinking. Others were on fire.

In point of fact the destruction was even greater. Captain Evans, of the *North Cornwall*, with others from the British steamers *Mersington Court* and *Blythmoor*, had been made prisoners soon after the German occupation and put on board the *Jan Wellem*. From the deck of that ship Captain Evans witnessed the attacks. “It was like being in the front row of the stalls,” he said, “except that shell were whistling all round us, torpedoes exploding, guns banging, and ships blowing up, sinking and bursting into flame.”

The *Jan Wellem* was being used for fuelling the destroyers, and Captain Evans saw the destroyer actually lying alongside at the time torpedoed and sunk in a huge explosion. Another, torpedoed or battered by gunfire, lay with her bows under water. A third was sinking by the stern, while a fourth, lying alongside a jetty, was blazing like a bonfire.

"I never saw anything to equal it," he said. "Ships all round us, destroyers and merchant ships, were sinking and on fire. Our chaps seemed to come in again and again, loosing off their guns and slamming in every torpedo they had. The harbour was a shambles of sunk and burning or sinking ships."

The sound of firing had been heard by others. Other German craft lay at anchor in the branching arms of the main fiord, and on her way out, while actually turning to the westward at the head of her flotilla for the thirty-mile dash to the open sea, the *Hardy* sighted three enemy destroyers steaming full speed towards her from the eastward, the direction of Rombaks Fiord.

The British increased speed to thirty knots and opened fire at the Germans, about three thousand yards astern and coming up fast. The enemy replied. Once more the air filled with the roar of guns, the crash of exploding shell, and the eerie screech and whining as they drove through the air. The calm water vomited fountains of spray as projectiles fell wide. It was broad daylight now, and the mist had almost gone.

Gathering speed as her turbines were opened out, the *Hardy* was still swinging to the westward when two more enemy destroyers appeared ahead, barring the passage to the sea. Like those astern, they were larger ships than the British, armed with heavier guns. They were immediately engaged.

It was a battle of five against five; but the odds were overwhelming. The British had already been in hot action, and were now caught between fires. Shell rained upon them from two directions; but they fought desperately.

Almost at once the *Hardy* was badly hit forward, the two foremost guns being put out of action, and the bridge reduced to a mass of tangled wreckage. Captain Warburton-Lee fell, mortally wounded. Lieutenant Charles P. W. Cross, the signal officer, was killed outright, and Lieutenant-Commander Russell C. Gordon-Smith, the navigating officer, seriously wounded. Every officer or man on the bridge except one was killed, wounded or stunned, the only one left being Paymaster-Lieutenant Geoffrey H. Stanning, the Captain's secretary, and he with his left foot useless through a wound. The after guns were still firing under the orders of Lieutenant-Commander Victor G. D. Mansell, the First Lieutenant.

Recovering himself, Stanning suddenly realised he was alone amidst the wreckage, with the dead and dying all round him. The ship was steaming fast with no one at the helm, the wheelhouse having been hit. He lowered himself painfully down a steep ladder to find the wheelhouse a shambles, with the coxswain and other men killed or wounded. So Stanning himself took the wheel and steered, peering out through a shell gash in the steel plating. There was no one to give him orders from the bridge.

Then an able seaman appeared, and the Paymaster-Lieutenant gave him the wheel, climbed back to the bridge and took charge of the ship. The firing continued, and he had no notion of what was happening aft. But abreast of the *Hardy*, firing gun after gun at almost point-blank range, was an enemy destroyer. Stanning had the idea of putting the helm over to ram her, when the *Hardy* was badly hit in the engine-

room. Steampipes were shattered, and the *Hardy* began to lose her way through the water. There was nothing more to be done. Still under heavy fire, Stanning gave orders for the helm to be put over to run the ship ashore. She was practically stopped by the time she grounded on the rocks three or four hundred yards from the shore under fire at short range. Her last remaining gun still blazed defiance.

The *Hunter* had been sunk, apparently being hit by a full salvo as she turned and foundering in less than a minute, while the *Hotspur* and *Hostile* were damaged. But the Germans had not come off scatheless. Some of them had been heavily hit and were on fire. They refrained from pursuing the four remaining British as they limped out to sea, sinking on their way the *Rauenfels*, carrying ammunition and explosives. She went up with a roar in a column of smoke and flame over a thousand feet high.

Meanwhile orders had been given for the survivors of the *Hardy* to abandon ship, which they proceeded to do under fire without a boat that would float.

“We piled overboard as best we could and swam ashore,” one of the men said. “It was so cold after we got into the water there was no feeling in our hands or feet. We had a hundred yards to swim, and at least another two hundred to wade.”

The desperately wounded Captain was lashed in a stretcher, lowered into the icy water, and towed ashore by Mr. John W. McCracken, the Gunner, and one rating; but was dead when the shore was reached.

Lieutenant George R. Heppel saved at least five men who could not swim by swimming backwards and forwards between the ship and the shore. Chief Stoker Styles, who was

seriously wounded and afterwards died on shore, was taken there by Lieutenant-Commander Mansell and Stoker Petty Officer Carey. There were numerous instances of self-sacrifice and gallantry on behalf of others.

According to one survivor's account, about 170 officers and men got ashore, many of them grievously wounded. Seventeen had been killed in the fight, and two more were missing.

Some hundreds of yards away from the shore where they landed there was a cluster of small wooden houses. Shivering and numb with cold, the men dragged themselves thither through nearly six feet of snow, taking their wounded with them. The houses had been evacuated during the battle, but the inhabitants soon returned.

Eighty of the *Hardy's* people went to the little dwelling of Mrs. Christiansen, who, with her daughter, distributed food and all the clothing they had.

As one of the men said, "The girl took off her coat and jumper, and gave them to those of us who needed clothing most. They made us tea and coffee and prepared bread and butter. They gave us all they had, and we were thankful for it. All there was in that house was women's clothes, and we had to make shift with that. We got underwear of various sorts, skirts and jumpers. The women even tore up carpets for coverings, and pulled down curtains and cut them up too. We cut up lifebelts and used them as shoes."

The time was about eight o'clock, and much had happened since dawn. With the party were nine seriously wounded, and others with slighter injuries. Surgeon-Lieutenant A. P. B. Waind, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, himself wounded, did all he could for the suffering. Their bearing was very

courageous. We learn from the official account that Able Seaman Geoffrey Bailey, half-frozen with cold and with one hand shot off, sat for one and a half hours and never murmured.

The most important consideration for the moment was to get succour for the wounded, and a Norwegian telephoned to Ballangen, some fifteen miles away on the south side, which sent a doctor and an ambulance. The snow was thick. For the greater part of the distance the frozen road was little more than a rough track filled with ruts and pot-holes. Some of the wounded went in the ambulance. Others were lashed to sledges and dragged by their shipmates, bearing the heavy jolting with the greatest fortitude.

At Ballangen the *Hardy's* party were joined by Captain Evans, of the *North Cornwall*, with forty-six officers and men from the British merchant ships at Narvik. Landed on the south side of the harbour after the British attack, they managed to "lose" their German guards and get away, walking about twenty-five miles to safety.

At Ballangen the whole party were housed in a new school building with central heating. They were amply provided with food and clothing, for which the generous inhabitants scoured the country-side. There they remained from Wednesday, April 10th, until about noon on Saturday, the 13th. Then, as said one of the *Hardy's* men, they became aware that something was happening.

"We heard the sound of guns as a battleship started firing. We saw three German destroyers come out patrolling, and then they turned back, and we saw three or four destroyers come zigzagging up the fiord."

They watched with breathless excitement. Then someone raised a cheer. Others shouted, "Go on, boys! Let 'em have it!"

Next, to quote our informant, "We saw our destroyers driving the Germans on ahead, with the *Warspite* firing over the top of them in the direction of Narvik. Then up came the *Warspite*, though we didn't know her name till later, and the battle swept past us."

Once more the air shook to the rolling crash and thunder of guns, but heavier metal this time.

It was a grey, misty day, with low clouds and drizzling rain, so that the snowy hills more than five miles away on the opposite shore were invisible. Those men from the *Hardy*, we are told, could hardly believe their eyes when they saw a great battleship steaming past them. Her guns flashed defiantly, and sent the billowing clouds of dun-coloured cordite smoke rolling in her wake. It was a goodly sight to see that grey ship with her battle flags fluttering in the breeze. Adding their puny voices to the roar of artillery, those officers and men from the *Hardy*, with some of the merchant seamen from the *North Cornwall*, cheered and cheered again.

The battleship *Warspite*, of 30,600 tons, flew the flag of Vice-Admiral W. J. Whitworth. Mounting eight 15-inch and eight 6-inch guns, she was originally completed in 1915, and played a prominent part as one of the Fifth Battle Squadron at the battle of Jutland.

Her aircraft, laden with bombs, were catapulted off just before their parent ship entered the Ofot Fiord. They flew off in the direction of Narvik to reconnoitre.

Leading the British force was the destroyer *Icarus*, armed with four 4·7-inch guns and ten torpedo-tubes. There were

also the destroyers *Hero*, *Foxhound* and *Forester* of similar armament, but two less torpedo-tubes; the *Kimberley*, completed just before the war and armed with six 4·7's; and the *Cossack*, *Bedouin*, *Eskimo* and *Punjabi*, all 1,870 tonners of the *Tribal* class, armed with eight 4·7's.

The force was considerable, but it was known that several German destroyers were in the Ofot Fiord or its various branches. They were destroyers of the *Roeder* class, each armed with five 5-inch guns and eight torpedo-tubes. Under cover of the mist they might easily deliver a torpedo attack on the *Warspite*. U-boats might also be present. However, these risks had to be taken, with the additional danger of navigating a deep-draught battleship in a narrow fiord on small scale chart in misty weather.

The enemy was on the alert and patrolling, for just before half-past noon a German destroyer showed up from the mist on the south side of the Fiord and was instantly engaged by five British before she turned away and vanished. Passing the remains of the *Rauenfels*, the German munition ship destroyed three days earlier by the *Havock*, which was aground and still smoking, two more enemy destroyers were sighted to starboard before one o'clock. Both were engaged, the *Warspite* herself opening fire. The enemy replied.

Meanwhile the British were approaching Ballangen Bay, an indentation on the south side of Ofot Fiord, where the battleship's aircraft, using wireless, had reported the presence of another enemy destroyer. Sighted by the *Icarus* at seven minutes past one, the pair were soon in hot action, in which the *Bedouin*, *Punjabi*, and *Eskimo* presently joined. Fighting desperately, the German was overwhelmed by the murderous fire poured into her. In eight minutes she was burning from

end to end, though one gun remained obstinately in action until knocked out by a 6-inch shell from the *Warspite*.

The British light craft were still being engaged by two Germans to the eastward, which were presently joined by several others, until there were six of them zigzagging to and fro ahead and being driven to the eastward. The *Icarus*, *Bedouin*, *Punjabi* and *Eskimo*, having dealt with their first opponent, then joined in with the battle ahead.

It was a confused high-speed scurry, with all ships firing as fast as their guns could be loaded while twisting and turning to fire torpedoes or dodge enemy salvoes. The enemy, unable to escape, were being driven to the eastward, and soon showed signs of distress. One ship after another was badly hit and burst into flames. Within half an hour three had been destroyed, one burning fiercely in Ballangen Bay; a second drifting helplessly off Narvik with her survivors abandoning ship and swimming for the shore; and a third hard and fast on the rocks on the north side of Herjangs Fiord with a dense cloud of black smoke pouring out of her.

For the Germans it was a holocaust, their senior officer, Commodore Bonte, and many officers and men being killed, drowned or wounded. As for the British, not a ship had been hit or a man wounded. Already the *Hardy* and *Hunter* had been amply avenged.

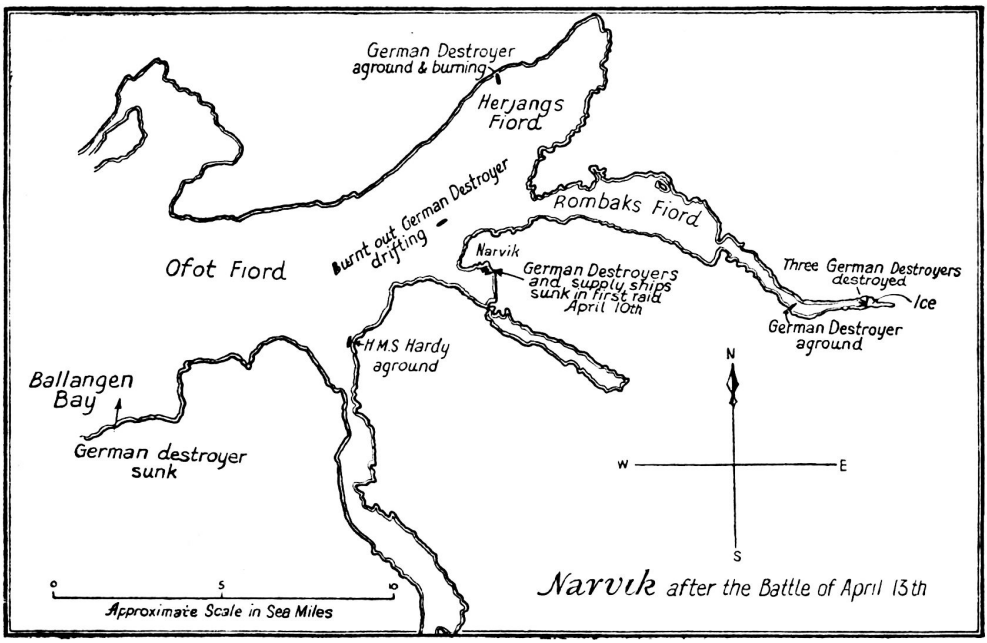
Meanwhile, by half-past one aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm had attacked the harbour at Narvik, and the *Warspite*, assisted by the *Cossack*, *Punjabi* and *Foxhound*, was bombarding the enemy's shore guns round the port. The *Cossack*, already famous for her boarding of the *Altmark* in the ice-strewn waters of the Jösing Fiord on the night of February 16th and

rescuing 299 British prisoners, closed the shore batteries to within less than half a mile and silenced a howitzer.

Later, according to one account, the *Foxhound*, and possibly other destroyers as well, went right in among the wrecks in Narvik harbour, and was engaged by a damaged German destroyer lying alongside. She returned the fire at less than a hundred yards, and drove the crew ashore, hastening their flight with a few more shells.

The destroyer action had become a chase, and four enemy destroyers, one of them severely hit, fled up Rombaks Fiord, to the east of Narvik, dropping smoke floats as they went.

The Fiord, about ten miles long, has an entrance



Narvik after the Battle of April 13th

roughly three-quarters of a mile wide. Then it broadens a little, until, five miles up, it is separated from the inner part of the fiord, less than half a mile wide, by a moraine which

restricts the navigable channel to a passage about 200 yards wide, through which the tide sets strongly.

It was through this narrow gullet that the four German destroyers fled, with the *Eskimo*, *Forester*, *Hero*, *Bedouin* and *Icarus* in pursuit.

From outside this entrance to the inner fiord it was impossible to see what lay beyond, and no sooner had the *Eskimo* put her bows through the passage than she came under heavy fire from a damaged enemy destroyer beached on the southern shore. The *Forester* was with her; both ships replying.

Then the *Hero* came up in support, but could get no further for lack of manœuvring room. Meanwhile, the *Eskimo*, in hot action, silenced the enemy's guns and set her ablaze, herself being damaged in the process.

Feeling their way, the *Hero* and *Bedouin* then went ahead, being cheered wildly by the other ships' companies closed up at their guns and torpedo-tubes, and cheering in reply. The spirit was magnificent. As an eye-witness said, "If one had been blind and had not known the circumstances, one might have put the cheering down to the procession of the *Cock Ship* having won the regatta in peace-time."

The *Icarus* and *Kimberley* followed the others into the inner fiord. The navigation was extremely difficult, with a waterway less than a quarter of a mile wide; but rounding the next bend they were able to see what lay ahead. Hard up against the ice fringing the beach at the very end of the fiord were three German destroyers, or what remained of them. One, with no signs of life on board, lay broadside on to the shore and appeared to be undamaged. Another was on fire in the stern, but seemed intact. The third, in the centre, lay with

her stern submerged and only her bows showing above the surface.

The British destroyers fired a few shells, but ceased when there was no reply. All three of the enemy ships seemed to have been deserted.

A little later the *Icarus* and *Hero* sent in boats with armed parties to search the two Germans that were still afloat. The boats were on their way in when the northernmost enemy rolled slowly over to starboard, remained there for perhaps a minute, and then disappeared. Scuttled by her own crew, she had foundered in deep water.

The remaining destroyer, the *Hans Ludemann*, was boarded, the German ensign hauled down and rehoisted with the White Ensign over it. The ship, which was still burning, had no one on board except one wounded officer in a stretcher, and he was taken to the *Hero* as a prisoner of war. Exposed films found on board the vessel were afterwards developed and found to contain photographs of the German troops landing at Narvik, and German destroyers damaged in the earlier attack.

Salvage of the *Hans Ludemann*, a large destroyer of 1,800 tons, was impossible, so the *Hero* lay off and fired a torpedo which hit the German under the bridge. The whole vessel seemed to lift in the air and to disintegrate into pieces.

That day seven enemy destroyers were completely shattered and the shore batteries silenced at a toll of three British destroyers damaged. Leaving two destroyers in occupation of the fiords, Vice-Admiral Whitworth gave the signal for withdrawal.

At Ballangen, as has already been described, some of the men from the *Hardy* and the British merchant ships had seen

the opening of the battle. Some of them went down to the beach in a motor-car, and later a Norwegian coasting vessel came in with a German motor-boat in tow. The motor-boat was in working order, so it was "borrowed" by Lieutenant Heppel, who embarked with Captain Evans of the *North Cornwall* and some others with the idea of intercepting one of the British ships to tell her of the British at Ballangen. They got on board the destroyer *Ivanhoe* at about eight o'clock, and that ship landed twenty-four armed seamen, who took charge of the village. Some twenty wounded were left behind in hospital, but between 130 and 140 officers and men from the *Hardy*, together with forty-seven merchant seamen, were ferried off to the *Ivanhoe*.

Later, during the night, 120 Germans from one or more of the sunken merchant ships entered the village, and without much ado surrendered to the armed party from the *Ivanhoe*. One hundred and twenty Germans were more than could be accommodated on board a destroyer which already had more than double her normal complement and might later be in action. On the other hand, the local Norwegians did not wish the prisoners to be released. So when the landing party from the *Ivanhoe* was re-embarked, some of the local inhabitants were provided with rifles and ammunition so that they could act as armed guards.

Thus the two battles of Narvik, which resulted in the destruction of eight or ten German destroyers of the largest and most up-to-date type, and the sinking of many enemy supply ships.

Both engagements were unusual, in that they were fought in the restricted waters of a Norwegian fiord beyond the Arctic Circle which had never been regarded as a possible battle-ground, and in any case were more suited to the

operations of small gunboats than large, high-speed destroyers designed and built for work in the open ocean.

Both actions were fought with gallantry, skill, dash, and a complete disregard of consequences—shining examples of destroyer work which will be remembered long after the ships engaged have disappeared into scrap.

It was announced in the *London Gazette* of June 7th that the Victoria Cross, the supreme award for gallantry, had been bestowed upon the late Captain B. A. W. Warburton-Lee, of H.M.S. *Hardy*. It was the first award of the Victoria Cross during the present war, and was made "for gallantry, enterprise and daring in command of the force engaged in the first battle of Narvik."

In the words of the official narrative:—

> "On being ordered to carry out an attack on Narvik, he learned from Tranoy that the enemy held the place in much greater force than had been thought. He signalled to the Admiralty that the enemy were reported to be holding Narvik in force, that six destroyers and one submarine were there, that the channel might be mined, and that he intended to attack at dawn, high water.
>
> "The Admiralty replied that two Norwegian coast defence ships might be in German hands, that he alone could judge whether to attack, and that whatever decision he made would have full support. Captain Warburton-Lee gave out the plan for his attack and led his flotilla of five destroyers up the fiord in heavy snowstorms, arriving off Narvik just after daybreak. He took the enemy completely by surprise and made three successful attacks on

warships and merchantmen in the harbour. The last attack was made only after anxious debate.

"On the flotilla withdrawing, five enemy destroyers of superior gun-power were encountered and engaged. The captain was mortally wounded by a shell which hit *Hardy's* bridge. His last signal was 'Continue to engage the enemy.' "

THE NAVY IN HOLLAND

IV

A POSSIBLE German invasion of the Low Countries had, of course, been contemplated by the British Government. Yet so strict was the neutrality of Holland and Belgium from the very beginning of the war that the Government of neither country had discussed measures of joint defence with the Allied Governments before the German armies actually crossed the frontiers on May 10th.

The Admiralty, however, had planned certain operations which were to be carried out if the expected invasion took place.

Destroyers were immediately to be sent to Imuiden, the Hook of Holland, Antwerp and Flushing to keep the ports open for the removal of shipping which might otherwise fall into enemy hands, to assist in evacuating refugees, to support the armed forces by all the means in their power, and to act as wireless links with England. Simultaneously, naval operations were to take place off the Belgian coast on the flank of the Armies; minesweeping flotillas were to be ready for service; and certain minefields were to be laid in enemy waters to prevent interference by hostile surface vessels or submarines coming down from the Heligoland Bight.

All these operations were set in motion immediately the invasion began, while other ships and forces were kept in reserve and ready to reinforce at the shortest notice. The minelaying operation was actually concluded within five minutes of the scheduled time, the only wireless signal that was made being, “Operation completed.”

For several days on end, in the face of continuous and terrific bombing from the air, fires blazing ashore, the dropping of magnetic mines in the harbours and rivers, and the confusion brought about by German parachutists acting in conjunction with a veritable army of Nazi sympathisers among the civil population, the Navy was hard at work in circumstances of almost incredible difficulty and danger. Call after call went forth for more and more ships and men to deal with a situation that became more confused every minute, or to relieve ships which had been damaged by enemy action, as was inevitable.

A chronological narrative is impossible, for many incidents took place at widely separated points at one and the same time. New problems arose every hour. The Navy was operating in small isolated units, each one working under the orders of its own individual officers. General instructions were given, but, for the rest, officers, and even small parties of men detailed for certain specific tasks, had to use their own initiative and act as dictated by their own good sense.

What with bombs, blazing buildings, the roar of anti-aircraft gunfire, parachutists dropping from the sky, spies, bogus telephone messages, cut wires, conflicting rumours and hundreds of refugees striving to get away, the situation was as difficult and as complex as it possibly could be. There was no fighting front in the ordinary sense of the word. Little isolated parties of men were fighting desperately in streets and buildings. Nobody could know what was happening out of his own immediate sight.

One destroyer at Imuiden landed a party of sailors who fought in the trenches with Dutch troops operating against parachutists. For nearly four days the force off the Belgian coast maintained its patrol under incessant bombing from the

air from dawn to dark. Minesweepers, also subjected to violent aircraft attacks, swept up the magnetic and ordinary moored mines off the Dutch coast and harbours.

On the second day of the invasion there came a report that the Germans were crossing the Zuyder Zee in boats. British naval assistance was urgently required. What shallow-draught craft were available?

Motor torpedo-boats, small, handy, very fast little vessels armed with machine-guns, were available in an English East Coast port. They sailed at once, crossed the North Sea at high speed, went up the fourteen-mile canal from Imuiden to Amsterdam and operated on the Zuyder Zee. It was the first time in history that British warships had been there. Under incessant attention from enemy aircraft, they did not finally retire until Amsterdam had to be abandoned to the enemy, and the huge oil-tanks had been set ablaze at short notice by a party hurried up from Imuiden.

The scene was indescribable as the motor torpedo-boats went down the canal on their way back towards the open sea. Amsterdam was covered in a thick pall of smoke with the flames blazing beneath it. German aircraft still roared overhead, raining down bombs, which crashed and thudded in all directions to add to the ruin and conflagration. The canal banks were choked with pitiful crowds of refugees flying for their lives, with those cattle that had escaped drowning by deserting the lower-lying ground when parts of the country were flooded. The canal itself was blocked with every sort of craft that would float crammed with escaping people—old men, women and tiny children. Now and then came the fiendish rattle of machine-guns as the German aeroplanes dived steeply down to attack the innocent who had been

driven out of their homes by the brutal and unprovoked aggression of the Nazis.

The motor torpedo-boats remained off Imuiden until the last of the refugees had sailed in all the steamers and boats that were available. They were still being mercilessly machine-gunned from the air, and the torpedo-boats had the satisfaction of bringing one enemy aircraft crashing down into the sea. The curtain of smoke over Amsterdam was visible for a full fifty miles out at sea.

It was at Imuiden that the Princess Juliana and her family were embarked in a British destroyer for passage to England. There was a heavy air attack as the ship left, and a magnetic mine fell into the river forty yards ahead of her. By some happy mischance it exploded on striking the water.

Gold was brought away from Amsterdam and Rotterdam, while a store of diamonds valuable for industrial purposes were rescued from the capital by a Dutch diamond merchant to prevent them falling into the hands of the Nazis. Valuable foreign securities in Amsterdam were also collected at the last moment by a British military officer. Arriving back at Imuiden to find the last ship gone, he returned in one of the motor torpedo-boats.

A party of about 130 officers and men of the Royal Navy were sent to Imuiden in a destroyer, to be greeted with eight or nine air attacks on their way in and salvoes of bombs dropping all around from aeroplanes coming down at a steep angle. There were several casualties before they got alongside a jetty in the harbour. Beyond having been told to keep the port clear and open for the evacuation of refugees, their orders were undefined; but new tasks arose almost every moment.

The German bombers were continually overhead showering down their explosives; but every available ship and boat was pressed into service to carry off the swarms of refugees arriving in every sort of conveyance. Then, at the request of the Dutch authorities, the British seamen set about destroying the port. Quays were blown up and oil-tanks set on fire. Machine shops, foundries and storehouses were destroyed, while the canal was blocked with an old liner of 12,000 tons, a merchant ship half laden with iron ore, and a trawler. The work of moving the liner, which had lain a long time at her moorings, was carried out in spite of the bombs and magnetic mines which were constantly being dropped by enemy aircraft. It was a slow process which was not facilitated by the fact that some well-meaning Dutch officer had already sunk the best tugs.

A floating dock and some cranes, with dredgers, hoppers and barges were sunk, while little parties of seamen with explosives ran cheerfully off to destroy buildings in spite of the bombs exploding all round them. The lock gates of the canal were closed, and the pumping machinery and power house blown up. Had the gates been opened, as they first intended, the water would have rushed in and the lower pans of Amsterdam would have been flooded. There were pathetic scenes when the Dutch seamen of the minesweepers, obeying their orders, had finally to embark in their ships and leave their wives and families behind to the mercy of the invaders.

The voyages home to England of some of the British naval personnel were full of adventure. One petty officer took command of a Dutch pilot boat filled with people, steered straight for the Downs over various minefields, and managed to get there. The Commander in charge of the naval party at Imuiden had earmarked a trawler for the use of himself and

the last few men to leave. It had all his belongings on board. Then it was found that the sunken liner and iron-ore steamer did not quite fill the canal, so the trawler had to be pressed into service to fill the gap that remained, leaving the Commander and his men with nothing better than a harbour launch.

In their small craft they set off for home, a distance of 120 miles, with no charts, food, water or lights. They had fuel remaining for about ten miles when they reached what they thought must be the Straits of Dover. The weather was hazy, and the only vessel in sight at dawn was a Dutch lifeboat flying a large flag and filled with refugees. With no real idea of their whereabouts they were finally picked up by a British patrolling destroyer and landed in England.

Similar scenes took place at the Hook of Holland, where an advance party of Royal Marines were rushed in destroyers for what their commanding officer afterwards referred to as “a very interesting Whitsun week-end.”

The assembly had sounded in their barracks in England at 8.0 p.m. on a Saturday, and less than two hours later they were fully equipped and on their way in motor-coaches for what was referred to as “a defensive operation” at some place unknown. Embarked in destroyers, they were rushed oversea to land at the Hook of Holland at dawn next morning, where they had the task of protecting the landing places.

They were bombed assiduously, and saw the enemy parachutists descending through the air “like great white butterflies,” though unfortunately out of reach. As one officer said, “Every time we moved we were bombed. Many of the parachutists were shot on the wing. There were spies everywhere. No one could be trusted.”

On the next morning—Monday—the Marines were reinforced by a larger body of troops which occupied a wider perimeter and freed certain of the Dutch troops which were able to go to the front, or to engage the various scattered bands of parachutists helped by their civilian sympathisers.

On the Tuesday, by which time "the bombing was becoming a nuisance," as the Marine officer reported, the troops were ordered to evacuate and the Marines to cover their embarkation. The soldiers started to go on board the ships at 12.15 p.m., the retirement being carried out in perfect order. The Marines, the last to leave, went on board two destroyers at 2.0 p.m. and left the harbour in the face of an intense air attack by thirteen aeroplanes which dropped bombs and magnetic mines. They reached England without the loss of a single man.

Much that was unforgettable occurred during the fifty-seven hours the Marines were landed on Dutch soil. Like the crews of the destroyers, which lay alongside with the bombs crashing down and their anti-aircraft guns continually in action, they had the heart-rending experience of seeing and dealing with those hundreds of refugees flying from the ravaged country.

Clutching their pitiful belongings, the fugitives arrived by boat, in every sort of vehicle, on bicycles and on foot, people of all ages and classes and of many different nationalities. There were aged men and women driven out of their homes, babies in arms and toddling children—some almost numb with terror, others weeping hysterically, a few stoical. Men had become separated from their wives, and mothers from their children. The task of embarking them was terrible with the bombs exploding everywhere, and enemy aircraft

swooping down from the skies with their chattering machine-guns pouring bullets into the escaping mass.

As one officer said—"It made me see red when I saw poor, wretched German Jewish refugees machine-gunned and bombed from the air as they tried to reach the ships to get away." It was deliberate and calculated murder. By no stretch of imagination could the pitiful crowd have been mistaken for armed troops. The enemy aircraft were out to kill and to terrorise.

One destroyer got away with 400 refugees over and above her normal complement, and was bombed and machine-gunned as she got away to sea with her anti-aircraft guns roaring in answer. A Dutch ship carrying seventy fugitives was mined in the river, though all on board were saved.

For nearly four days the turmoil lasted, and in the midst of it, with the din of anti-aircraft gunfire, the bomb explosions and buildings blazing ashore, the captain of one of the British destroyers was told that Queen Wilhelmina was on the jetty. Against her own personal wish, she had been persuaded to leave.

The British officer saluted, and asked Her Majesty's wishes.

The Queen, perfectly calm and unruffled in spite of the uproar and scenes around her, replied in slow deliberate English. She would not be hurried.

"Do you know the way to Flushing?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Do you know where the minefields are?"

The officer replied that he knew of the British and German minefields; but was not certain about the Dutch.

When that information was forthcoming the Queen embarked with her entourage, dignified to the end. It was when the ship was at sea that she was prevailed upon to go to England.

But for the Royal Navy it is possible that neither Queen Wilhelmina, nor Princess Juliana and her family, would have succeeded in escaping.

Incredible adventures were crammed into those hectic days. Apart from the incidents already described, one destroyer passing down the coast saw five enemy seaplanes lying on the water close inshore, and, in the words of her captain—"Let 'em have it. I believe we knocked out two or three." The Naval Attaché at the Hague managed to get a telephone message through to the captain of one of the destroyers. He would be waiting off a certain place in a boat at such-and-such a time next morning. He was, and a destroyer was there to pick him up.

The seamen and Royal Marines went about their duties during those terrible days of tragedy as though it were part of an ordinary day's work. Many of them were young men, and not all had been under fire. In the words of one of the officers in charge—"I have been very deeply impressed by the cheerful, calm and confident bearing and conduct of the personnel, both naval and Marine, which was indeed beyond all praise."

On May 17th, 1940, a message was sent by the First Lord of the Admiralty and the First Sea Lord to all warships that were operating from Northern Norway to the Belgian coast:—

"We would like those of you who are going through the most strenuous time that naval forces have ever had to endure to realise that we and the Naval Staff know well what is being

asked of you. Many of you have not had a good night's rest for weeks, but nevertheless your work has been done magnificently and cheerfully.

"What you may not realise is that you are helping our country to weather as black a storm as has ever broken on her.

"Hold on, carry on in the splendid way you are doing.

"Good luck to you."

DESTROYERS AT BOULOGNE

V

THIS story of the evacuation of British troops from Boulogne was told by a Naval Eye-Witness who had been sent to the port on an independent mission. He described in glowing words the truly wonderful behaviour of the troops in the face of an attack by greatly superior forces of the enemy who were assisted by enemy aircraft, tanks and field guns, and the no less admirable courage of the Royal Navy, particularly of the destroyers who evacuated the troops in circumstances of great difficulty and peril.

Where so much happened in less than twenty-four hours, and event followed event in rapid succession, it is impossible to tell the story in chronological sequence. Indeed, when one asked the Naval Eye-Witness what time such-and-such a thing happened, he could give no definite reply. "Things were so hectic," he said, "and there was so much going on, that we had no time to look at our watches."

Anyhow, a demolition party was detailed to be ready to move at two hours' notice. It consisted of seamen, Royal Marines, and a small detachment of the Royal Engineers, with the necessary officers. All the explosives and other demolition gear had to be provided.

Embarking in lorries, the combined party were taken by road to another port, where they embarked in a destroyer and were rushed across the Channel, reaching the main jetty at Boulogne in the forenoon. On the way into the harbour they had seen some French and British destroyers shelling the high land to the north, over which enemy tanks and mechanised

troops were advancing on the town. Inside the harbour, however, there was “comparative peace” for the time being, though not for very long.

The naval party was landed to hold the railway station, to fit the demolition charges, and to earmark all the bridges, cranes, lock-gates, machine shops, pumping stations, and the like which should be destroyed when the time came. This work was to be undertaken at the request of the French authorities.

Certain details of troops were in the railway station when it came under high-explosive shell fire from enemy field guns. The seamen were there too, fitting the detonators to their explosive charges. “Some of them were quite young men who’d never been under fire,” our Eye-Witness said. “They just carried calmly on with their jobs with bits of the roof flying around and casualties occurring. They never turned a hair.”

The officer in charge went off to Military Headquarters to report his arrival to the Brigadier, finding all the roads on the way barricaded with lorries and protected by machine-guns. The British troops defending the town consisted of battalions of the Welsh Guards, the Irish Guards, the Rifle Brigade and the Durham Light Infantry. There were also some smaller detachments of departmental troops, and the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps.

The Germans were gradually closing in on the town with light mechanised vehicles followed by tanks and motorised field guns. German aircraft were also busy using bombs and machine-guns. Their attacks were intermittent throughout the day, and at one time there were sixty machines in the air

overhead. On one occasion a greatly superior number made themselves scarce on an attack by R.A.F. fighters.

Owing to the position of the Germans all round the town it had been impossible to send field guns or other assistance, consequently the troops could not hold out indefinitely against the enemy armoured vehicles. Small parties of Germans were already coming down the streets on the outskirts of the town. Accordingly, it was decided to shorten the defended perimeter by a slight British withdrawal. This would avoid the flank being turned, and would accelerate the evacuation when the time came, as come it must.

The destroyer bringing the naval demolition party had already left under orders. She was relieved by another, and the second was relieved by a third. The naval and military officers conferred, and soon came to the conclusion that the town could not be held. The Germans already held the higher ground commanding the town and harbour, and were massing more troops and guns. Already our troops had been in action, and had sustained casualties.

Demolition of all the bridges and important points was decided upon, and small parties of seamen went out with their parcels of explosives The enemy was closing in. Already the swing bridges giving access to the inner part of the harbour were under the fire of machine-guns at a range of a few hundreds of yards. The explosives were placed by the bridges, though they could not be destroyed until the last of our troops had withdrawn.

Meanwhile, in another part of the harbour was a large crane, with a wet dock beside it containing a naval trawler. Both might be captured by the enemy, so the officer in charge decided to destroy them, with the power-house and pumping

station for the dock, without waiting for further orders. He did so, though the crane did not collapse as was expected. It was eventually brought crashing down by a few rounds from the destroyer alongside the jetty. While all this was going on the enemy were all round the docks at a range of about 400 yards, and snipers were within fifty yards of the crane.

Another small naval party were searching the docks for any ships which might assist in the final evacuation. They found one small vessel of the drifter type in which some stokers raised steam in record time by using bits of packing cases and anything combustible they could lay their hands upon.

The fire from field and machine-guns continued. So did the bombing. Then came the long-expected orders—"Complete demolition."

The floating dock was sunk, and machinery, power-houses and the like blown up. The hinges of some dock-gates were demolished, another trawler, another crane—anything and everything that might be of use to the enemy. The work was necessarily hurried, and in the midst of it the demolition parties were harassed by a dive bombing and machine-gun attack by fifteen enemy aircraft. These were the ones put to flight by R.A.F. fighters.

Further charges were placed to make certain of the sluice gates and bridge. The Germans were very close, and coming nearer all the time. At this period—the time cannot be stated—a considerable number of our troops were sheltering in the sheds round the railway station, and more were arriving every minute.

Evacuation having been decided upon, two destroyers came into the harbour and alongside, and steamed stern first again

out of the narrow entrance with all the troops they could cram on board.

Then three more destroyers came in and alongside, to be fired upon furiously by enemy field guns concealed on a wooded hill to the north of the harbour and overlooking it, and a number of pom-poms and machine-guns in the second storey windows of a hotel. The range was no more than 800 yards. Then several enemy heavy tanks came down the hill and on to the foreshore.

The troops, meanwhile, were on the jetty and embarking in the destroyer alongside. Their courage and bearing were magnificent, even under a tornado of fire with casualties occurring every second. They were as steady as though on parade.

But the destroyers had not been idle. Their 4·7's, 4-inch, pom-poms and machine-guns were in hot action, plastering the hillsides and the German fieldguns in them at point-blank range; blasting the hotel opposite until the pom-poms and machine-guns were silenced in showers of hurtling masonry and shell fragments. The first shot fired at the tanks missed. The second was a direct hit which caused one of them to capsize and "go spinning over and over like a child doing a cart-wheel," as said an onlooker. A third was knocked out with a direct hit. The others retired with celerity.

If it had not been for the rapid and accurate fire of those destroyers, and the bravery of the men manning their guns in the open, the retiring troops must have sustained far heavier casualties. Indeed, the evacuation might never have been possible.

"By God!" said one of the more senior military officers, voicing his admiration, "They were absolutely magnificent."

What the Army thought of the Navy, the sailors also thought of the soldiers. “They stood there like rocks and without giving a damn for anything,” said one naval officer.

Those three destroyers cast off with full loads of soldiers on board and went stern-first out to sea through the narrow entrance. One of them was slightly on fire, all of them were listing over heavily with the number of men on board. Getting them safely away and out to sea in such conditions involved a fine display of seamanship, particularly as the tide had fallen and there was a danger of them grounding. There was very little water under their bottoms.

It was now evening, and there were still many troops ashore, and more still coming over the bridges under heavy fire. Still more were under the doubtful cover of the station buildings. The firing and the bombing continued.

The troops never seemed to end, and the enemy was still advancing. Most of the naval demolition party had gone in the destroyers, leaving the officer in charge, a sub-lieutenant, a petty officer and one rating. They blew up the bridge when the last soldier had passed over it.

Darkness came, and at ten o’clock the railway station was still crammed with men, with the Germans very close, and advancing. But word had gone forth to the Navy that the evacuation was not complete, and at about eleven o’clock another destroyer nosed into the darkened harbour and alongside, being bombed and fired upon as she came.

She also was in danger of grounding; but moved stern-first out to sea with her quota and a list of fifteen degrees.

Then two more destroyers arrived, and evacuated the troops that remained, with their many wounded.

It was a miracle that all of these destroyers were not sunk.

This, in brief, is the tale of the evacuation of Boulogne in the face of an attack by vastly superior forces of the enemy. If the withdrawal was a misfortune, it is a story of truly magnificent discipline, and of courage, determination and devotion to duty on the part of comparatively small forces of the Army, the Navy and the Royal Marines which should be remembered long after we have passed into oblivion.

VI

THE following message was received from His Majesty the King by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, and published on June 4th.

Buckingham Palace.

"*I wish to express my admiration of the outstanding skill and bravery shown by the three Services and the Merchant Navy in the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Northern France. So difficult an operation was only made possible by brilliant leadership and an indomitable spirit among all ranks of the Force. The measure of its success—greater than we had dared to hope—was due to the unfailing support of the Royal Air Force and, in the final stages, the tireless efforts of naval units of every kind.*

"*While we acclaim this great feat, in which our French Allies too have played so noble a part, we think with heartfelt sympathy of the loss and sufferings of those brave men whose self-sacrifice has turned disaster into triumph.*"

GEORGE R.I.

A signal was sent out by the Admiralty on June 4th:—

"*The Board of Admiralty congratulate all concerned in the successful evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force and the soldiers of the Allied Armies from the Dunkirk area.*

Their Lordships appreciate the splendid endurance with which all ships and personnel faced the continuous attack of enemy aircraft and the physical strain imposed by long hours of arduous work in narrow waters over many days.

The magnificent spirit of co-operation between the Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Merchant Navy alone brought the operation to a successful conclusion.

The ready willingness with which seamen from every walk of life came forward to assist their brother seamen of the Royal Navy will not readily be forgotten.

Their Lordships also realise that success was only rendered possible by the great effort made by all shore establishments, and in particular by the Dover Command, who were responsible for the organisation and direction of this difficult operation."

The following letter was also sent by the Minister of Shipping on June 17th, 1940, to the masters of 91 ships of the Merchant Navy which took part in the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk.

"*I write on behalf of the Government to convey to you and to the members of your Ship's Company the gratitude and admiration felt for the help freely given and the courage and endurance displayed by you all in the evacuation from Dunkirk.*

This operation, in which the Merchant Navy joined as partner of the fighting services, was

carried to a successful conclusion in the face of difficulties never before experienced in war.

I am proud to pay tribute to your share and that of your Ship's Company in a great and humane adventure destined to occupy a place of honour in the pages of history."

Of the 91 ships, 57 were passenger and store ships, and 34 were tugs. In addition to these, the Ministry of Shipping has the names of over 600 smaller craft which went to take part in the operation, and the list is not yet complete.

I

The full story of the withdrawal of about 335,000[B] British and French troops from the town of Dunkirk and the beaches nearby between May 26th and June 3rd, 1940, cannot be told until the end of the war. Even then, when the memories of those thousands who took part have become blurred by the passage of time and in the light of after events, much of the more picturesque detail will necessarily be lacking.

The story deserves to be commemorated in letters of gold in the battle records of Britain. It concerns not merely the superb gallantry and devotion to duty on the part of the seamen of the Royal and Merchant Navies, our soldiers and our airmen; but also of those hundreds of amateur seamen and civilians who gave their little ships and their services to the country in the hour of her grave need. At least one young woman is said to have been among them in charge of a motor cruiser.

Many deeds of sublime heroism and self-sacrifice will have passed unnoticed and unrecorded. Comparatively few will receive awards for valour. But the story of that successful

withdrawal of those thousands of men of the British Expeditionary Force and the French Army during those eight terrible days will pass down to posterity as assuredly as have the desperate landings on the blood-stained beaches of the Gallipoli peninsula in March, 1915. Gallipoli is some thousands of miles from England. Dunkirk is a bare forty miles as the seagull flies from the white cliffs of Dover, and Calais only twenty.

It is impossible to exaggerate the immensity of the achievement. As Mr. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, told the House of Commons on June 4th: ..."The Belgian, British and French Armies were almost surrounded. Their sole line of retreat was to a single port and to its neighbouring beaches. They were pressed on every side by heavy attacks and far outnumbered in the air. When a week ago to-day I asked the House to fix this afternoon as the occasion for a statement I feared it would be my hard lot to announce from this box the greatest military disaster in our long history. I thought—and some good judges agreed with me—that perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 men might be re-embarked.... The whole root and core and brain of the British Army, on which, and around which, we were to build, and are to build, the great British armies of the later years of the war seemed about to perish upon the field, or to be led into an ignominious and starving captivity.... It seemed impossible that any large number of Allied troops could reach the coast."

The Prime Minister went on to describe the fierce fighting on land, the attacks by enemy aircraft, artillery, U-boats and motor launches upon Dunkirk, the beaches and the sea and ships beyond. He spoke of the Royal Navy, with the willing help of countless merchant seamen, straining every nerve to embark the troops in 220 light warships, and 650 other

vessels. He told of the difficulties of operating off a dangerous coast often in adverse weather, under a ceaseless hail of bombs and an increasing concentration of artillery fire; of how the hospital ships became a special target for the merciless attacks of the Nazi bombers; of the magnificent bravery of the Royal Air Force.

And he continued:—

"Suddenly the scene has cleared, the crash and thunder has for the moment—but only for the moment—died away. A miracle of deliverance achieved by valour, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by dauntless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all. The enemy was hurled back by the retreating British and French troops. He was so roughly handled that he did not harry their departure seriously. The Royal Air Force engaged the main strength of the German Air Force and inflicted upon them losses of at least four to one, and the Navy, using nearly 1,000 ships of all kinds, carried over 335,000 men, French and British, out of the jaws of death to their native land, and to the tasks which lie immediately ahead."

II

One of the wartime departments of the Admiralty in London is the "Small Vessels Pool," an organisation which has to do with the requisitioning of the large number of auxiliaries required for service with the fleet. Small vessels of all types were thus earmarked for naval purposes—trawlers, drifters, motor-launches, motor-boats, tugs and barges. As time went on it was found that certain of these vessels were not being used in the most economical way. A large ship might be doing the work that could equally well be done by a

smaller one, or a small vessel struggling with the task that should have been undertaken by a larger vessel.

This was duly rectified, though later on it was realised that many small craft available throughout the country were still unutilised. Information was needed of all the smaller vessels which might be needed in an emergency, and on May 14th the Admiralty broadcast an announcement dated May 10th that it was compulsory for owners of "self-propelled craft (including motor-boats) between 30 and 100 feet in length which are used for their owners' own pleasure or for carrying fare-paying passengers for pleasure" which had not already been offered or requisitioned, to send particulars of their craft to the Director of the Small Vessels Pool at the Admiralty within fourteen days.

Ninety per cent. of the people forwarding particulars of their vessels did not realise the announcement was a definite order or command; but took it as an appeal for help. There was no feeling of compulsion, and most of the owners replied to the effect—"Please take my boat, and me with it."

In the three days following the announcement the Admiralty received fourteen hundred letters, and at once set to work to inspect and to divide up the vessels into geographical groups. So if and when the call came from any particular locality, all that had to be done was to turn up the appropriate list to see at once the number and type of vessels available on any particular stretch of coast.

This wise prevision served the country in good stead. The call for the services of some of these small craft came much sooner than was expected.

It was on the night of Sunday, May 26th, twelve days after the Admiralty announcement had been broadcast, that the

Small Vessels Pool at the Admiralty was first asked to provide a number of small craft to help in withdrawing the troops from the eight or nine mile stretch of beach between Dunkirk and La Panne. Thereafter the cry went up for more boats and more men. Both were provided, a fantastic armada manned by men from every possible profession and walk of life.

Vice-Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay commanded the Naval forces from Dover. As he was to say later—"I don't quite know how the Admiralty got such a move on; but hordes of these little vessels arrived. They were manned by civilians mostly, and a certain number of naval ratings.... All these vessels had to be supplied and given instructions what to do. In the end they all went over to the beaches at Dunkirk, where their crews acted mostly on their own initiative.... As boats were sunk or abandoned the crews took to others, and carried on with their jobs. Nobody to this day quite knows what happened to anybody else."

III

The German invasion through Belgium swept like a scythe round the right and rear of the Allied Armies in the north. It cut the communications between the British Expeditionary Force and the main French Army. It cut the communications of the B.E.F. for food and ammunition to Amiens and then Abbeville, and drove on up the coast to Boulogne and Calais, and almost to Dunkirk.

There was desperate fighting at Boulogne, which was held by the Guards until they were ordered to withdraw. Calais was defended to the last by the Rifle Brigade, the 60th Rifles, the Queen Victoria Rifles, with a battalion of British tanks and 1,000 French troops. The British brigadier in command was given an hour to surrender, which he refused. There were four

days of intense street fighting before the end came. Only thirty men could be brought off by the Navy from Calais.

But the desperate defence of the port by 4,000 brave men was not in vain. At least two German armoured divisions which would otherwise have been used against the B.E.F. had to be sent to overcome Calais, while the delay allowed areas at Gravelines to be flooded and protected by French troops. Thus it was that the port of Dunkirk remained open.

As has already been said, only Dunkirk and that nine mile stretch of beach to the north-east of it remained from which to embark the B.E.F. and portions of the French Army. As Mr. Churchill observed, it seemed impossible that more than 20,000 to 30,000 men could be taken away through what he referred to as—"the ever narrowing, ever contracting appendix" upon which the British and French armies fought against the German armoured divisions and great masses of infantry and artillery.

A glance at the chart shows that the stretch of coast between Dunkirk and La Panne is a tangled maze of shoals and sandbanks for fully ten miles seaward. The channels are narrow and the tides swift and uncertain, while in war time navigation is made doubly difficult by the extinction or removal of lights, buoys and beacons. Dunkirk Road itself is a channel about half a mile wide with depths of six to nine fathoms at low water. Ships of considerable draught can use the port of Dunkirk at high water, or lie in the roads at any state of the tide.

Towards La Panne the anchorage broadens out a little into what is known as the Potje, where the depths do not exceed four fathoms at low water. The anchorage, however, is hardly navigable by vessels larger than destroyers, minesweepers,

cross-channel steamers and small coasting craft, including paddle steamers. But even so the sandy beaches extend to a quarter of a mile and more from the dunes which form the coast. One can wade for hundreds of yards with the water no higher than one's waist. Even the light-draught ships mentioned must lie a half to three-quarters of a mile from the shore. Hence the urgent need for boats, and still more boats, to embark the troops assembling on the beaches.

IV

Some 220 light warships of all kinds from destroyers to trawlers and drifters were engaged in the operation, with 665 other British craft and boats of every imaginable variety. Apart from two days of evil weather with a north-westerly wind raising a surf, they worked under an incessant rain of bombs and machine-gun bullets from aircraft, and a heavy and increasing concentration of artillery fire.

But before describing their experiences, let us hark back to the collection of the craft which formed this fantastic armada which will surely pass down to history as the weirdest collection of vessels ever used in a military operation.

As Mr. Ronald Cross, the Minister of Shipping, told us in a broadcast, the ports from the Humber to Southampton were scoured for shallow-draught ships that could operate close inshore. There were pleasure and cross-channel steamers, coasting craft, tugs, trawlers, drifters, motor-boats and launches, motor, and sailing barges.

"Every tug from the River Thames was taken," said Mr. Cross. "At our request the Royal National Lifeboat Institution sent twenty lifeboats, collected from ports between Lowestoft and Poole. A father and his son would take their yacht across from some south coast port without a word to anybody, and

bring it back full of troops. There was a Deal boatman who took his motor-boat across with several rowing-boats in tow, and brought them all back full of troops. And so I could go on, giving you story after story of these brave volunteers."

The larger vessels were manned by their own merchant naval crews. Most of the smaller ones were manned by volunteers—fishermen, yachtsmen, yacht-builders, members of yacht clubs, river boatmen and ordinary civilians innumerable. Boatbuilding and hiring firms provided their craft with volunteer crews and rushed them to the assembly points. There was no time to bring boats from a long distance; but every kind of craft was used that could propel herself or be towed over, if only for the ferry service between the beaches and the larger ships anchored in the deeper water offshore.

The response was magnificent. Small craft came from all sorts of places within reach of the Dover area, together with many Dutch and Belgian coasters and fishing craft manned by their own crews. An Officer was sent up to Lowestoft, and he telephoned to the Admiralty at nine o'clock at night to say he had secured eight boats and the crews for six. An officer at the Admiralty communicated with one of the London yacht clubs to say he required four men accustomed to running motor-boats.

"What's it for?" the voice at the yacht club asked.

"I can't tell you," said the voice from the Admiralty.

"Hold on a minute," from the yacht club, and then after a short interval, "I've got hold of six fellows."

They were on their way in half an hour, and afloat and on their way south by a quarter past three in the morning.

More boats came from the Thames, and offers of help from every sort of man in London, clerks, typists and messengers. Naval officers, military officers on leave or sick leave, merchant seamen, civil servants and at least two Treasury officials all came forward to man the improvised armada, and presently appeared off the beaches on the other side of the channel.

Six girls, expert yachtswomen, volunteered their help, to be told their sex was against them. One, inquiring in a gruff, masculine voice over the telephone, was given this answer. "Blast my sex!" she retorted. It is said that in spite of the rebuff she actually got to the beaches on the other side of the channel.

A naval officer called at an employment exchange asking for volunteers to man boats. He could only say that the work for which they were required was extremely dangerous and would last a few days. The exchange was kept open, and in six hours 150 men had come forward.

One party of enthusiasts from Blackpool wanted to know if their boats could be used if they loaded them on to lorries and brought them down by road. Two others set out from the Thames in little river canoes with outboard motors, hoping, as they said, to cross the Channel and to bring a man apiece.

All the available ships' lifeboats were used, and for every lifeboat sent a dozen could have been manned. One man was telephoned to by the Admiralty to be asked how he was getting on. His son replied, "I haven't seen my father since eight this morning. But I know they're doing all right because they're coming out of the lock-gates like sausages out of a machine. They come down to Westminster to the Customs

and pass on down, and away they all go, just like a procession."

Thames barges were used as piers on the beaches, the small craft securing alongside them to embark their human freights for passage to the larger ships lying in the anchorages beyond.

Only the very smallest craft could go direct from Dover to Dunkirk. Ships of heavier draught had to circumvent the shoals and previously laid minefields, which made the distance for the round voyage there and back about seventy-six miles. But as time went on the enemy mounted heavy batteries commanding the direct route passing near Calais, which meant that a new approach had to be chosen. This lengthened the distance for the round journey by about one hundred miles. Then the Germans brought up more guns commanding the new route, which meant that a third had to be selected. It had never been used before, and as it ran over shoals and sandbanks it had to be buoyed and swept for possible mines.

The navigational difficulties alone were daunting. Enemy gun-fire, with the bombing and machine-gun attacks of aircraft, and the presence of German U-boats and motor torpedo boats made them infinitely worse. Yet the impossible was achieved.

By the courtesy of the editor of *Lloyd's List and Shipping Gazette* I am permitted to make use of a log kept by a volunteer member of the crew of a small craft towed by the London tug *Sun IV*, one of the well-known tugs of that name owned by the firm of W. H. J. Alexander, Ltd., of Wapping.

At 9.0 p.m. on May 30th this volunteer arrived at Tilbury by motor-coach and was served out with his steel helmet and gas mask. He left in tow at two o'clock next morning, the

interval having been spent in embarking bully beef, biscuits and two-gallon petrol cans filled with water. Two and a half hours later, when it was getting light, they took in more provisions alongside Southend Pier—bread, butter, hard-boiled eggs, sardines, condensed milk, jams, herrings in tomato sauce, etc.

They were under way again at 4.40 a.m. Two destroyers were sighted entering the Thames, and at 5.15 the tug slowed down to permit buckets of hot tea to be passed to the boats she was towing, some of which were ships' lifeboats. During this operation one man was flicked overboard by the tow rope. He was rescued and taken to *Sun IV* to have his clothes dried. "Tea as good as a tonic," the diary says.

They saw ten fighter aircraft, and a steamer packed with troops on their way home. Then their troubles began with three boats breaking away from Number One on tow, after which Number Three tow lost a Thames pleasure launch, which proceeded to catch up under her own power.

> "7.0 a.m. Sea now getting troublesome. Sky overcast. Passing extra tow-lines for safety. Boats shipping a little water.
>
> 7.30 a.m. Sighted motor torpedo-boat. We reduced speed to five knots. Seas now astern as we alter course. Boats pitching. Man in No. 2 boat seasick. I do not think this trip across the Channel in small open boats will soon be forgotten by any of us. Wished I had brought my pipe. Officer in charge on tug showing very keen interest in our welfare."

After an uncomfortable trip they arrived at a British port, sailing again at 3.0 p.m. with an escort of destroyers, minesweepers, motor torpedo-boats and aircraft. In little more

than an hour, with the English coast out of sight, the boats in tow were rolling and pitching heavily. “Taylor seasick. His first time at sea.”

The log kept by this unknown volunteer tells the rest of the story so well and simply that it needs no embellishment of mine. I make no excuse for quoting the rest of it in full with the permission of the Editor of *Lloyd’s List and Shipping Gazette*.

> “7.15 p.m. Droning of ’planes. Suddenly discover 52 Jerries overhead at a colossal height. Every destroyer around us opening fire. Pom-poms, machine-guns, A.A. guns firing in rapid succession. This is continuous for seven minutes, until suddenly 25 of our fighters appeared on the scene, rapidly breaking up the enemy’s formation. Several ’planes falling into the sea, but too far away to distinguish nationality. One British fighter returning to England with white smoke pouring from her. One Messerschmitt falling into the sea one mile away, being followed by a German bomber, diving into the sea at the same spot with her engines flat out. As she hits the sea she explodes. Our fighters apparently now attacking the enemy bombers as they are unloading their bombs, in their endeavour to get away, five of them falling right ahead of us, shaking our boats heavily, but doing no other damage than killing millions of fish which are now floating all round us. One of our pilots bailing out, and two destroyers racing to the spot where he is expected to fall into the sea.

"8.00 p.m. Second air attack. A.A. fire from destroyers and French coast putting up tremendous barrage.

"8.15 p.m. One of our boats capsized. Two men overboard. One rescued. Had to abandon boat. Dunkirk ablaze in distance. Continuous shell-fire sending flames into the sky, forming miles of clouds of black smoke.

"8.30 p.m. Passing within half mile of Dunkirk. Flames leaping up from factories and oil dumps. In its small harbour were two destroyers half submerged, one British and one French. Just east of this we prepared for anchoring when Jerries renewed their attack of artillery bombardment on Dunkirk. Tremendous explosions shake everything. However, we *do* anchor and receive orders to prepare the boats for going ashore. Small groups of 'planes are dog-fighting overhead and just above the horizon. The superiority of our 'planes is plainly visible.

"9.00 p.m. We are proceeding at about half a knot. The beach is continuously being shelled, causing further fires. A British destroyer is now overtaking us and has started her heavy guns going, shelling over our heads to the Germans'$1positions.

"10.00 p.m. We cast off our boats and are being towed by a small launch towards the beach. Naval lieutenant is in charge. The launch was told to stop and wait for our return as we proceeded under oars.

"10.40 p.m. We were rowing very quietly towards the beach where our Tommies were awaiting us

when we heard a Nazi 'plane flying low over Dunkirk. Three hundred yards away on the beach right ahead of us she released three H.E. bombs. A soldier told me afterwards that the 'plane was attracted by the lighting of a cigarette of one of his comrades. I thereupon put on my steel helmet. I then received orders to stand by at the fore and bail out the anchor which consisted of six fire-bars tied together. German shells which had been so far directed towards the harbour and centre of Dunkirk could clearly be seen to be fired from the guns some 12 to 15 miles away, and then explode at their objective. I could see another one of these being fired in the distance. Took no more notice until we all heard a short whistle, followed by a colossal thunderclap, and we saw the shell explode on our starboard quarter, no more than 25 to 30 feet away. Luckily no one was hurt, but this audacity caused many adjectives to fly about. We then heard ahoys from what appeared to be a beached wreck. When our keel touched, our officer lowered himself into the water and returned with 24 French soldiers who had taken refuge in this wreck. They waded to our boat, but were too exhausted to climb aboard, so we had to heave them in.

"11.15 p.m. We rowed the Frenchmen to a coaster bound for England, then went back for our second load. Took 45 British soldiers from the beach. There was not the slightest sign of panic among them, and all waded through the water as if they were on parade. Brought them aboard our tug.

"*Saturday, June 1st*

“00.00 a.m. Our launch caught tow-line in her propeller. I went overboard with knife, endeavouring to clear it, but as it was 3½-inch rope and time too valuable we decided to try and start up a nearby motor yacht. When we went aboard we found that she had been heavily machine-gunned and was in a pretty poor state, so we had to abandon the idea, and rowed back. (I do not think I have ever been so cold before.)

“2.00 a.m. The rescued troops are now aboard the tug, and in the engine-room drying their uniforms. (I have joined them in this.)

“4.00 a.m. Have just awakened from one hour’s sleep, to find my clothes practically dry on the boiler. The experiences of the soldiers and the terrible hardships they have suffered cannot be described.

“4.30 a.m. Heaving anchor for home, leaving behind us the red glow of Dunkirk.

“1.15 p.m. Dropped anchor. Our Tommies disembarked on to a motor launch, giving three cheers as they leave us.

“2.00 p.m. We are taken off for the shore, where we received a wonderful reception. We were supplied with travel warrants, food tickets, cigarettes, cakes, tea.

“3.00 p.m. Departed for Tilbury, with some of General Prioux’s soldiers.

“6.30 p.m. Arrived Tilbury. The authorities there treated us to a meal.

"10.00 p.m. Signed off and received unexpected pay.

"11.00 p.m. Left Tilbury by Naval speed-boat for London.

"*Sunday, June 2nd*

"3.00 a.m. Disembarked at Tower Bridge.

"3.30 a.m. Had breakfast. Fell asleep over table.

"4.30 a.m. Home for a long sleep."

Hundreds of other volunteers in that armada of ships and boats had experiences similar to those of the volunteer who was towed to the beach at Dunkirk by the tug *Sun IV* of London.

As the Minister of Shipping said in his broadcast, the men of the Merchant Navy, and the volunteers as well, worked on until they dropped from sheer fatigue—embarking the soldiers from the beaches, passing to and fro across the Channel, for days on end, without sleep, often without proper meals.

To provide relief for those tired men a pool of seamen was arranged by the Shipping Federation at Dover, while an appeal was made for deck and engineer officers. The replies were magnificent.

Engineers, as the Minister explained, were almost all engaged upon work of national importance. If not at sea, they were making munitions, or building ships or aircraft. Engineers with sea-going experiences were appealed to to volunteer for a few days to help in withdrawing the troops. Nothing but fatigue and danger could be promised them, but the response was immediate. Within a few hours the names of about 350 volunteers had been received.

A factory at Ramsgate was appealed to for volunteers. “You’re going to hell,” the men were told. “You’ll be bombed and machine-gunned. Will you bring back the lads?”

There was not a moment’s hesitation. Tools were dropped and the engineers went straight down to ships they had never seen before. Within twenty minutes they were on their way to Dunkirk.

In the course of the operations one ship was badly damaged above water, and would undoubtedly have sunk if the sea had risen. Nevertheless, her crew took her back to Dunkirk without the least hesitation. Two other vessels received such injuries that they could not be used again, whereupon their crews instantly came forward to man another ship. Off the beaches, where the troops had to wade out from the shore, merchant seamen swam ashore with lines to help them.

Acts of gallantry and devotion to duty occurred off the beaches every minute. They were so numerous, and so many passed unrecorded, that it is invidious to mention names.

There was an elderly chief officer serving in a ship where three of the four lifeboats had been destroyed by bombs. He spent the whole night in the remaining boat picking up survivors from a sunken ship, he and his boat’s crew rescuing 150 men. A young fifth engineer with only four months’ sea service who manned a Bren gun and shot down an enemy bomber, while the captain, officers and crew of a cross-Channel steamer, in spite of repeated bombing attacks and severe damage through collision and bombs, made eight trips to and from Dunkirk carrying an average of 2,000 soldiers on each voyage, being about 500 in excess of their ship’s normal capacity.

One of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's lifeboats from the south-east coast of England was manned by ten men whose combined ages totalled nearly 600 years. They spent hour after hour under bombing and shell fire, bringing off more than 500 men to the larger ships. A boy of fifteen and a naval pensioner of seventy were in charge of a motor-boat, and spent three days and nights without rest in bringing soldiers off from the beaches under showers of bombs and machine-gun bullets. Their craft finally sank.

A commander of the Royal Naval Reserve, long past his youth, his son, and a sea scout took over a fifty-eight foot motor-boat and brought back 130 soldiers packed tight wherever room could be found for them. The passengers had to lie low to prevent the boat capsizing. Two other men acted as skipper and engineer of a thirty-six foot motor-boat. They had a mishap three-quarters of the way across the Channel, and were forced to abandon ship. Rescued by a small Dutch coaster, they spent seventeen hours on end in a lifeboat bringing soldiers off from the beaches.

Other volunteers manning a motor-boat included a man of sixty-nine. They towed a string of eight wherries across the Channel and to the beach near Dunkirk. Because the water was shallow it was arranged that eight soldiers at a time should wade out to the wherries. Each wherry when laden delivered her load to the motor-boat, which in turn took them to one of the larger ships in the anchorage. Many hundreds of men were thus brought off during the night, and as the last load was taken an officer on the beach shouted: "I can't see who you are. Who are you?"

The reply went back that the rescuers were part of the crew of a motor-boat from a south-east coast port. The officer called back: "Thank God for such men as you!"

Thank God indeed.

That motor-boat returned to England riddled with bomb and shell splinters.

One might go on for ever with tales of the splendid heroism of the officers and men of the Merchant Navy, and of the hundreds of volunteers.

Their spirit was magnificent. The enemy aircraft roared constantly overhead, bombing and using their machine-guns. Our men feared neither the bullets nor the fragments of bombs or shell that swept among them.

V

The town of Dunkirk was burning, and under continual air attack and shell-fire from the batteries of German 5·9-inch guns encircling the town at long range. The streets were littered with the wreckage of demolished buildings, and the bodies of dead and wounded. Over the town drifted a thick pall of black smoke from the blazing oil depôts and refineries.

The smoke-screen hampered the enemy aircraft; but for days his dive-bombers had concentrated their venom upon the headquarters of Vice-Admiral Abrial, of the French Navy, in command at Dunkirk; upon ships loading troops alongside the jetty, and the miscellaneous collection of craft embarking men from the beaches.

They also attacked all ships passing to and from across the Channel. Not even the white-painted hospital ships, flying their distinctive flags, and their hulls clearly marked with their broad green bands and red crosses, were spared from the ruthlessness of the Nazi bombers. They were assailed both in harbour and at sea.

The hospital ships *Worthing* and *Paris*, originally cross-Channel steamers of the Southern Railway Company, were attacked in clear weather in mid-Channel on June 2nd. There were no wounded in either of these vessels, but a boy of seventeen was killed by machine-gun bullets.

More than a dozen bombs were dropped near the *Paris*, narrowly missing her. Returning about an hour later, the bombers again attacked with machine-guns, firing indiscriminately upon the crew, the R.A.M.C. personnel and the nurses.

As a seaman on board described it: "The women clambered into a lifeboat, but as it was swinging from the davits a Nazi 'plane flew down, just missing our rigging, and machine-gunned the crouching women.... The same 'plane dived again, and this time dropped a bomb about twenty-five feet from the lifeboat, which was full of holes. The concussion lifted the boat out of the water."

According to another account, seven women were thrown into the sea when a bomb hit one of the davits from which a boat was being lowered, and one of them was seriously wounded in the arm by a splinter. However, the details matter little. The fact remains that vessels clearly marked and recognizable as hospital ships were wantonly attacked.

The *Paris* had to be abandoned, her crew and members of the nursing staff eventually being picked up by other craft and safely landed in England.

A party of about 200 officers and men of the Royal Navy, under the command of Captain William George Tennant, were landed at Dunkirk to assist in the evacuation. Under fierce bombing and artillery fire, this devoted band worked tirelessly and resolutely for days and nights on end in the town itself

and on the beaches, directing the soldiers to the places of embarkation and shepherding them on board.

At Dunkirk the enemy bombers had made a shambles of the docks. The storehouses, sheds and other buildings round them were blazing furiously, the heat being so great that the troops could not approach. It was soon found impossible to use the regular jetties inside the harbour for embarkation. An alternative had to be found.

The entrance to the port is protected by various jetties, or breakwaters of wooden piles jutting out into the sea. They were never intended for berthing ships, merely to facilitate the passage of vessels in and out of the port by breaking the force of the sea and the strong tides running off the entrance.

The use of one of these jetties, about three-quarters of a mile long, was suggested by the naval party at Dunkirk. Ship after ship—destroyer, merchantman or auxiliary—went alongside the frail structure under intense bomb and artillery fire to embark the quota of troops, to take them back to England and then to return for more.

As Vice-Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay said afterwards: "The place was never intended in the wildest imagination for a ship to go alongside.... There were no gangways, and narrow mess-tables were put across like planks from the pier to the ship. You can say that about 200,000 soldiers walked the plank to safety, mostly in the dark, and most of them so tired they could hardly drag their legs."

Though full details are not yet released for publication, we know that ships were sunk in Dunkirk harbour and its approaches. The official Admiralty list of losses, quoted later, as an appendix, gives the names of six destroyers and twenty-four minor war vessels out of the 170 engaged. We have no

means of knowing the number of British merchantmen or privately-owned craft and boats that became casualties.

Some 500 French vessels of all types from warships to fishing craft were also employed in the work. The French official list mentions as losses the names of seven destroyers and a supply ship; but the same uncertainty prevails as to losses among other craft.

Yet, numerous as the losses may look on paper, they were justifiably referred to in an Admiralty communique on June 3rd as "comparatively small."

They were small indeed compared with the magnitude of a task carried to a successful conclusion in the face of intense and almost continuous air attack from the enemy bases nearby, and the shell-fire poured in upon the whole area. This shelling was checked to some extent by the bombardment of the enemy artillery positions by naval forces. Naval forces also protected the flanks of the withdrawal with their gunfire, and operated against the German U-boats and high-speed motor torpedo-boats.

In the face of all this terrible opposition the withdrawal of these 335,000 troops was one of the most hazardous feats that can be imagined, or, as the Admiralty communique phrased it, "the most extensive and difficult combined operation in naval history."

Some day the whole story will be written in its proper perspective in relation to the war as a whole. It will be a story of hurried but successful improvisation; above all, of supreme gallantry in unimaginable danger and difficulty.

Sir Bertram Ramsay's account given to the press on June 9th was spoken in the terse language of the Navy. He said little of the heroism or fortitude of those concerned, merely

told the story as it occurred. A wealth of incident lies behind his simple words.

He said the success of the operation was due to the fact that the Admiralty supplied as extra staff the officers he asked for, and added: “The staff sent down here numbered about twenty naval officers and 180 Bluejackets. They had no idea what they had come for, but they were given instructions and sent over to Dunkirk. They were bombed all the way, and at Dunkirk were bombed all the afternoon, so they had a really good opening scene.”

For the organization at the Dover end we “set aside a room here with about seven telephones and fifteen or sixteen fellows working in it. It was called the ‘Dynamo Room,’ and after three or four days those working it were so tired that when relieved they were just lying down behind their chairs on beds, mattresses, or even on the floor and falling fast asleep. As they woke they carried straight on with their jobs. Most of them were junior officers, but when they had any difficulty they talked to their seniors in a way that was a pleasure to hear. They allowed nothing and nobody to stand in the way.”

And at the Dunkirk end: “After a couple of days all our landing parties were exhausted. They had had no sleep.... We had every day to draw on another hundred men, and, if possible, fifty more boats.”

Many of these boats were lost on the way across the Channel, but by about May 30th troops were being evacuated in better numbers than had been thought possible. From 13,000 on the first night the numbers rose to 20,000 on the second and 45,000 on the third. On the peak day 66,000 men

were taken off, though at the expense of casualties to the ships.

"By Monday, June 3rd," the Admiral said, "I was getting very anxious about the state of exhaustion of the officers and men of all my ships. They had been working without sleep or rest of any kind for eight days under conditions of unprecedented strain. We could not have carried on without fresh men which the Admiralty supplied.... The job was made possible only by the extraordinarily fine ship handling and the amazing endurance of the men engaged. Many of the small craft which disappeared into the haze of Dunkirk will largely go unthanked, because we do not really know who they were."

VI

We read of destroyers, transports, sloops, trawlers and other ships making trip after trip across the Channel literally packed with men and being bombed assiduously.

One destroyer made seven passages to and from, never carrying less than 600 troops, and sometimes as many as 900. As one of her seamen said: "At the end we were just about worn out. We had only brief snatches of sleep for six days, and there were times when we were without food. We had given everything we had to the troops. Periodically all the time we were at action stations, and sometimes it was very hard to keep awake."

Another, after being in action in Holland and Boulogne, had the congenial task of bombarding German tank formations on the coast road between Boulogne and Calais. Then, in six trips to Dunkirk, she brought 5,000 men of the B.E.F. to safety, being bombed and machine-gunned from the

air on the way. Yet another destroyer had fifty-two bombs dropped around her while embarking troops from the beaches.

A pleasure paddle-steamer used as a minesweeper crowded with British and French soldiers was attacked by German aircraft with bombs and machine-guns. She managed to escape the bombs through the skilful handling of her captain. The enemy machine-guns took toll of the troops before the aircraft were finally beaten off with Bren and Lewis guns.

One steamer lying alongside at Dunkirk with troops and wounded on board was sunk by a bomb bursting on the quay and blowing out part of her side. With the German 'planes "flying overhead like flies, bombing and machine-gunning anything they could," the men boarded another vessel higher up the jetty. She herself was bombed twenty minutes later on her way out to sea, and was run ashore blazing from end to end. Lifebelts were put on the wounded. Some of the men were for several hours in the water before being picked up by other craft.

Here is the tale of the skipper of a little fishing drifter. On May 27th he was leading a flotilla of drifters to Dunkirk, and at seven o'clock in the evening, one mile off the harbour entrance, was attacked by German aircraft. When he saw the Nazis diving to attack he put his helm hard over. The bombs missed, but severely damaged his ship. "I kept her going as fast as she could go," he said, "but on reaching the harbour she sank. Another drifter came over and rescued all the crew."

Two hours later that skipper was on board another drifter assisting in getting the troops off the beaches. In all he made seven trips in the boat, working from dark to daylight, and saving over 100 men. When they heard the German aircraft

overhead they stopped rowing, so that the phosphorescence of the water should not invite attack.

"When I reached the landing base I was not sent to the home base with the rest of the crew," he explained, "but was retained. On May 31st I had an emergency call and took part in four evacuation trips in another drifter, and during the second trip went through a very severe air raid. On June 2nd I skippered the drifter for the final evacuation of Dunkirk. We were machine-gunned continuously. We got clear away of Dunkirk in the darkness, having a very narrow channel to navigate and only two lights to guide us. But we got clear and brought away about 200 soldiers."

One might continue for a long time with tales of individual experiences, of ships bombed and machine-gunned, and of amazing deeds of gallantry and devotion to duty. But enough has been said to show the hazardous nature of one of the most remarkable operations of all time, and the means by which it was accomplished.

An eye-witness who was in a ship off the beaches at dawn on May 30th speaks of miles of coast from the low dunes on the skyline to the water's edge literally packed with troops, some of them standing in the water waiting to be embarked. They were there in their tens of thousands, and it seemed impossible that they could be saved. There were insufficient boats.

Then the boats were asked for, and they came from here, there and everywhere to assist in the work.

But the great bulk of the men were carried away from that narrow wooden breakwater of which I have already written, a breakwater five feet wide against which it was never intended

that ships should be berthed, but alongside of which the ships went without hesitation.

The embarkation from the beaches was slow, particularly in bad weather. As many as possible of the men on the beaches had to be encouraged and persuaded to move on into Dunkirk, where the embarkation was far more rapid. To accomplish this, Dunkirk must be held to the end. And held it was by the rearguard of the British Expeditionary Force and the French.

The last night came, that of June 3rd-4th, when Admiral Abrial, of the French Navy, and the last troops were evacuated in good order after the port had been made unusable.

The last ships left before dawn, by which time the Germans were within machine-gun range of the jetty whence the last troops had embarked. They moved out into the Channel, and when daylight came the fires and smoke of stricken Dunkirk could still be seen over the horizon to the eastward.

The impossible had been accomplished, a miracle of deliverance achieved, as the Prime Minister said, “by valour, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by dauntless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity.”

APPENDIX

The naval losses sustained during these operations were as follows:—

H.M.S.	*Keith*	Destroyer	Captain E. L. Berthon, R.N.
„	*Basilisk*	„	Commander M. Richmond, R.N.
„	*Grafton*	„	Commander C. E. C. Robinson, R.N.
„	*Grenade*	„	Commander R. C. Boyle, R.N.
„	*Wakeful*	„	Commander R. L. Fisher, R.N.
„	*Havant*	„	Lieutenant-Commander A. F. Burnell-Nugent, R.N.
„	*Skipjack*	Fleet Minesweeper	Lieutenant-Commander F. B. Proudfoot, R.N.
„	*Mosquito*	Gunboat	Lieutenant A. N. P. Castobadie, R.N.
„	*Grive*	Fleet Air Arm	Captain Hon. Lionel Lambart, R.N.
”	*Brighton Belle*	Paddle Minesweeper.	Lieutenant L. K. Perrin, R.N.V.R.
”	*Gracie Fields*	”	Lieutenant A. C. Weeks, R.N.R.

„	*Waverley*	„	Lieutenant S. F. Harmer-Elliott, R.N.V.R.
„	*Brighton Queen*	„	Lieutenant A. Stubbs, R.N.R.
„	*Crested Eagle*	Minesweeper	Lieutenant-Commander B. R. Booth, R.N.R.
H.M.S.	*Polly Johnston*	Trawler	Chief Skipper L. Lake, R.N.R.
„	*Thomas Bartlett*	„	Skipper G. E. Utting, R.N.R.
„	*Thuringia*	„	Chief Skipper D. W. L. Simpson, R.N.R.
„	*Calvi*	„	Skipper B. D. Spindler, R.N.R.
„	*Stella Dorado*	„	Skipper W. H. Burgess, R.N.R.
„	*Argyllshire*	„	Sub-Lieutenant E. G. D. Healey, R.N.V.R.
„	*Blackburn Rovers*	„	Skipper W. Martin, R.N.R.
„	*Westella*	„	Chief Skipper A. Gove, R.N.R.
„	*Girl Pamela*	Drifter	Skipper C. Sansom, R.N.R.
„	*Paxton*	„	Skipper A. M. Lovis, R.N.R.
„	*Boy Roy*	„	Skipper E. F. Dettman, R.N.R.

„	*King Orry*	Armed Boarding	Commander J. Elliott, R.N.R.
”	*Mona's Queen*	”	Commander J. K. Dowding, R.N.R.
„	*Comfort*	Dan-laying Vessel.	Skipper J. D. Mair, R.N.R.
„	*St. Fagan*	Tug	Lieutenant-Commander G. H. Warren, R.N.

The French naval losses were announced as the destroyers *Jaguar*, *Chacal*, *L'Adroit*, *Bourrasque*, *Foudroyant*, *Ouragan* and *Sirocco*, together with the supply ship *Niger*.

As an aftermath to the withdrawal of the British and French troops from Dunkirk and its vicinity between May 26th and June 3rd, details of the rescue of a party of nine French soldiers by one of His Majesty's fast motor-craft on June 12th were afterward made public. For nine days these survivors had existed on board a wreck sunk in shallow water within a few miles of Dunkirk. For the whole of this period they had been without food or water. The party had originally consisted of twenty. Eleven had perished during their terrible ordeal.

The story of the rescue really starts at 5.30 p.m. on June 12th, when a British motor-vessel at an East Coast port was ordered to proceed with all despatch to a position off the French coast, where some Allied troops had been seen on board an overturned wreck. Aircraft had been detailed to assist in the search in a position something over sixty miles away as the seagull flies, though considerably longer with the usual navigational detours.

A quarter of an hour after receiving her orders the motor-vessel sailed. Her official report tells us nothing of the wind

and weather; but she must have been driven hard, for in three hours she was within ten miles of the wreck's estimated position. At 8.35 p.m. two British aircraft were sighted ahead and flying very low. These were most helpful in locating the wreck, and remained in the vicinity until the motor-craft established communication with the survivors.

About half an hour later large fires were seen ashore and heavy gun-fire was heard. At 9.15 p.m., in the growing dusk, the wreck was seen about four miles from the shore. She was a small passenger steamer lying in about twelve feet of water. Though her upperworks had been severely bombed, no holes were visible in the hull. Men could be seen on board. As the report says, they were "waving frantically."

The state of the sea and tide made it impossible for the motor-craft to use her small dinghy for the work of rescue. Nor, in their exhausted condition, could the survivors be expected to swim. The only alternative was to take the motor-craft alongside the wreck, which the Commanding officer proceeded to do. It cannot have been easy in the sea and tide and the tangle of wreckage alongside. Moreover, high-speed motor-vessels of the type referred to have sides little thicker than stout millboard.

However, as the report continues: "Secured alongside the wreck. Embarked one officer of lieutenant's rank and eight men, all French. Their rifles and some personal belongings were also embarked, including a saxophone. Embarkation being satisfactorily concluded, slipped and proceeded towards British coast. H.M. Ship sustained no damage in any way throughout the entire operation."

The French officer in charge of the party said he had escaped from the beach in a small boat with a party of

nineteen men. They had tried to reach England; but carried here and there by wind and tide had succeeded only in reaching the wreck. There they had been for nine days without food or water. During this period four men had built a raft and had set out for England, not to be seen again. Seven others had died after drinking sea water. They had burnt their boat, partly to supply warmth at night, partly to attract attention.

Uninjured, though very weak from hunger, thirst and exposure, the survivors were cared for by their rescuers.

But their adventures were not quite finished. The captain of the motor-vessel considered it inadvisable to approach the British shore defences during darkness. Instead, he anchored out at sea, where a British naval trawler was with difficulty persuaded that the motor-craft was not a lurking enemy. However, all ended happily, and at 4.10 a.m. on June 13th the French survivors were landed at a British port where doctors and ambulances awaited them.

THE CONVOYS

VII

For all the naval operations in Norway, and nearer at home in the North Sea and English Channel, the oversea convoys must continue to run. Britain is not self-supporting in the way of food and raw commodities. In war, too, numbers of men, with vast quantities of munitions and materials, must be brought from abroad. On any typical day something over 1,500 British merchant vessels of 3,000 tons gross and above are at sea in every ocean in the world. Another 700 odd are in harbours all over the navigable globe, presently to resume their voyages.

Long before the outbreak of the present war convoy was one of the accepted methods of trade protection in areas where submarines were active. The Convoy System proved itself during the intensive U-boat campaign of 1917-18. Of the total of 16,693 ships convoyed from May, 1917, up till the end of the war, 16,539, or 99·08 per cent., were safely escorted.

My last trip to sea with a convoy in the Atlantic during this war was in one of the escorting warships. She was rather an aged ship, twenty years old, to be precise, which, as everyone knows, is not exactly juvenile for a destroyer. However, since the war had started she had spent more than 70 per cent. of her time at sea, most of it in bad weather. Generally speaking, the worse the weather the longer the time at sea. On one occasion she did a thirteen-day trip, followed by a day and a half in harbour, during which she had to replenish with fuel, provisions and stores and effect what running repairs she could, and then spent another eleven days at sea.

How many thousands of miles she had steamed since the outbreak of hostilities I did not discover, but the fact that she was kept running in all weathers with a minimum of time in harbour was a fine tribute to the officers and men of her engineering department. A destroyer of any sort is like a slender steel box crammed full of complicated machinery. Like an aged motor-car, a destroyer twenty years old needs a deal of looking after.

Our captain, a sturdy, well-covered, cheerful person in the early thirties recently promoted to Commander, was an ex-navigator from a big ship. Long experience in the art of finding his way about the trackless ocean certainly stood him in good stead in this convoy business. Apart from frequent heavy gales beating in from the Atlantic, with grey, lowering clouds and never a sight of the sun or stars, the weather was often foggy. The exact position on the chart might therefore be a matter of uncertainty, and the picking up of a homecoming convoy at a definite point some hundreds of miles out at sea a task that was by no means easy.

Yet whatever our captain felt in his innermost soul he never showed the least signs of anxiety or perturbation. He never turned a hair. He worked with an uncanny prescience or instinct that was completely beyond me, and even in the most difficult conditions of weather or low visibility effected his rendezvous with convoys, or made his landfalls, exactly at the right place.

But what a job his was! For the whole time I was at sea with him, which was well over a week, he rarely left the bridge, never removed his clothes, seldom seemed to sleep and occasionally washed his face and hands in the tip-up basin in his little cubbyhole of a sea cabin abaft the bridge. Shaving was too much like a purgatory with the ship pitching

and rolling as she butted her way into a toppling south-westerly swell.

I still treasure a recollection of him, pipe in mouth and wearing his oilskins, as he pored over the chart in the small charthouse some time before three o'clock on a dark, dismal morning full of wind and a driving rain which shut down the visibility to a few hundred yards.

His oilskins and uniform cap dripped moisture, for he had been on the bridge most of the night. His chin was dark with five days' stubble, and his eyes red-rimmed and sunken for want of sleep. I watched him as he used the parallel rulers and dividers to lay off a position, putting out a grimy hand now and then to prevent a mug of scalding cocoa from sliding to the deck as the ship lurched.

"How goes it?" I asked as he finished his work and replaced his instruments in their drawer.

"All parts bearing an equal strain," he grunted, regarding me with his habitual cheery grin over the edge of the cocoa cup. "What's brought *you* out of bed?"

"I came up to see what the news was," I told him.

"Huh!" said he. "The convoy's got a bit cock-eyed, and we spent an hour or two chasing 'em around a bit. Apart from that, the weather's pretty poisonous, but we're used to that. Have a sandwich?" he added, waving a hand at a tin plate containing slabs of rather stale-looking bread divided by half-inch layers of corned beef. "They'll be on the deck if someone don't eat 'em soon. What about some cocoa? Old Cookie's got his fire going."

I did not need cocoa. Instead, I ate the remains of his sandwiches, while he told me the gossip of the past four or five hours since I had last been on the bridge.

Item one: portion of the convoy was due to part company at dawn.

Item two: we hoped to make a landfall later in the day, though the visibility was so poor, and so unlikely to improve with the wind in its present quarter and the glass as it was, that he wouldn't be the least surprised if we didn't make the land at all.

Item three: a Fritz, otherwise an enemy U-boat, had been reported somewhere to the northward. Yes. The necessary steps were being taken.

Item four: the air was blue with wireless signals. Every operator for miles seemed to be making a night of it. They were screeching their heads off.

Item five: the ship, and the convoy as well, had been running on dead reckoning for some days. Speaking for himself, he'd be deuced glad to get a peep of the sun or stars, so that he could snatch a sight with his old sextant. But there was precious little chance of that so far as he could see. As usual in this climate, he supposed they'd have to grope their way shorewards with the deep-sea lead.

And so on and so forth, as the skipper told me what was uppermost in his mind at the moment. But it was all in the day's work, he pointed out. I mustn't think he was complaining. Stolid and phlegmatic by nature, he wasn't the least bothered or perturbed.

There were seven other officers in the wardroom headed by the first lieutenant, otherwise "Number One," who must have been about twenty-four. Tall, dark and irrepressibly cheerful, he was responsible for the interior economy and upkeep of the ship besides, of course, keeping his regular watches at sea.

There were two sub-lieutenants, younger still, both of whom kept watch. One was responsible for correcting the many folios of charts covering, so far as I could see, the whole area of ocean from Gibraltar to the North Cape. What with all the war-time amendments brought about by the laying of British and enemy minefields, the extinction of lights, the removal of some buoys and the laying of others, his job was one I did not envy. The junior sub-lieutenant looked after the confidential books and correspondence; but what with their watch-keeping and other duties, neither of these young officers seemed to have much leisure.

The same applied to the gunner, who had started life as a seaman on the lower deck before becoming a warrant officer. A good officer and shipmate, a man of sterling worth, he also kept his regular watches, and was responsible not only for the guns, ammunition, torpedoes, depth-charges and the like, but for the voluminous store-books relating to them. Each torpedo or depth-charge had its history sheet. Every round of ammunition had to be accounted for. In his spare time, which was inconsiderable, the gunner acted as mess caterer.

The "makee learn" on the executive side was the midshipman of the Royal Naval Reserve, aged nineteen, who before the war had been an apprentice in a merchant ship, but was rapidly learning naval routine and responsibility. He performed a multitude of odd jobs, slept in a hammock in the lobby outside the captain's cabin, and in his spare moments was trying to raise a jazz band among the ship's company.

The commissioned engineer, with his boilers, turbines and other miscellaneous machinery, had also started life on the lower deck. He was one of the hardest-worked men in the ship, and knew every inch of her. Like the gunner, the "Chief" was a sterling good man. His aged charge would long since

have been on the scrapheap if it had not been for the possibility of war. But he would not hear a word against her. The ship was the apple of his eye. He nursed her and coaxed her to keep her going; bullied the dockyard people during the brief spells in harbour to make good the defects he could not undertake with the ship's own resources.

The "Chief's" war-time assistant, a temporary sub-lieutenant (E) of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, was an electrical engineer by profession who had been sent to sea to learn the way of a ship.

Finally, there was the temporary surgeon of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, who had been in some civil hospital before the war began. Volunteering for sea service, he admitted to being "rather shaken" at times by the life on board a destroyer in bad weather. Little wonder. Far hardier seamen than the "Doc" were "shaken" on occasions. Besides attending to the ship's company's bruises, cuts and ailments, despatching them to hospital if really ill, he wrote up the wardroom wine-books and coded and decoded cypher signals with the help of the sub-lieutenant (E).

The point to be made is that the inhabitants of that little wardroom all had their niches. All of them were necessary to the running and welfare of the ship. They were like a happy family, a very large family if one counted the crew, every member of whom they knew intimately. The fact that one of the able seamen wished to marry the young woman of his choice next time he could scrounge four days' marriage leave, or that the "Doc" had successfully extracted a tooth from the jaw of Stoker Johnson, might quite well be a topic of conversation in the wardroom.

Our ship's company numbered about 140, including the officers. They were of all ages from twenty to fifty-five, some active service ratings, others pensioners and reservists who were at sea in the last war and before, later returned to the blessings of the land, and then came back to the Navy on mobilisation. We had several postmen, a poultry farmer and a platelayer, a commissionaire and a crane driver, two builders, a boarding-house keeper, a 'bus driver, a licensee (otherwise the keeper of a public-house), a gamekeeper, a joiner and a mental nurse.

The ship's cook, a seasoned veteran of fifty-five, was probably the oldest man in the ship. He had been chef in a hotel before the outbreak of war and was now condemned to cooking for about 130 hungry sailors in a galley about fourteen feet by ten, nearly half its deck space occupied by a coal range.

Yes, he said in answer to my question, it was a toughish job. The sailors weren't half pernickety either, growling like fury if he failed to satisfy their raging appetites, or to produce what they wanted. His day's work started round about four o'clock in the morning and ended at ten at night. In this galley during bad weather the sea sometimes developed a playful habit of coming in through the door to send his utensils flying, and himself as well. It was *some* job to produce any sort of a hot meal for the crew, with his pots and pans skidding wildly across the red-hot top of the stove. All the same, "Cookie" prided himself on his job, reckoning that his ship's company, growl though they might, were the best-fed of any blinkin' destroyer in which he had ever served.

I spoke to all and sundry, and never heard a grumble. I cannot pretend that all the reservists loved leaving their wives and families and their jobs or business ashore, some of them

built up after years of endeavour, and coming to sea again in war-time, and in a small ship at that. But they were a cheery, contented lot, and quite irrepressible. I remember being on the bridge in the cold and chilly dawn far out in the Atlantic, with the ship butting into a heavy westerly swell. Everything was rather cold and wet and miserable, when I heard a raucous voice crooning up the voice-pipe from the wheelhouse, "Why does my heart go boom?"

I could not tell him at that grisly hour in the morning.

The ship, of course, was always darkened at night. I remember so well groping my way forward or aft along the upper deck in the pitch blackness, picking my way foot by foot through the many encumbrances which threatened to throw me headlong, dodging from port to starboard to escape the overhanging lips of the torpedo tubes. I went on the mess-decks in the middle watch, to see a few figures, fully clothed and ready for a call, sleeping on tables, lockers and even the deck itself. Out on the bleak, windswept deck the men at the guns, torpedo-tubes and depth-charges relieved each other at regular intervals. Down below in the engine and boiler-rooms, where it was tolerably warm, other patient men went about their business.

I cannot be too explicit as to what we did, or where we went, but leaving one port and arriving at another, we picked up our convoy and started off to sea in the early dawn. The wind blew shrewdly from the north-east, to raise a confused jabble of leaping white horses as we drew out from under the lee of the land. One felt the ship kick a little as she met the first of them. For the next eight days she was never still.

Our convoy was formed up by full daylight and steamed along with their Commodore in charge. He, incidentally, was

a retired admiral who had forsaken his rank for the duration of the war, and had come back to sea as a Commodore of the Royal Naval Reserve. We acted the part of a watch-dog, scurrying round and about the ships making flag signals: "Speed and course so and so. Close up," if they showed a tendency to straggle or drop out of station.

All the time we were keeping a careful look-out on our Asdics, those deadly devices used for submarine detection which have been described as unseen, impalpable fingers groping beneath the surface of the sea. Our depth-charges were ready for letting go at a moment's notice, and twice we did let one go on getting what is known as a "contact." It might have been a submarine, but was not.

Our weather was variable. We had a good deal of fog and some rain, and a stiff easterly breeze which superimposed a little breaking sea on top of a heavy swell and made the ship kick about quite a lot. Our convoy was made up of ships of almost every type of merchant vessel except passenger liners, some deeply laden and some in ballast, and as we progressed they gradually got better at keeping station, even in thick weather or at night without lights. Merchant naval officers are not accustomed to steaming in close order, and being drilled, more or less, by flag signals and winking Morse lamps. But after very little practice they might have been at the work for years, and their station keeping would have done credit to a squadron of warships.

I remember the little flutter of excitement that passed through our ship when we heard by wireless that a neutral steamer had been torpedoed and sunk, and then, later, that the submarine was being attacked. The weather was hazy, and as our task with our convoy was finished, we steamed off at high speed to the northward towards the position indicated, and,

much to our chagrin, that submarine had been well and truly sunk and all but one of her crew rescued, some time before we got there. This is what happened.

A sloop was in company with a convoy, their weather, like ours, being hazy. At five minutes past eleven one of the steamers in the convoy, a neutral, was torpedoed. The explosion was seen and heard from the bridge of the sloop, which at once went on at full speed and steered for the estimated position of the submarine. After very few minutes' steaming she obtained definite contact with her Asdic.

There was no mistake about it, for presently, dead ahead, those in the sloop sighted a periscope. It was seen for a moment or two, then dipped, then reappeared and remained in sight for at least twenty-five seconds, and only 150 yards ahead. One can imagine the suppressed excitement on the sloop's bridge at sighting that periscope close under the bows. The U-boat seemed to be offering herself up on a plate, and appears to have been incredibly careless. Her captain at the eye-pieces of the periscope was apparently so intent upon inspecting the ship he had torpedoed that he seems to have been unaware of the warship's presence.

In less than a minute the sloop was over the spot, and started to let go her depth-charges, which exploded one after the other at various depths beneath the surface. Two large air bubbles came up, but, for the time, no signs of the U-boat. So while one of the other ships in the convoy was detailed to rescue the survivors from the torpedoed neutral, which was sinking, the hunt continued. The weather was still thick, with considerable wind and sea.

A little later the sloop again got contact with her Asdic, and dropped more depth-charges. Still there were no signs of the

U-boat. Meanwhile, other ships in the neighbourhood had been told by wireless of what was going on, and just before two o'clock two British destroyers arrived and joined in the hunt. Then a French destroyer appeared.

At half-past two, the weather having cleared a little, the sloop suddenly sighted a submarine on the surface at a range of about two miles. She opened fire with her guns, and so did the Frenchman. A British flying-boat then joined in, sighting the U-boat on the surface with several men on deck. The aircraft dropped a bomb which fell within twenty feet of its target, whereupon more Germans appeared on the submarine's deck.

There were still patches of heavy mist floating over the surface of the sea, and the submarine, long and low, was very difficult to see from the ships, so that firing was only intermittent. Then the U-boat disappeared altogether—blotted out. However, steaming on towards the spot the sloop suddenly saw five men struggling in the water, so threw them a life-saving float overboard as she went by.

Then she sighted another object, which was at first taken to be the U-boat's conning tower. She was about to attack it with gunfire when the mist cleared and the object was seen to be a raft with a large number of men clinging to it. There was a thick scum of oil all round it, which meant that the submarine was already under water and sinking slowly. From the number of men on the raft it was clear she had been abandoned.

The survivors were rescued from the raft, while a destroyer picked up the others from the float. Between them they saved every man of that U-boat's crew except the captain, who had either elected to go down with his ship, or had been too late in making his escape.

Describing the attack, the rescued Germans told how one of the first depth-charges dropped had caused the stem gland to leak and to admit some tons of water. While they were trying to repair it another charge exploded close alongside with a shattering detonation. This, coupled with a shortage of air, finally drove the leaking submarine to the surface and surrender.

However, submarines are not sunk every day. Thanks to the efficacy of the Asdics fitted in most of the British destroyers, sloops and escort craft, the U-boat are rather chary about attacking protected convoys.

Our outward convoy had already been handed over to the care of others, so abandoning our wild goose chase when we heard that the submarine had been put under, we steamed off to a rendezvous far out at sea where we were to pick up another convoy homeward bound. We had managed to get a peep of the sun and some star sights, so knew our position accurately. And next morning we picked up our convoy right ahead and on time. Sometimes, when it's blowing a gale and sights of the sun and stars have been unobtainable, escorts have great difficulty in picking up their homing convoys and may have to search for as long as thirty-six or forty-eight hours. But this time we were lucky. We joined up, took up our usual station, and turned our bows homeward. We had more thick weather on the way, and fog is always a bugbear at sea with a considerable number of ships in company. But they all got home safely, and so did we.

But the work is certainly no sinecure for the escorts, which, as I have said, spend long periods at sea. Some of the escorting destroyers are old, which means they have no such modern amenities as steam heaters or refrigerators. One is usually eating out of tins after three or four days.

And in the gales of the North Atlantic the motion is difficult to imagine, a combined pitch and roll wholly disconcerting to the uninitiated. At one moment the bows will be climbing to the advance of a steep, slate-coloured hummock crested with foaming white. They hang poised for a moment with the forefoot out of water, while the wave sweeps aft with its crest surging knee-deep along the low upper deck. Then the bows fall into the next hollow with a shock that jars the whole ship, while the stern, with its rudder and whirling propellers, is momentarily lifted in the air.

Sometimes the ship will get out of step with the seas and take a great wave clean over the bows. A boiling cataract will come roaring over the forecastle, to go sweeping aft past the bridge structure and down on to the upper deck in two cascading waterfalls. Spray drives high over the bridge and funnel tops. Everything is cold and wet and altogether abominable.

Having seen them at work, I give full credit to the officers and men of the Merchant Navy who are carrying the food and supplies upon which Britain depends. But having also been at sea in one of the convoying destroyers I cannot help saying that their job is also one of the toughest that can be imagined. They do not have the excitement of meeting U-boats every time they go to sea. More often than not, their work means day after day of acute discomfort in vile weather.

My chief recollections are of those muffled, oil-skinned figures on the bridge peering out through the inky darkness of a moonless night in the Atlantic; of the patient quartermaster in the wheelhouse with his rugged, unshaven face illuminated in the dim light of the gyro-compass; of the men stationed round guns, torpedo-tubes and depth-charges ready for instant action; of those others below in the engine-room and

stokeholds; and the few sleeping their uneasy sleep on the mess-decks.

The whole impression gained was one of readiness for anything that might happen—of that sleepless watchfulness and preparedness which are the prime duties of the Navy in time of war.

MINE WARFARE AT SEA

VIII

In its simplest form a sea mine is a canister containing explosive designed to explode in contact with the most vulnerable part of a ship, that is under water. Primitive sea-mines, designed to be attached to the bottom of a wooden ship by a sort of one-man submarine running awash, were used by the Americans during the War of Independence, when, in 1777, David Bushnell tried unsuccessfully to blow up H.M.S. *Cerberus*. Between 1801 and 1805 the American inventor Robert Fulton built a submarine called the *Nautilus* for the same purpose; but failed to evoke the interest of the United States, British or French Governments.

Canisters charged with gunpowder, moored under water, and designed to explode on contact with an enemy vessel, were used by the Russians in 1854 for the defence of Kronstadt, by the Austrians in Venice in 1859, and five years later by the Danes in Alsen Sound. These containers, intended for the defence of harbours, were first known as "torpedoes"—from the torpedo, or electric ray, a fish provided with electrical antennæ for numbing and killing its prey.

Torpedoes, or moored "mines," as we should now call them, assumed considerable importance during the American Civil War of 1861-5, when they are stated to have destroyed seven iron and eleven wooden vessels. It was Admiral David Farragut, at the battle of Mobile Bay on August 4th, 1864, who made his name famous by shouting "Damn the torpedoes!" The monitor *Tecumseh* had just been blown up, and the attacking squadron was in some confusion. Without

the least hesitation Farragut took his flagship, the *Hartford*, in over the minefield and saved the situation. The mine-cases could be heard rumbling along the flagship's bottom. By sheer good luck none exploded.

Mines of a much more potent kind were used by both sides during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. The Japanese lost two battleships and the Russians one, besides smaller units.

Though the successful use of mines by the Russians and Japanese evoked the greatest interest in other countries, their offensive power and real use in naval strategy had not been properly appreciated at the outbreak of war in 1914. Surface minelayers certainly existed in most of the world's navies; but it was thought that they could satisfactorily be dealt with by offshore patrols. Submarine minelayers had yet to be developed.

Certainly, few people had any idea how potent a weapon the mine might be if used offensively and on a large scale. The British mine of 1914 was an inferior weapon which frequently failed to explode. Its only merit was its cheapness —£40 against the £200 of the deadly Russian "Carbonit" mine used by the Germans. It was not until September, 1917, that British mines of a new pattern modelled upon the German became available in any quantity.

In 1914 nobody in the British Navy, or out of it, had any idea that during the next four years or so the Germans would lay 43,636 mines in every part of the world, 25,782 of them in the North Sea and the waters round about the British Isles. From the middle of 1915 onwards most of these mines were to be laid by submarines. Moreover, it was never imagined that in the North Sea and English Channel alone British

minelayers would deposit something like 116,000 mines, and the American 56,033.

These latter, with 15,093 British mines, were laid in the well-known "Northern Barrage," to be mentioned later, which stretched for 230 miles between the Orkneys and the coast of Norway, and was designed to prevent the egress of the U-boats on to the trade routes through the northern part of the North Sea. Another large mine barrage existed in the Straits of Dover to prevent the submarines from using that route, while the huge British mined area in the Heligoland Bight was added to and reinforced until the end of the war.

German minelaying off the east coast of England started within a few hours of the outbreak of hostilities on August 4th, 1914, when the German auxiliary minelayer *Königin Luise* laid 180 mines some 30 miles seaward of the northern approaches of the Thames. The minelayer was caught and sunk; but her cargo sank the cruiser *Amphion* with a loss of 151 lives. Later in that month the German minelayer *Albatross* laid 194 mines about 30 miles off the River Tyne, and the *Nautilus* a field of 200 off the Humber. Like the mines which sank the *Amphion*, both groups were well outside territorial waters.

The first German minefield laid outside the North Sea was the group of 200 deposited by the North German Lloyd liner *Berlin* on October 26th, 1914, off Tory Island. Her objective was the merchant traffic bound to and from Liverpool round the north of Ireland. Portion of the Grand Fleet was using Lough Swilly as a base for gunnery exercises. One of the *Berlin's* mines sank the battleship *Audacious* on October 27th.

Before the end of 1914 two more minefields were laid by the *Kolberg* in the North Sea, one on November 3rd off

Smith's Knoll, and the other on December 16th off Scarborough. On April 4th, 1915, another 360 mines were laid by German surface vessels off the Humber.

June, 1915, however, saw the advent of the first of the German minelaying submarines—the U.C. boats of about 170 tons carrying twelve mines in inclined tubes built into the hull. Thereafter, until the end of the war, minelaying from German submarines was practically continuous and extended further and further afield. Submarine mines appeared off Lisbon, Cape St. Vincent and Sierra Leone, throughout the length and breadth of the Mediterranean, in the White Sea, off the east coast of the United States and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

This is not to say that German minelaying from surface vessels ceased entirely. In August, 1915, a German auxiliary laid 380 mines off the Moray Firth, a portion of the Grand Fleet then being at Invergordon. No big ships were sunk; but the field caused the loss of one destroyer and damage to two mine-sweeping sloops. The *Meteor*, which had laid the mines, was intercepted and sank on her return journey. Over 200 of her mines were swept away from the southern portion of the field, the remainder being left in place to form a defensive barrier which the Germans would know was mined, and which therefore need not be regularly patrolled or swept.

The German raider *Möewe*, disguised as a merchant ship, laid 252 mines to the westward of the Orkneys in January, 1916. But probably the most remarkable minelaying feat of the last war was that of the German raider *Wolf*, which left Germany on November 30th, 1916, managed to slip through the blockade and got safely away to sea. Rounding the Cape of Good Hope, she cruised in the Indian Ocean, and then proceeded south of Australia to New Zealand and Fiji. Thence she returned home by way of New Guinea, the Dutch East

Indies and the Cape of Good Hope, reaching Germany in March, 1918.

She captured various merchant ships; but her 458 mines gave work to minesweepers in many an unexpected part of the globe. She laid 25 off Capetown and 29 off Cape Agulhas in January, 1917; and 39 off Colombo with 19 off Cape Cormorin, the southern-most point of India, in the following month. One of her prizes laid another 25 mines off Aden, and this vessel, or the *Wolf* herself, 68 off Bombay. Between them, these minefields occasioned the loss of ten ships.

Continuing her voyage, the *Wolf's* next mining exploit was off Gabo Island, the south-eastern point of Australia, where she laid 14 mines which occasioned the loss of one steamer. Then she proceeded to New Zealand, to lay 15 mines in the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands, and another 17 off Three King's Island, in the north. Her last big batch of 110 mines was laid off the Anamba Islands, in the South China Sea about 160 miles to the northward of Singapore, in September, 1917, and was not located that year. In all, the *Wolf's* mines were responsible for the loss of about fifteen ships. More than this, however, the *Wolf's* minelaying activities were directly responsible for the creation of extensive minesweeping organisations and forces in seven different areas all over the world, and the despatch of four sloops from Malta to Singapore.

How the Admiralty received news of the *Wolf's* movements is interesting. She had sunk various merchantmen, and made prisoners of the officers and men. At the risk of incurring dire penalties, one of the British captains threw overboard bottles containing notes of the voyage. One of these was picked up on December 9th, 1917, by natives in Toli-Toli, in the Celebes. It eventually reached the British Consul-General at

Batavia, who informed the Commander-in-Chief, China, of its contents. The details, which included an account of the raider's cruise so far as Australia, reached the Admiralty on January 15th, 1918.

A second bottle, found this time on the Norwegian coast, had its contents dated February 10th, 1918, at which time the *Wolf* was somewhere in the North Atlantic on her homeward voyage. It appeared by the note inside that the writer was able to state the exact position of the last 110 mines laid. He was ill in a hammock at the time, and, being a prisoner, had no access to a chart. But he believed the spot to be somewhere off Singapore, though he stated subsequently he was unable to identify the lighthouse on the last piece of land seen before the minelaying took place.

A long and fruitless search took place off Singapore; but the position of the 110 mines remained a mystery. It was not until after the Armistice that they were discovered from German sources to have been laid off the Anamba Islands. Otherwise the information contained in the bottle was entirely accurate, and the officer who took the grave risk of supplying it received due recognition.

An interesting and not unamusing incident occurred in connection with one of the *Wolf's* mines.

On January 26th, 1918, Mr. Abraham Louw and his son Gert, farmers at Elands Bay, South Africa, discovered a peculiar cast-iron receptacle on the beach. Having brought a cart, they proceeded to dismantle the object by unscrewing what was locally described as the large brass cap on one side of it, and detaching the pulleys and some sort of catapult apparatus.

Lifting the receptacle on to the cart, Mr. Louw noticed it was exuding "brown tar." Intensely curious, he lit it with a match, with results sufficiently disturbing to cause him and his son to retire in haste. So did the horse, dragging the cart after it.

The object, of course, was a mine, and the "brown tar" T.N.T. softened by the sun. The T.N.T. did not explode, but blazed up to a height of 200 feet, frightened all the inhabitants from the coast, and caused them to take cover in the bush.

The flames having expired, the Louws fetched the local policeman to the scene. He, "not very interested in the thing," pulled it into some bushes and covered it with reeds.

The naval authorities were informed, and an officer was sent to investigate. He found that the Boer farmer and his son had dismantled the primer of the mine with a tin-opener, and, for convenience' sake, had cut off the horns with a hammer and cold chisel!

Mr. Louw, "after much persuasion," as said the official report, returned the various parts of the mine he had dismembered, and said he had mistaken it "for a new kind of boiler used in the manufacture of wireless telegraphy."

Derelict mines were not always so harmless. On another occasion a mine laid by a U-boat drifted ashore on the West coast of Ireland. The villagers mistook it for a new kind of liquor cask. Forgathering cheerfully on the beach with tools and receptacles, they tried to open the novel barrel. There was a funeral—for nine.

The point to be made is that in 1914 the British were totally unprepared for submarine minelaying on a large scale. Indeed, our regular minesweeping force consisted of six old torpedo-gunboats fitted for sweeping ahead of the fleet. Arrangements

had also been made for taking up about 150 fishing trawlers of the ordinary deep sea type manned by their fishermen crews. The men belonged to the Trawler Section of the Royal Naval Reserve, and had received minesweeping training in peace.

When it became evident that intensive minelaying was part of the German naval strategy our minesweeping force grew and grew. At the time of the Armistice it comprised 726 vessels stationed at twenty-six ports at home and abroad—110 regular naval ships, mostly built during the war, and divided into twenty fast sweeping flotillas; 62 hired paddle steamers of the type patronised by excursionists in peace time; 412 fishing trawlers; 142 herring drifters; and ten shallow-draught minesweepers of a special type for use in river mouths and shallow waters.

No less than 214 British minesweepers were lost during the war, 148 of them in the waters between Portsmouth in the south, and the Humber in the north. The greater number of casualties occurred in the northern and southern approaches to the Thames, which gave a fair indication of the intensity of the enemy's minelaying campaign against the huge volume of traffic passing in and out of the port of London.

German mines occasioned the loss of 46 vessels-of-war, including five battleships of all ages, three cruisers, 20 destroyers and four submarines. Of the auxiliaries employed on Admiralty service 225 were destroyed by mines, of which 140 were hired trawlers and 22 were colliers.

Merchant ship casualties through mines were 259 vessels of 673,417 tons sunk with a loss of 1,493 lives, and 84 vessels of 432,446 tons damaged with a loss of 64 lives. Sixty-three

fishing vessels of 8,545 tons were sunk in the same way with a loss of 332 lives.

In 1917 ten of the larger submarines designed for distant oversea work each carried 36 mines, while 79 smaller U.C. boats, not all of which were operating from Germany or Flanders, carried 12 or 18. As showing the faith of the Germans in their minelaying offensive, it may be said that 19 large and over 100 small minelaying submarines were built during the period of hostilities. Some 88 more were cancelled at the time of the Armistice, a few being completed for surrender to the Allies.

There was hardly an important harbour, headland or channel in the whole of the British Isles which was not mined at least once during hostilities in the hope of destroying Allied shipping. The denser traffic areas were mined more or less continuously. For instance, in the Dover area alone 695 mines were swept up between January and September, 1917, and another 500 round about Harwich.

Though the intensive minelaying on the part of the Germans was confined to the waters round about Great Britain, both sides of the English Channel, and the Mediterranean, mines also appeared in the White Sea, the Bay of Biscay, and so far away as the eastern seaboard of North America.

The minesweepers were at it eternally, when the organisation was in full swing, a channel between the Firth of Forth and Portland Bill, was swept daily, as well as the approaches to all ports. Other channels were periodically swept for a length of 5,000 miles. At Dover, in two years, the minesweepers swept a distance equal to twelve times round the earth.

It is impossible to compute the number of regular naval personnel employed in minesweepers during the war of 1914-18; but at the outbreak of hostilities the Trawler Section of the Royal Naval Reserve comprised 1,278 officers and men. By November, 1918, their numbers had increased to 39,000, of whom 10,000 were employed in minesweepers and the rest in the auxiliary patrol.

At the outbreak of this war, when British trade was scattered all over the oceans on its ordinary business, a U-boat campaign against merchant shipping offered the greatest chances of success for Germany. Stationed in the best strategic areas for attack, the German submarines did, indeed, inflict severe losses upon the British merchant fleet before that well-tried measure of defence, the Convoy System, could be established.

Convoy had been planned and arranged long before hostilities began. However, it took time for the merchantmen to be collected at the terminal ports, the cargoes to be arranged, and the necessary escorts to be provided.

After the first few weeks, as the Convoy System gradually came into force, British merchant ship losses rapidly declined. Precise figures need hardly be given, but now, in the tenth month of the war, for every seven hundred ships that have sailed in convoy, an average of only one has been sunk by enemy action. As something like 1,000 merchant ships of a total tonnage of about 2,500,000 arrive at, or sail from, the ports of the United Kingdom every seven days, the success of the system is manifest.

This happy result has been brought about by the close co-operation between the Royal and Merchant Navies, with the potent assistance of the aeroplanes of the Royal Air Force

operating within striking distance of the shore. Apart from this must be mentioned the arming of British merchantmen and the efficacy of the submarine detecting device known as the "Asdic," with which so many British escort vessels, destroyers and patrol craft are now fitted. As Mr. Churchill has said, it was necessary in the last war to use a flotilla of fifteen or twenty vessels for a whole day to hunt down a U-boat on the vaguest indications. Nowadays two destroyers, or even one, can maintain a prolonged and relentless pursuit.

By the beginning of February the German submarine losses probably amounted to one-half of her seventy odd U-boats possessed at the beginning of the war. At the same time her submarine-building programme was not coming up to her expectations. A recrudescence of submarine activity against merchant shipping may recur when more boats are available. However, the British escort vessels and patrol craft will have increased also, and more targets for the latter mean more U-boat losses.

Turning to an easier method of inflicting losses upon British merchant ships, and upon neutrals trading with Britain, the Germans began their mine-laying offensive off the British coast and harbours. It was not unexpected. Neither was the manner in which it was carried out.

The Hague Convention of 1907, which is still supposed to be in force, forbids the laying of automatic contact mines off the coasts and ports of the enemy for the sole object of intercepting commercial navigation, while "every possible precaution must be taken for the security of peaceful navigation." Moreover, as soon as mines cease to be under observation, the danger zones must be notified.

Germany has not conformed to the terms of the Convention in this war any more than she did during the struggle of 1914-18. She has sown many mines in the areas used by neutral shipping proceeding to one neutral country from another.

Britain, however, was far better prepared for a mine-laying offensive in September, 1939, than she was twenty-five years ago. She possessed a considerable force of regular naval minesweepers manned by trained personnel, together with a great number of naval trawlers available alternatively as minesweepers or patrol vessels, and a large reserve of fishermen with naval training. Many more trawlers from the fishing fleets, with hundreds of willing volunteers, were available soon after mobilisation. Some 10,000 officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve Patrol Service, all fishermen, were already serving in the Royal Navy when war broke out.

Since then many more have joined, and more ships have been taken up for war service. They include yachts, trawlers, drifters and numbers of paddle steamers of the type used for short pleasure cruises. Because of their shallow draught these latter are particularly adapted to minesweeping.

Having been on board various trawlers since the outbreak of war, I can speak of the men from personal experience. They come from every fishing port in Britain. In one little ship I found a skipper and his mate from Aberdeen, an engineer from Grimsby and others from Hull, Grimsby, Fleetwood, North Shields and Lossiemouth.

Those in the deep-sea trawlers which make their habitual voyages to Iceland, the Faroes, the Rockall Bank and to the south-west of Iceland, with others in the drifters which work off the English and Scottish coasts in the herring fishery, are a particularly fine type—excellent seamen accustomed to

thinking and acting for themselves, courageous, and intensely conservative and independent. Skippers may be related by birth and marriage to cooks and deck-hands and live in the same streets. There is a certain amount of free and easy familiarity which does not always accord with the tradition of the Navy. If trouble arises in a trawler during peace, settlement is generally reached by way of the strong right arm of the skipper or second hand, helped by the toe of a heavy sea-boot.

Men from Hull may look sideways at those from North or South Shields. The Grimsbyites may affect to despise those from Lowestoft or Fleetwood, and regard the Aberdonians as being no more than foreigners. All of these different clans and factions, steeped in their own peculiar traditions, have to be reconciled and brought to work in unison.

We have many tributes to the men who sweep for mines.

"They are men of the sea, rough, sturdy, undisciplined, accustomed mostly to pleasing themselves as to the manner of doing their work," wrote an officer in command of the minesweepers on the East Coast. "They are inured to every hardship, and accustomed to every ordinary danger of the deep. How would they respond to naval discipline? Would they fight shy of the fresh dangers they were now called upon to confront?"

The answer was that the officers and men were admirable, rapidly absorbing the initiative, the quick perception, decision and resource that enabled their arduous and dangerous work to be carried on without intermission.

Wrote the captain in command of minesweepers at one base on the East Coast: "I have worked with all classes and many

nationalities in all corners of the world. I never want, or hope, to work with a finer lot than the crews of the minesweepers."

Another senior naval officer writes of his admiration for the skippers and men with whom it was his good fortune and privilege to have served. He recalls one incident when, during an influenza epidemic, a trawler skipper had eight men down out of his total complement of twelve. "The remaining four managed to take their ship to sea, pass sweeps, and carry out the day's work. A trimmer was running the engines, a deck-hand fired the boiler under his directions, the cook worked on deck, and the skipper was at the wheel."

Magnetic Mines, when they first came to be dropped by aircraft in this war, presented something of a problem, in that new methods of sweeping them had to be evolved and perfected. But mines of this type are no novelty. They were in use in 1918, when, laid on the sea bottom in fairly shallow water, a magnetic device caused them to detonate when a steel ship, herself a magnet, approached within a certain distance.

Laid by enemy submarines and dropped from aircraft in this war they at first presented something of a problem. Being unexpected, the means of sweeping them, and of protecting ships against their explosion, had to be evolved and perfected. In other words, Germany, springing a new weapon, had a few weeks advantage. But no weapon yet invented has not eventually been met by its antidote.

In November German aircraft started dropping magnetic mines from aircraft, the idea being that they could thus be laid in estuaries or harbours inaccessible to U-boats. And it so happened, on the night of November 22nd, that an enemy aeroplane, intending to drop her mine in one of the ship channels in the Thames estuary, dropped it instead on a mud

flat off Shoeburyness, where it could be reached from the shore at half-tide.

At about 10 p.m. the strange object, attached to a parachute to reduce the shock of hitting the water, was dropped in bright moonlight. The troops, it is said, first opened fire on it with a machine gun, luckily without hitting. Then they decided it was something out of the ordinary, and informed the naval authorities.

At 2.30 a.m. on November 23rd the mine was photographed by flashlight. Two hours later, a party of experts arrived on the scene from H.M.S. *Vernon*, the Torpedo School at Portsmouth. Headed by Lieutenant-Commander J. G. D. Ouvry, they had travelled through the night.

The mine was recognised for what it was, and treating it with gentleness and circumspection, the experts first secured it to prevent its being moved by the rising tide. Then, by the light of electric torches, they took rubbings and templates so that tools could be made to take it to pieces. The tide then rose and covered the mine, the interval being used in fashioning the spanners and other necessary implements in non-ferrous material.

At 12.30 p.m., less than fifteen hours after the mine had been found, the tide had fallen sufficiently to allow Ouvry to start his dangerous work of dissection. He took the greatest possible precaution, working process by process, and telling the others, who remained at a safe distance, precisely what he intended doing at each step. In this way, if the mine had exploded through anything he did, the other members of the party would know of at least one operation to be avoided. However, nothing untoward happened, and after a few steps Ouvry came across and removed what was obviously a

detonator. The other men then gathered round him to continue the task, certain in their minds that the mine was now safe from accidental explosion.

Their serenity was somewhat shaken a little later when a second detonator was discovered and removed!

However, all went well. The mine and its various parts were loaded on to a lorry and taken by road to Portsmouth for further investigation.

In all, it weighed about three-quarters of a ton, and carried about 700 lbs. of an explosive like T.N.T. Constructed throughout of non-magnetic material, it contained a delicate magnetic needle, which, when deflected by the magnetism of a ship passing near it, completed a circuit which fired the detonator and exploded the charge. There was another firing device which operated the second detonator designed to operate only by impact if the mine fell upon something solid like the deck of a ship or a concrete jetty. It was this auxiliary detonator, the least harmful, that Ouvry had removed first!

For this cold-blooded gallantry Ouvry and his helpers were all decorated by the King on December 19th. One of them, Petty Officer Baldwin, was unhappily later killed on service by the explosion of a mine he was investigating.

Magnetic mines, as has been said, are laid on the sea bottom, and are only effective if ships passing over them are inside the danger area of the explosion. They are useless in depths of 300 feet or more, and are thus complementary to the ordinary moored mines floating beneath the surface and designed to fire on a ship striking them. However, there is no denying that the development and laying of magnetic mines has forced us to provide special methods of clearance over and above the ordinary sweeping of moored mines.

As regards the antidote, we have been told of the "de-gaussing" belts fitted to ships of all types from trawlers to battleships, for the purpose of neutralising their magnetism and so rendering them immune to magnetic mines. Dr. Gauss, one believes, was a German professor who died in the middle of the nineteenth century; but gave his name to the unit of magnetic flux, just as the names of Ohm and Ampere are now used in the technical language of electricity.

The "de-gaussing" belt or girdle, or "D.G." equipment, as it is usually called, consists of a number of strands of ordinary insulated cable passing round the ship about the level of the upper deck, and energised in a special way by an electrical current. It neutralises the permanent magnetism of the vessel, so that she is able to pass over a magnetic mine without deflecting the needle and so firing the charge.

Total immunity against mines, magnetic or otherwise can never be guaranteed. However, no ship fitted with the D.G. gear has yet been damaged by a magnetic mine, while an officer responsible for its development expressed himself as being prepared to take a de-gaussed ship over any number of magnetic minefields.

It should be added that the apparatus was suggested by the officers of one of His Majesty's Naval Establishments with the able advice and assistance of civilian scientists. It was developed in less than three months from the time the need for it became apparent.

I have mentioned the Northern Barrage laid in 1918 in depths between 45 and 150 fathoms between the Orkneys and the coast of Norway. The United States Navy used ten large minelayers to lay 56,033 mines at a cost, according to Mr. Josephus Daniels, then the United States Secretary of the

Navy, of approximately $80,000,000. We know that six U-boats were supposed to have been destroyed in the barrage, and that a total of 71,126 mines were laid there. I am unaware what proportion of the six submarines were sunk by American or British mines, and what was the cost of the British share of the barrage. However, if the American portion cost $80,000,000, then it cost at least $13,333,333 for every U-boat demolished, roughly eight times the price of a modern British submarine!

The American mine had novel firing gear. It consisted of an electrical device inside the spherical mine case, and a thin wire antenna of any desired length supported by a small copper buoy or float within eight or ten feet of the surface. The mine itself is said to have a destructive radius of about 100 feet against submarines. However, it was not necessary for a vessel actually to strike a mine to explode it. If a steel ship of any sort, indeed, any steel object, even a minesweep, touched the antenna, the mine to which it was attached exploded. The main idea was economy, fewer mines being required to cover a certain area with the mines laid at different depths beneath the surface.

The American minefields being dangerous to any steel ship, much ingenuity had to be displayed, and many experiments carried out, before the mines could be cleared at the end of the war. Briefly, minesweepers of the ordinary type had to be rendered more or less immune by fitting them with an electrical device to prevent the mines exploding within a certain distance.

Exploratory sweeping had first to be carried out to determine the actual condition of the mines in the barrage. As steel vessels could not be used, the protective device not having been perfected, two *wooden* fishing smacks from

Lowestoft were taken over by the Americans and refitted at Inverness. Manned by naval crews, the *Red Rose* and *Red Fern* were towed to the barrage, reaching it on December 23rd, 1918. The two steamers stood off at a safe distance, while the smacks made sail, passed their sweep wires from ship to ship, and shaped course to cross the first minefield.

A few minutes before noon, as the smacks crossed the first line of invisible mines, a giant column of discoloured water burst into the air close astern of the *Red Rose*. The first mine in the Northern barrage had been swept. Separated as it was from the smack by a short length of manila rope which insulated the sweep-wire, the tremendous shock of the explosion all but crushed in her wooden hull. Water spouted in between her timbers. The pump was started at once, but was barely sufficient to keep her dry.

"It was a pretty sight," said an eye-witness, "to see these little craft sailing back and forth across the minefield, wearing and tacking in unison, and keeping station on each other by furling topsails or streaming sea anchors."

In all, the lines of mines were crossed four times, and six mines were exploded, which showed they were still there and ready to function. This meant that every possible precaution must be taken when they came to be cleared by the ordinary sweepers.

The clearance actually started on April 29th, 1919. It continued for five months, being carried on in circumstances of great difficulty and danger. The weather was often vile, with a very heavy sea, but the gravest risks of all came from mines being dragged up in the sweeps, and the explosion of one detonating another in close proximity to a sweeper.

Two officers and nine men of the American naval forces were killed during the clearing of the mines from the Northern Barrage. “Regrettable as was this loss of life,” wrote Mr. Daniels, “it was small in comparison with that of our comrades in the British minesweeping service.”

The entire minefield, spread over about 6,000 square miles of one of the stormiest seas in the world, was swept up by September 30th, 1919. According to the American official account, 21,295 mines were disposed of while the work was in progress. Of the 56,033 mines originally laid, 3,814 are stated to have exploded prematurely soon after laying. The remaining 31,924 had apparently been sunk or broken adrift from their moorings.

A magnificent spirit was shown by the American personnel engaged. Like their comrades in the British service, a large proportion of the crews of the minesweepers came from the Naval Reserve.

Early in this war the British naval authorities issued traffic regulations for the Dover Straits. All ships must pass through the Downs, or close Boulogne for instructions. Vessels disregarding these regulations, it was added, did so “at their own peril.” The implication was obvious.

Germany also declared a mined area running north from the Dutch island of Terschelling and covering the Heligoland Bight. Rectangular in shape, it was roughly 175 miles long and 55 miles wide. As explained by Rear-Admiral Von Luetzow over the German radio, the mine barrages laid south and east of Heligoland in the war of 1914-18 to prevent enemy surface vessels and submarines from entering the mined German Bight restricted Germany’s freedom of

movement. In this war, he added, “it was essential to push out a defence barrage much farther to sea.”

In December the British Admiralty announced that it was their intention to lay mines without further notice for the better protection of vessels navigating in the North Sea off the east coasts of England and Scotland. The area defined is in a rough zigzag, leaving a free channel near the coast. It reaches from just north of the Thames to the Moray Firth, and is roughly 420 miles long and from twenty to thirty miles wide.

Every weapon that has ever existed has eventually been met by its antidote, and mines are no exception to the rule. Nevertheless, they have exerted a profound influence upon naval warfare.

All the world’s navies must now contain minesweeping forces in peace, with a consequent increase in the naval appropriations of money. And in war it is not only that mines cause the loss of ships, but that their wholesale and indiscriminate use, particularly from submarines and aircraft, necessitate extensive and expensive countermeasures, which cannot be wholly visualised or prepared for during peace. This was amply proved by the growth of the British minesweeping service during the war of 1914-18, and is being proved again to-day.

Mines may even alter the whole course of a campaign. At the Dardanelles, in 1915, the Turks had ten lines containing in all 373 mines moored in the Narrows between Kephez and Chanak, amply protected by guns and searchlights. These mines could not be swept with any means then at the disposal of the British, which meant that the big battleships could not approach for the reduction of the mine defences, and the final advance through the Narrows into the Sea of Marmora.

But in the dark and windy dawn of March 8th, 1915, a small Turkish vessel called the *Nousret* slipped down under the shadow of the land and laid a group of twenty mines in an area from which the ships had been bombarding, and might bombard again. Four of the mines were swept up, but the rest remained undiscovered and unsuspected. There they still lay hidden beneath the calm water when, on the brilliant morning of March 18th the Allied Fleet steamed in to attack.

That little minefield caused the loss of the French battleship *Bouvet* and the British battleship *Irresistible* and *Ocean*, and severely damaged the battle-cruiser *Inflexible*.

On March 19th General Sir Ian Hamilton, who had witnessed the naval attack of the day previous, telegraphed to Lord Kitchener: "I am being most reluctantly driven to the conclusion that the Straits are not likely to be forced by battleships, as at one time seemed probable, and that if my troops are to take part ... it must be a deliberate and prepared military operation, carried out at full strength, so as to open a passage for the Navy."

The opinion was agreed with by the Navy on the spot, largely as a result of the heavy losses caused by the *Nousret's* little minefield.

The story of the gallant failure at Gallipoli need not be enlarged upon. But if the Allied Fleet had won through into the Sea of Marmora and Constantinople, Turkey's communications with Europe would have been cut, and the Allied command in the Black Sea would have eased the situation for the Russian Armies in the Caucasus which were heavily beset by the Turks. Vast quantities of wheat from South Russia could also have been exported to Allied countries, while Russia could have been provided with the

munitions and weapons she sorely needed. The Allies would also have had access to the mouths of the Danube. Had these things occurred, it is not too much to say that the Russian *débâcle* of 1917 might never have happened, and the Bolshevists never have assumed power.

An Allied Fleet off Constantinople would also have had profound repercussions in Eastern Europe. Greece, unable at first to make up her mind, would probably have thrown in her lot with the Allies. Bulgaria, which afterwards joined the Central Powers, might have done the same. So could Rumania. The effect upon Italy, which had not yet joined in the war and still belonged to the Triple Alliance, would have been stupendous.

With Turkey defeated and Constantinople in Allied hands, the costly Mesopotamian campaign would have come to an end, Kut-el-Amara would not have fallen, and there would have been no campaign in Palestine.

With Bulgaria fighting for the Allies instead of against them, there would have been no Anglo-French Army in Macedonia with their base at Salonika, which the Germans derisively termed their "largest internment camp," with over half a million Allied troops locked away in virtual impotence.

The Gallipoli campaign was anything but an ill-considered side show. It was a sound and far-sighted stragetical conception whose success would have altered the whole course of the war.

The campaign failed.

Those twenty mines laid in the dawn of March 8th by an insignificant little Turkish steamer played what Mr. Winston Churchill has called "a recognisable part in the history of the Great War."

IX

THE grizzled skipper, who hailed from Stornoway, wore the plain green ribbon which spoke of long and faithful service in the R.N.R., Trawler Section, and the three ribbons of the Great War. With a brown face all seamed and criss-crossed like an old apple, he must have been somewhere in the fifties. He was a phlegmatic man of few words, mostly "Um," "Aye," "Maybe that might be so." He certainly wasn't committing himself. To get him to talk of himself and his adventures in war and in peace was like extracting teeth from an elephant.

However, after half an hour's conversation while we steamed along that tall bastion of pallid cliff which forms part of the south coast of England, with the float of our Oropesa mine-sweep splashing through the water about three hundred yards away on the port quarter, one gathered he had spent most of those four years between 1914 and 1918 mine-sweeping and hunting for submarines. Aye. He'd been blown up twice and had been present at the sinking of a U-boat way back in 'seventeen. Part of his time he'd served in the Mediterranean—off the coast of Palestine and escorting between Port Said and Malta.

Since 1919? Aye. He'd been in trawlers fishing round about Iceland; Bear Island, which is about seven hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle; the Murman Coast, and the White Sea.

"Them Rooskies!" he muttered in a voice of the fiercest indignation. The Russians, it seemed, had falsely accused him of fishing inside the territorial limit, and not content with

confiscating his trawl and fining him, had tried to pinch his ship and gaol him as well. They would have done if he hadn't cut and run in the middle of the night, after doping two Rooskie guards with far more good Scottish whisky than they deserved. Then he'd been chased by a Russian gun-boat; but managed to escape under cover of darkness and a thick fog.

And now, after more than twenty years' fishing, with the midnight sun in summer, and the fogs, ice, snow, blinding gales and almost total darkness all day of the far northern winter, he was back again at the old mine-sweeping.

Like it? Of course he didn't like it. Who but a fool liked dodging about in minefields, with these new-fangled magnetic mines and all. But he reckoned "that something Hitler chap and his gang" had to be put out for once and all, so that's all there was to it. He, the skipper, and his mates had volunteered to assist in the good work.

Life was no more uncomfortable than ordinary fishing, and the work less hard, taking it all in all. Forty-eight hours at sea followed by a nominal forty-eight hours in harbour, during which they had to fill up with coal and stores, that was the usual routine.

It was blowing half a gale from the south-west, with a leaden-looking breaking sea, and a dull, sombre-looking sky with low clouds all streaked with scurrying frayed-out streamers of whitish cirrus. To port lay the sheer chalk cliffs, their clefts and ledges stained with the dull green of verdure. We were passed by three neutrals, the gay flags painted on their sides proclaiming their nationality—then by a pot-bellied, rusty-looking British tramp wallowing down-Channel with an occasional sea breaking over her forecastle. Except for these passing ships, the horizon to starboard was barren,

and obliterated at times in driving rain squalls sweeping down from windward.

With the wind and sea aft, and the coal smoke from the funnel streaming over the bridge, our little trawler lurched and tumbled in the lop. The others astern seemed to be rolling from side to side through the most impossible angles.

We were engaged in clearing the channel regularly swept for the moored mines which might have been laid by a U-boat during the night. Soon after clearing the harbour each trawler had streamed her torpedo-shaped float with its flag, with a heavy wooden "door" some distance beneath it and connected to the ship by the sweep-wire. The "door" was so slung and balanced as to carry the float and wire off at a broad angle. Then a "kite," a heavy steel contrivance like a section of a Venetian shutter, was slid down the inboard end of each trawler's sweep-wire to sink it to the desired depth. Each trawler thus covered a front of so many hundred yards—between them a front of a good many hundred yards.

For some time nothing happened. Then there came an incomprehensible shout from someone aft. There was a mine in the sweep, he yelled. Apparently he'd felt the extra pull of it. We watched, and presently a dark object, like a small buoy, bristling in spikes, came bobbing and swirling to the surface, its moorings cut. We hoisted a signal. A few minutes later we heard sounds of gunfire as a trawler following astern of the sweepers started to sink the mine. She fired about half a dozen shots before a great gout of greyish-white water leapt a hundred feet into the air and the thudding roar of an explosion travelled down wind.

"Huh!" grunted the skipper, unperturbed. "Nasty things, mines."

We found others before we'd finished.

And this was their everlasting and never-ending job, unless they were used as submarine hunters with their depth-charges aft and the 4-inch or 12-pounder guns on their platforms built over the bows. They were at it incessantly—fine weather or foul; flat calm or raging sou'wester beating and booming up-Channel.

I remembered that the Admiralty had recently reinforced the minesweeping flotillas by acquiring more fishing vessels of the trawler type, and calling for volunteers from among fishermen between the ages of eighteen and forty-five with not less than one year's experience in deep-sea fishing craft. I recollected that in the Great War the number of vessels in the Auxiliary Patrol increased from 745 at the end of 1914 to 3,714 at the time of the Armistice, and the personnel from 9,984 officers and men to a total of 47,819. Not all the personnel came from the Fishing Fleets, though many of them did. Out of the 726 minesweepers in service at the time of the Armistice there were 412 trawlers and 142 herring drifters.

And once more the officers and men of the Merchant Navy and the Fishing Fleets, not to mention hundreds of volunteers from every profession and walk of life, had flocked into the Navy to help the country in the hour of her need. In the minesweeping and anti-submarine trawlers their job is certainly no sinecure.

I suppose our small ship's company was fairly typical. The skipper, as I have said, hailed originally from Stornoway, but had fished out of Hull and Grimsby. The cook, who had lost two fingers off his right hand while man-handling a recalcitrant trawl during a gale of wind in the Atlantic—he had been a deckhand then—was born in Wales and had fished

out of Milford Haven. We had men who had served in herring drifters working out of Yarmouth and Lowestoft, a trawlerman from North Shields, and another from Aberdeen. The wireless operator, who had never been to sea before the war, but liked it, had been an enthusiastic wireless fan in an amateur way, and a clerk in an insurance office in the Midlands. He looked absurdly young and pink about the face for so tough a job; but, said the skipper, he was one of the best wireless operators he'd ever had.

They were fine men and stout-hearted, inured to all the hardships and dangers of the sea. About them there was none of the spick and span smartness and polish of the regular Navy. They rarely wore uniform at sea, and their ideas of naval discipline were peculiar. Their ships were war-worn and rusty, and the White Ensigns at their peaks tattered and blackened. But for a real job of work commend me to those little ships and the brave hearts who man them.

Our sweep ended. At a signal from the senior officer we hauled in our sweeps and turned our bows homeward. Steaming against the wind and sea, we started leaping and curvetting over the grey, yeasty-topped hammocks rolling down from the horizon. Cookie hoisted himself on to the bridge built over the wheelhouse with tea in a basket for the skipper and myself—tea, strongly sweetened and the colour of dark sherry, and thick slabs of suet cake studded with currants. A sea burst over the bows, to bring a sheet of spray flying high over the funnel. The skipper, munching, shouted down a voicepipe for his oilskins, and a spare one for me, the visitor.

For many miles we seemed to be crashing our way to the westward, towards the harbour whence we had come in the morning. It was pitch dark by the time we crept in through the

entrance, and secured to our buoy. The clouds still scurried through the murk overhead; but here there was peace and quietness indeed after our buffeting outside.

As a motorboat came alongside to take me ashore, the engineer, who hailed from Fleetwood, asked for orders for steam. Steam at one hour's notice during the night, the skipper said. The weather didn't look too good. It would get worse before it became better.

"What time in the morning, skipper?"

"Six o'clock, Fred," the skipper answered. "We'll be sweeping with the first crack o' daylight."

THE UBIQUITOUS NAVY

X

THOUGH the Navy occasionally achieves a blaze of publicity with its more spectacular exploits like the defeat of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, the release of the *Altmark's* prisoners, the two battles of Narvik on April 10th and 13th, and the hairbreadth adventures of certain submarines in attacking and torpedoing enemy cruisers, a U-boat, and many transports and supply ships, its daily work does not excite the imagination of the reading or listening public as do the tales of personal gallantry or enemy ships sunk.

We know little of the doings or movements of the battleships, battle-cruisers, aircraft-carriers and cruisers except on the rare occasions when they happen to be mentioned by name. The numbers of mines swept up or destroyed are not published, and for very good reasons.

Nor do we publish many accounts of U-boats attacked and sunk, or the total number destroyed since the war began. Reticence in this respect is enforced to avoid giving valuable information to the enemy. Moreover, unless survivors or other traces are forthcoming, it is usually impossible to say if a submarine attacked in really deep water has been well and truly destroyed.

But what is particularly striking is the ubiquity of the Navy, and its mobility. Ships that were heard of as operating away beyond the Arctic Circle at Narvik, may reappear ten days or a fortnight later in action over a thousand miles away off the coasts of Holland and Belgium.

Consider the aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal*. On September 26th, after an attack by enemy aircraft, the Nazi radio claimed that she had been sunk. On September 27th, the Admiralty stated that no British ship had been lost, and on October 1st the American Naval Attaché actually visited the ship and attended church on board. The German radio thereupon suggested that the British had disguised another ship as the *Ark Royal* for the American Attaché's benefit, while on October 9th the pilot of the German aircraft was promoted and decorated for "sinking" the ship. On October 14th the Germans challenged the First Lord of the Admiralty to admit the loss, and a further Admiralty denial was issued next day.

On November 9th a German commentator broadcasting from Zeesen said they had "irrefutable proof" that the *Ark Royal* had been sunk. It must have been awkward for the German propaganda machine when on December 14th the South African Press announced that the *Ark Royal*, with the battle-cruiser *Renown*, had recently visited Capetown. On December 17th, after the defeat of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, both the *Ark Royal* and the *Renown* were reported as fuelling at Rio de Janeiro, which is roughly 3,300 miles from the Cape of Good Hope. The *Ark Royal* had steamed many thousands of miles since being "sunk." Indeed, when she was visited by Press representatives at a home port on March 25th, it was disclosed that she had steamed 75,000 miles while engaged in commerce protection in the South Atlantic, and that her aircraft had made reconnaissance flights covering five million square miles of sea.

Where she may have served since, or what she has done, one cannot say; but on April 8th the *Renown* was in action with the German battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst* beyond the Arctic Circle somewhere off the coast of Norway.

Some indication of the prodigious distances steamed by ships of different classes was given early in the war. For the first four months battleships averaged 25 days a month at sea. A cruiser covered 28,000 miles in the North Atlantic in three months; a second steamed 12,000 miles in one month; and another was at sea for 103 days on end at speeds of from 15 to 25 knots.

A special word should be said about the cruiser *Achilles*, of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy and manned largely from that Dominion. When she took part in the defeat of the *Admiral Graf Spee* off the River Plate on December 13th, 1939, she had steamed 124,000 miles since last being refitted, having been sent to the South Atlantic from New Zealand on the outbreak of war. On February 20th, when the officers and men of the *Ajax* and *Exeter* marched through London, the crew of the *Achilles* were receiving a vociferous welcome in New Zealand.

Destroyers also gave, and continue to give, wonderful service, some of them having been at sea for an average of more than 25 days a month.

In an order to the Fleet in March the Admiralty appreciated "the large expenditure of effort which the care and maintenance of machinery and equipment throughout the winter months has involved in circumstances of continuous watchkeeping. That this amount of steaming has been possible is a tribute to the designers and builders, but still more so to the personnel of all branches who have maintained the efficiency of their ships under the most difficult conditions, especially in view of the dilution of complements which has of necessity taken place."

It is impossible, and probably never will be possible, to give any idea of the sea-time of the large variety of ships which go to make up the war Navy, and those hundreds of other vessels taken over from the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets for conversion into fighting ships proper. One may mention, among others, the armed merchant cruisers; the many trawlers, yachts and motor craft used for anti-submarine and other duties; the trawlers, drifters and paddle steamers employed in minesweeping.

The Navy's task is world-wide. Its men, like its ships, have had to be greatly supplemented since the outbreak of hostilities. To the greater number of these ships and men the war has spent long periods of intense monotony and danger varied by very little in the way of exciting action.

At a quarter past midnight the day after Italy's entry into the war, I was on the bridge of a cruiser listening to President Roosevelt's moving speech from America.

We were well up beyond the Arctic Circle, and it was still broad daylight—bitingly cold for June, with a smart little breeze from the south-east and a small tumbling lop on the grey sea. We were glad of our thick woollies and mufflers, and duffle coats of thick, drab-coloured material something like thick flannel. We were grateful also to the cooks, who had provided hot soup, cocoa and sandwiches during the night. This they always do during the night watches at sea. Men need sustenance if they are up and alert during most of the night. We blessed the cooks.

The visibility was none too good, the sky overcast, and the cloud ceiling low. Our varied assortment of guns were all manned and ready for instant use. Our lookouts, with their high-powered glasses, were searching the sea and sky in

every quarter of the compass. Strong covering forces were somewhere in our vicinity; but the North Sea is a huge area of water. We might have been attacked by aircraft at any moment, or perhaps by surface ships. We were escorting a convoy from Norway, soon after the withdrawal from Narvik.

I had joined the cruiser ten days before at a port where she had been refitting. We sailed next day for another place, and then on to a northern base. Then, after two days' exercises, we were ordered to raise steam, and had spent three days on an independent mission with other ships, most of it at high speed. I cannot exactly specify where we went or what we did. Anyhow, we were in the far north, and since there is no real night in northern latitudes at this time of year one rapidly lost all count of time. Often I found myself having to refer to the log to discover the date and day of the week.

We spent something over three days on this special mission and then were detached elsewhere at high speed to provide additional cover for the troops and stores being sent back from Norway. We duly met one convoy of fast ships carrying troops, and then were detached to look after another with military stores, a few troops, and one hundred mules. In reference to the mules, a signal had to be made asking for ten tons of hay for their fodder on arrival. No doubt it was provided, though hay is hardly a naval commodity.

Our convoy was escorted by a destroyer, a sloop and several armed trawlers. It consisted of various types of ships —an oiler or two, some quite large vessels of the cargo-carrying type, and other little coasting vessels of the sort one sees plying round the coasts of Britain in peace-time. I had seen other convoys at sea before since the war started; but once more I was lost in admiration for the way these merchant ships, and the gallant souls who man them, carry on in spite

of everything. They are wholly imperturbable, and their station keeping was good to see.

The same applies to the destroyers and armed trawlers, who had accompanied the convoy all the way from Norway, and had been hard at it for weeks, and heavily bombed at pretty regular intervals. Their work had not been so spectacular; but just as difficult and dangerous as their mates who had been operating on the coasts of Holland and France.

This particular convoy had been bombed at sea the day before we joined them; but the attack had been beaten off, partly by our own aircraft, partly by gunfire from the ships. Two Norwegian ships following some distance behind the convoy, though not belonging to it, had been sunk after ruthless machine-gunning. One of the destroyers had between seventy and eighty Norwegian survivors on board, among them several stretcher cases and nine women. One could imagine that destroyer with that number of people on board and above her normal complement of about one hundred and fifty. She must have been greatly overcrowded and her doctor heavily overworked.

We plodded on, passing a group of islands with sheer forbidding-looking cliffs nearly two thousand feet high running down to the sea. Surmounted by a layer of flocculent, greyish-white cumulus standing sharply out against the pale torquoise of the lower sky, they looked grey and inexpressibly bleak. In these northern latitudes the islands are virtually treeless.

On we went, finally bringing the convoy to the safety of a northern base after a total of seven-and-a-half days at sea, during which we steamed about 3,000 miles, which is roughly the distance from Southampton to New York. We had no

undue excitements, and nothing extraordinary in the way of weather except a couple of days of thick fog. During the whole of that period I very much doubt if the captain or navigator had more than two consecutive hours of sleep. Certainly they never took their clothes off. Nor did I, or most of the officers and men.

But one thing that did impress me was the wonderful keenness and good spirits of that cruiser's ship's company, who had been hard at it ever since the war began. She had been in the North practically the whole time, and during the winter there is merely an apology for daylight between about ten in the morning and three in the afternoon. In the intervening nineteen hours there is darkness, except on those rare occasions when there is a moon, and a cloudless sky in which to see it.

They had ice, snow, blizzards and gales of wind, and on occasions had been thirteen or fourteen days at sea followed by a few hours in harbour and then off to sea again. I apologise for going into figures; but in her first commission of two-and-a-half years this cruiser steamed about 42,000 miles. In the first six months of the war she covered 45,500, and had steam on the main engines for one hundred and sixty days out of a possible one hundred and eighty-five.

In three months, sixty-seven per cent. of her officers and men never set foot out of their ship. One petty officer to whom I spoke was not ashore for six months. Week after week, month after month the eternal watchkeeping and vigilance continued, and still continues—on the bridge and at the look-out stations, at the guns, in the engine and boiler rooms, and in the wireless cabinets. Official messages came crackling through the ether; but for the majority their only links with the outside world were the mails when they

returned to harbour, and at sea the regular news bulletins radiated by the B.B.C. They were grateful for them, clustering round the loud-speakers fitted in all the messes and living spaces.

I was again reminded of the words of Mr. Winston Churchill to the officers and men of the *Ajax* and *Exeter* at the Guildhall in London on February 23rd. He said, when referring to the battle of the River Plate: "It is not only in the few glittering hours—glittering deadly hours of action which rivet all eyes—it is not only in those hours that the strain falls upon the Navy. Far more does it fall in the weeks and months of ceaseless trial and vigilance on the stormy, icy seas; dark and foggy nights when at any moment there may leap from the waves death and destruction with a sullen roar.... There is the task from which, in a sense, the fierce action is almost a relief."

New ships and old, young men and men already middle-aged—for some were reservists called back to their old Service when the Navy mobilised for war, others called into the Navy from the merchant ships, the fishing craft, and the shore itself. All gave wonderful service, and continue to do so.

The Merchant Navy has its own particular war to fight in carrying the cargoes of food and materials, the men and the munitions, upon which the country and the Empire depend. It carries on magnificently. Yet in war the Royal and Merchant Navies, with the Fishing Fleets are all one, in ships as well as in men. They are interdependent, indivisible.

The work of the merchantmen, and of the auxiliary minesweepers and patrol craft, has been incessant since the war began. The names of their officers and men, sometimes

also of their ships, occasionally appear in an Honours List; sometimes as casualties, which is inevitable. Yet their labours are largely unspectacular. Except when something happens we hear little of their everyday function.

Take again the magnificent work of the Fleet Air Arm, which has flown thousands of miles over the open sea since the war began. It is only when it has had the luck to have been in active conflict with the enemy that we hear a little of its doings.

"We are proud of the Fleet Air Arm." That was the message of congratulation sent by the Admiralty to the officers and men of the Fleet Air Arm who had been engaged in sustained and large scale operations in Norway. It is not often that the Admiralty is so warm in its congratulations.

There was a Royal Naval Air Service before 1914 and the last war; but in 1917, for reasons that need not be entered into, the R.N.A.S. became part of the newly formed Royal Air Force. But air work at sea became more and more important to the Navy, and more and more specialised, so in 1937 the Navy got back its own flying service in the Fleet Air Arm. Some of its aircraft are borne in the aircraft-carriers attached to the Fleet. Others are carried in battleships and cruisers and projected into the air by catapult.

They are young, these naval airmen, some of them midshipmen. Other pilots, as well as observers, air gunners and telegraphists, are chosen and trained from those who enter the Navy as seamen boys. There is the case where two Fleet Air Arm aircraft drove off ten Heinkels attacking a convoy, shooting one down. One of ours was piloted by a petty officer, who was awarded a richly deserved Distinguished Service Medal.

The full, intimate story of their achievements cannot be made public until the end of the war; but we have been told that the first thing pilots and observers have asked when they have been forced to return through lack of petrol is "Where's my next machine?" There was the case of a young midshipman who landed ashore, in a place where no one thought he could land, scrounged petrol from goodness knows where, and returned to his ship.

Another young pilot, with one wing of his machine badly damaged by anti-aircraft gunfire and his gunner wounded, brought his aircraft back to the carrier, and landed on her in fierce weather which would have deterred many more experienced men. Yet another had half his under-carriage shot away, but brought his aircraft back and circled round while the rest of his flight landed. He was about to land himself when another flight appeared, so once more he circled round while they landed on so he should not encumber the flight deck. His turn did not finally come until it was nearly dark and he had practically run out of petrol. It was blowing a fierce gale and the aircraft-carrier was pitching wildly. Landing on would not have been easy with an undamaged machine, yet this man managed to make it with half his under-carriage gone.

Another fighter aircraft was just landing on, with the carrier steaming head to wind on a steady course, when a German bomber, thinking her way clear, came down low to drop a bomb. Our aircraft picked up just in time, got his gunsights on, and brought the German crashing down into the sea.

We read of enemy transports and store ships being sunk and set on fire, of U-boats being attacked, of Heinkels and Dorniers being shot down. And because of the limitations enforced by ship use, naval aircraft are not so speedy as those

which work from an aerodrome ashore. In spite of this handicap, our naval airmen never hesitate to attack. They are irrepressible in action, going straight for the enemy without a thought for themselves. In little more than a month the aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm shot down twenty enemy aeroplanes off Norway, and accounted for many more on the ground. Others were damaged, while fifty-one more were destroyed by anti-aircraft gunfire from the ships of the Fleet.

On one day naval aircraft attacked in the Trondheim area, destroying two bombers on the ground, hangars and other buildings on one aerodrome, and bombing and machine-gunning nine enemy seaplanes at their moorings. At another place two enemy tankers were set ablaze, a direct hit obtained on a store depot, and six transports or supply ships attacked with good results.

Three days later they had another crack at the aerodrome they had been at before, destroying all the hangars that remained and several more aircraft on the ground. They had another go at the flying-boats and seaplanes at their moorings, and finished off the day by breaking up an attack on one of the aircraft-carriers. Apart from enemy machines destroyed on the ground, seven were shot down in the air.

There is a story of seven Heinkels coming in to attack an aircraft-carrier. The ship pointed them out to three of her fighters, which were in the air. Their leader did not see them immediately, for clouds were probably in the way. But then he sighted the enemy, and communicated with his other two ’planes by radio-telephony. His remarks were overheard in the ship—“Tally ho! Tally ho! Tally ho!—I see the blighters!” though the last word was really much more expressive than that. Anyhow, he attacked at once, and three of the Heinkels were shot down.

A mere recital of all these combats and successes conveys little idea of the hairbreadth risks and adventures; but one knows that the German aircraft are as shy about tackling our naval machines as they are about taking on those of the R.A.F. The Fleet Air Arm did not have much chance of fighting until the Norwegian campaign started; but ever since they have come into their own they have shown themselves full of dare-devil gallantry. The German aircraft may be more numerous, but that does not prevent our men from going straight at them. What they lack in numbers they more than make up for in skill and daring, or what is popularly known as "guts."

The Fleet Air Arm is a young service, but they have nothing to learn about fighting.

The Navy rather shuns publicity, and so does its sister service, the Mercantile Marine. But of a truth the grace before meals that some of us were taught in our childhood may well be taught again to-day: "For what we are about to receive, thank God and the British Navies."

SCAPA FLOW

XI

SCAPA Flow is that landlocked sheet of water in the southern part of the Orkney Islands which served as the main base of the Grand Fleet during the war of 1914-18, and is being used again to-day.

It is also the place where the surrendered German Fleet of eleven battleships, five battle-cruisers, eight light cruisers and fifty destroyers was interned in November, 1918, and was sunk by its own crews on June 21st, 1919. Many of these ex-German ships have since been salved, towed upside down to a dockyard and there converted into scrap metal. The non-ferrous metals, like brass, bronze, and copper, were always valuable for re-smelting. The steel armour-plate could be sold for conversion into cutlery. It is strange to think that some of the armour actually found its way back to Germany, whence it was re-exported to Britain and all over the world in the form of scissors and safety-razor blades.

The main anchorage of Scapa Flow is a great expanse of deep water some eleven miles long, east and west, and seven miles wide, north and south. It is bounded on the north by the large island of Pomona, or Mainland; to the east and south-east by the smaller islands of Burray and South Ronaldsay; to the west and south-west by the island of Hoy, which is the highest island in the whole group with hills running up to nearly 1,600 feet.

The south-western part of the Flow is divided into several sounds, available for destroyers and smaller craft, by the smaller islands of Cava, Risa, Fara and Flotta. There are three

entrances, Hoy Sound to the west, opening into the Atlantic; Hoxa Sound to the south, leading into the Pentland Firth; and Holm Sound to the east, opening into the North Sea.

The Pentland Firth, that seven-mile stretch of water which separates the Orkney Islands from the north coast of Scotland, has one of the worst reputations in the world. When the tide is at its strongest it rushes through the Firth at seven knots, and the eddies and whirlpools are uncertain and dangerous. Even great battleships, for no apparent reason, have suddenly been swirled through a right-angle or more out of their course. When a strong gale is blowing against the tide it raises a dangerous perpendicular sea which may cause damage to even a full-powered steamship.

During the last war a battleship punching her way westward against a gale had her bridge, boats and other fittings smashed, and many men injured. Some hundreds of tons of water found their way below.

It was on the Pentland Skerries, in the eastern end of the Firth, during a violent gale and a blinding snowstorm in January, 1918, that two destroyers crashed on the rocks with the loss of all but one of their crews. The solitary survivor, washed ashore through the boiling surf and clusters of sharp-fanged rock, managed to claw his way to the top of a spray-swept rocky islet, its gullies filled with driven snow. Bruised, cut and bleeding, he kept himself alive with snow and limpets taken from the rocks at low water. He was rescued two days later.

On the west coast of Pomona, near Marwick Head, a granite tower marks another great tragedy of the last war. It is the memorial to that great soldier, Lord Kitchener, and the officers and men of the cruiser *Hampshire*, who lost their

lives when that ship struck a mine and sank off this spot during a heavy gale on June 6th, 1916.

Scapa Flow and its neighbourhood is a place of many memories.

The well-sheltered anchorage occupies a position of great strategic importance. Long before the outbreak of war in 1914 it was used by the Fleet as a practice and exercising ground. At that time it was undefended, but as soon as hostilities started it was gradually made secure against attack by hostile submarines. Batteries were erected and the entrances blocked by sinking old ships, or barred by mines and booms. A small floating dock and a number of supply and repair ships were also provided for the maintenance of the Fleet.

When this present war started, Scapa Flow had more or less relapsed into a state of peaceful tranquillity. It was subjected to enemy air raids within a few days of hostilities starting, and these still continue spasmodically, though with negligible results. On October 14th the battleship *Royal Oak* was sunk with heavy loss of life by an enemy U-boat which had penetrated into the Flow. As the First Lord of the Admiralty said in the House of Commons on November 8th: “The long and famed immunity which Scapa Flow, with its currents and defences, had gained in the last war had led to a too easy valuation of the dangers which were present.” That position has now been rectified, and Scapa Flow is used by the ships of the Fleet.

Being cut off from the mainland and rather inaccessible, the Orkneys are not much frequented by tourists in time of peace. Unlike some of the beauty spots of Devon or Cornwall, the hills of Hoy are not besprinkled with old newspapers, cigarette cartons and ice-cream containers.

Hoy, as has been said, is the highest and most conspicuous of all the Orkney Islands, dominated as it is by the bold mass of Ward Hill, 1,565 feet above sea level, with other hills of over a thousand feet.

What names some of them enjoy! Ward Hill is understandable, but who christened Cuilags, the Knap of Trowieglen, Withi Gill and Sky Fea? But the Orkneys abound in strange-sounding topographical names, most of them of Norse origin. The name of the islands—Flotta, North and South Ronaldsay, Shapinsay, Ronsay, Westray and so forth—usually terminate in "a" or "ay," which is the Norse "ey," meaning "island." Islets are called "holms," isolated rocks "skerries" and tidal currents "roosts."

The uplands of Hoy are wild and desolate, heather-covered moorland for the most part, with a few stunted trees struggling for existence and leaning well away from the prevailing westerly winds. There are patches of bush and furze, and stony screes on some of the steeper hillsides, with innumerable tiny lochs and tarns, little streams tumbling noisily down some of the slopes, and many patches of boggy ground in the depressions. Snow lies deep in many of the higher gullies until late in the spring.

Even in summer the highlands are lonely and deserted. A shepherd may climb their steep escarpments in search of one of his flock, while in the latter half of August one may sometimes hear the popping of guns amid the heather. Otherwise, few folk visit the hills of Hoy. Shrouded in mist as often as not, unliveable in winter, there are no habitations, no cultivation. The hills are as God made them—softly rounded, sometimes gaunt and rugged, but always unspoiled and lovely in later summer with their mantles of deep purple heather. Their silence is only disturbed by the shriek or rustle of the

wind driving in from the open Atlantic, the splashing of rills and little waterfalls, the mournful crying of plover and curlew, with the occasional distinctive call of grouse or snipe.

The chief claim to beauty of the Orkneys lies in the clearness of the atmosphere, and the coloration of land and sea. The United Kingdom has few more magnificent sea frontages than the twelve-mile wall of cliff which forms the west coast of Hoy. In places they rise perpendicularly out of the sea to heights of between nine hundred and twelve hundred feet. The tallest sea cliffs in Britain, they present a solid buttress to the fury of the westerly and north-westerly gales beating home with all the might of league upon league of the open Atlantic. Dropping sheer to the water's edge, the cliffs are mostly of old sandstone, battered and weather-beaten by the process of time, and varying in colour from the brightest terra-cotta to orange and amber yellow. Alleviated here and there by narrow crags and grassy ledges which afford lodgment for innumerable seabirds, they are fissured and tunnelled by centuries of frost and gales.

The Orkneys possess only two sizable towns both on the main island—Kirkwall, to the east, and Stromness, with its grey stone houses and narrow paved streets, to the west. Most of the scattered islands are dotted with little crofts and farmhouses. Flying over them by aeroplane, one notices the patches of bright green and brown which denote cultivation.

The Orkneys lie in Latitude 59° North, 450 miles north of London, and the spring and summer, with its sun, clear atmosphere and absence of darkness except for about an hour and a half on each side of midnight, may be wholly delightful. At midsummer the transition period from sunset to sunrise is marked by a luminous glow above the northern horizon. If the sky is unclouded books can easily be read or photographs

taken at the hour of midnight. Even in summer, however, it sometimes blows fiercely for days on end with sheets of driving rain.

It is the winter that is really trying, almost numbing to the senses when the weather is really at its worst. The night lasts from about three in the afternoon until nine next morning. It is usually bitterly cold, with much snow, sleet, rain and fog. During strong gales from the west and north-west the wind whistles down the bleak hillsides and converts the great expanse of landlocked water which is Scapa Flow into a maddened welter which makes boatwork dangerous, if not altogether impossible.

But bleak and unsophisticated Scapa Flow, covering the northern exits from the North Sea, played its unforgettable part in the war of 1914-18 as one of the chief bases of the mightiest fleet the world has ever known. It is now playing the same part in another struggle in which Sea Power is of equal importance in the war effort of the Allies against a calculating and unscrupulous enemy.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE 'LUSITANIA'

XII

LIKE the *Mauretania*, the *Lusitania* was taken up by the Admiralty as an armed merchant cruiser at the outbreak of the war of 1914-18. It was soon decided, however, that the cost of fuelling these two great ships was out of proportion to their usefulness as fighting vessels.[C]

However, passengers still had need to cross the Atlantic, and after much consideration the Cunard Company decided that the *Lusitania* should be run once a month, provided her boiler power was reduced by about a quarter, thus economising in fuel and labour. No profit was expected, and none was eventually made. The Company continued to operate the ship as a public service. Six of her twenty-five boilers were accordingly closed down in November, 1914, the effect being to reduce her maximum speed to twenty-one knots.

She had various little adventures before leaving Liverpool for New York on her one hundred and first voyage in April, 1915. Indeed, in the previous February, voyaging eastward with some 400 Americans as passengers, and carrying the American mails, she received a wireless message to the effect that German submarines were operating in the Irish Sea. Captain Daniel Dow, her commander, was instructed to fly a neutral flag, so decided to wear the Stars and Stripes. Under this ensign he steamed up the Irish Sea at full speed without stopping to pick up a pilot, and safely reached his destination. It was a perfectly legitimate ruse of war.

On her one hundred and first voyage, under the command of Captain W. T. Turner, the *Lusitania* sailed from New York for Liverpool on Saturday, May 1st, 1915. She carried a total of 1,959 people, made up as follows:

	Men	*Women*	*Children*
Saloon	190	88	15
Second Cabin	261	257	83
Third Class	239	96	38
Crew	669	25	—

On the morning of her departure there appeared in five New York newspapers the following advertisement, placed, in all cases but one, immediately over, under or adjacent to the Cunard Line advertisement announcing the *Lusitania's* sailing:

> *Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her Allies and Great Britain and her Allies. That the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles. That in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain or any of her Allies are liable to destruction in those waters, and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her Allies do so at their own risk.*
>
> *Imperial German Embassy,*
> *April 22nd, 1915. Washington, D.C.*

That announcement appeared for the first time on May 1st, sailing day. Captain Turner saw it, "or something of the kind,"

and realised his ship was included in the warning. It was also known to the Cunard Company at Liverpool on May 1st or May 2nd.

In view of the accepted rules of International Law, however, nobody believed that such a diabolical threat as that implied in the notice would be carried out.

Indeed, over three years later, in August, 1918, as a result of various suits against the Cunard Line, brought about by the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7th, 1915, the Federal District Court of New York, in a decision written by Judge Julius M. Mayer, refused to hold the Cunard Company liable for damages due to loss of American lives and property.

"The fault," runs the written judgment, "therefore must be laid upon those who are responsible for the sinking of the vessel, in the legal as well as the moral sense.... The cause of the sinking ... was the illegal act of the Imperial German Government, acting through its instrument the submarine commander, and violating a cherished and humane rule observed, until this war, by even the bitterest antagonists." As Lord Mersey[D] said, "The whole blame for the cruel destruction of life in this catastrophe must rest solely with those who plotted and with those who committed the crime."

When the *Lusitania* sailed from New York her owners and captain were justified in believing that the humane and universally accepted rulings of International Law would not be violated. Nobody thought it possible that, in the opinion of the American Judge, "the German Government would authorise or permit so shocking a breach of international law and so foul an offence, not only against an enemy, but as well against peaceful citizens of a then friendly nation.... The unexpected character of the act was best evidenced by the

horror which it excited in the minds and hearts of the American people."

That same horror was felt in Britain and all over the civilised world.

The proof is positive that the *Lusitania* was not armed, that she carried no troops and did not carry explosives. She did carry some eighteen cases of fuses and 125 cases of shrapnel consisting merely of empty shells without any powder charge, together with 4,200[E] cases of rifle cartridges and 189 cases of infantry equipment, such as belts, leather pouches and the like. None of these munitions could have been exploded by setting them on fire in mass, or by impact, and in any case their presence on board did not justify her sinking.

And so, on May 1st, 1915, the *Lusitania* sailed undisguised, with her four funnels and silhouette so familiar as to be readily identifiable by any seaman.

The usual boat drills were carried out on the voyage, and on May 6th, on approaching the danger zone, Captain Turner ordered all the boats to be turned out, extra lookouts to be placed in the crow's nest, in the bows and on the bridge, and the portholes to be closed, with all those watertight doors not required for the working of the ship.

The *Lusitania* was steaming twenty-one knots. At 7.50 p.m. on May 6th she received a wireless message from the Admiral at Queenstown to the effect that submarines were active off the south coast of Ireland, and at 8.30 p.m. another relayed from the Admiralty to all British ships containing the words: "Avoid headlands. Pass harbours at full speed; steer mid-channel course. Submarine off Fastnet."

On April 15th, 1915, the Admiralty had also promulgated advice to all merchant shipping: "German submarines appear

to be operating chiefly off prominent headlands and land falls. Ships should give prominent headlands a wide berth." And on April 16th: "War experience has shown that fast steamers can considerably reduce the chance of successful surprise submarine attack by zigzagging—that is to say, altering the course at short and irregular intervals, say, in ten minutes to half an hour.... The underwater speed of a submarine is very slow, and it is exceedingly difficult for her to get into position to deliver an attack unless she can observe and predict the course of the ship attacked."

In the early morning of May 7th the *Lusitania's* speed was eighteen knots, this adjustment having been made because Captain Turner wished to run the last, and probably most dangerous, 150 miles of his voyage through the Irish Sea in the dark, and to make the entrance to the Mersey at dawn on May 8th, the earliest time he could cross the bar without a pilot. As the area had been infested by submarines, instructions had already been given by the Cunard Company that he was not to invite attack by stopping to pick up a pilot.

It was a fine, warm morning with a calm sea, and at 8 a.m. on May 7th, when she was approaching the Irish coast, the *Lusitania* ran into intermittent fog banks. Captain Turner accordingly reduced to fifteen knots, an ordinary seamanlike precaution on making a landfall in hazy weather.

Between 11 a.m. and noon the weather brightened to almost full visibility, and speed was again increased to eighteen knots, the course being S. 87° E. (Magnetic). At 11.25 Captain Turner received the following wireless message through Queenstown: "Submarines active in southern part of Irish Channel, last heard of twenty miles south of Coningbeg Light vessel. Make certain *Lusitania* gets this."

Land, which was thought to be Brow Head, was sighted in the far distance shortly before noon, and at 12.40 p.m. came another wireless message: "Submarine five miles south of Cape Clear, proceeding west when sighted at 10 a.m." At about this time the *Lusitania's* course was altered to N. 67° E. (Magnetic) to close the land and verify the ship's position, which was still somewhat uncertain.

More land was presently sighted in the distance which was taken for Galley Head. However, wishing to make sure, Captain Turner held on inshore at the same course and speed until, at 1.40 p.m., he identified the Old Head of Kinsale, and swung back to the original course of S. 87° E. (Magnetic).

At 1.50 p.m. the captain started to take a four-point bearing of the Old Head of Kinsale to ascertain its exact distance when abeam. Twenty minutes later, when the ship was between eight and ten miles off the well-known promontory she had made on so many voyages, the white wake of a torpedo was seen rushing towards the vessel from the starboard side.

It seems first to have been sighted by a young seaman of eighteen, Leslie N. Morton, who had been stationed as an extra look-out on the starboard side of the forecastle. In the calm sea, about 500 yards away, he saw a big burst of foam, which, as those who have seen it will know, usually accompanies the discharge of a torpedo by air pressure from any submerged tube. Then he saw a "thin streak of foam, making for the ship at a rapid speed, followed by another going parallel with the first one, and a little behind it."

Morton shouted to the second officer on the bridge through his megaphone, and the second officer reported to Captain Turner. But a torpedo covers 500 yards in something like

twenty seconds. There was no time to put the helm over—indeed, to do anything.

A heavy explosion occurred on the starboard side of the ship abreast of Number Two boiler-room, followed, by all accounts, by a second explosion abreast of Number Three, or between Numbers Three and Four. The huge column of water shattered one of the lifeboats, and sent debris whirling over the wireless aerials stretched between the masts, and a good 160 feet above the water.

Down below the damage was severe beyond description. The explosions blew open the coal bunkers, and water at once rushed into two, if not three, boiler-rooms. Thence it found its way into the engine-rooms, driving the men from their posts before they could obey any orders from the bridge. The dynamos very soon stopped, and the electric light faded out. The whole forepart of the ship became shrouded in a thick pall of white steam pouring out of shattered steam-pipes. According to one account, two boilers were forced bodily upwards and partly crushed.

The ship listed heavily over to starboard. Captain Turner at once rang down to the engine-room for full speed astern, hoping to get the way off the vessel before lowering the boats. His orders could not be obeyed. The engine-rooms were flooding and the propellers, still revolving under the gradually failing steam, continued to drive the ship ahead.

Realising what had happened, the captain ordered the boats to be lowered to the rail, and the women and children to be got into them. They were not to be lowered into the water until the ship lost headway.

The passengers, meanwhile, were scattered all over the ship—some on deck, some still at lunch in the saloons, others in

their cabins or the public rooms. They were summoned by the usual emergency signal, ordered to put on their lifebelts and to go to their boat stations.

The wireless operator, whose name was Leith, had already managed to get off an S O S signal, following it a little later with another message—"Come at once. Big list. Ten miles south Head Old Kinsale." After the failure of the dynamo, the messages were sent out on the emergency batteries in the wireless room.

The conduct of the passengers, as well as of the officers and men, constituted an enduring record of calm heroism in a situation of awful peril. There were many individual instances of self-sacrifice, a marked consideration for women and children. There was no panic; but naturally a certain amount of excitement, rush and confusion as the ship heeled over and the passengers crowded over to starboard away from the encroaching water.

Anderson, the staff-captain, who was in charge of the port boats, had instructions to lower them when he thought the way was sufficiently off the ship to allow it. His fidelity to duty is sufficiently exemplified by the fact that he went down with the ship.

The first officer, Arthur Rowland Jones, and Lewis, the acting-third, were in charge of the boats on the starboard side, to superintend their lowering. Too much cannot be said for their bravery and skill; indeed, the bravery and skill of every officer and man. In the words of a contemporary record, they acted with the "courage and fidelity to duty which is traditional with men of the sea." Their conduct was "impressive, not only because of inherent bravery; but because of intelligence and clear-headedness, and they

possessed that remarkable gift of simplicity so characteristic of truly fearless men who cannot quite understand why an ado is made of acts which seem to them merely as, of course, in the day's work." Says another account: "They were brave, and working as hard as they could without any fear. They didn't care for themselves. It was very admirably done. While there was great confusion, they did the best they could."

The boats on the port side, swinging inboard with the heel of the ship, could not be used, and not all the starboard boats appear to have got safely away. The ship was sinking rapidly by the bows.

One of the survivors writes that very soon the bridge deck was only four feet above the water, and describes the men passing the women rapidly into the boats. He himself dived overboard and swam away, noticing the menacing bulk of the tall funnels as they hung overhead. On getting clear he turned and trod water, to watch the great hulk roll over.

With a great crowd of people on her decks, and boats laden with women and children still alongside, the *Lusitania* took a sudden plunge. Flinging her stern into the air until her rudder and propellers were visible above the surface, she rolled over to starboard and went down with a roar of moving weights and collapsing bulkheads, dragging hundreds of people into the vortex. Many never rose again.

The whitened, swirling water in the spot where the ship had disappeared burst into gouts of spray as great air bubbles broke on the surface. The water became black with the heads of struggling swimmers, and some who could not swim—men, women and children, overturned boats, spars, timber, lifebuoys and debris of all sorts came shooting up from the depths.

Smoke, and a cloud of rapidly dissipating steam hung in the air overhead. A film of iridescent oil spread over the surface of the sea—that, the hundreds of struggling people, the wreckage, and a few white lifeboats.

Within eighteen minutes of being torpedoed the *Lusitania* was gone.

There were many scenes of gallantry in the water, and dozens of others that are only recorded in people's memories.

One reads of two seamen, Leslie N. Morton—eighteen years of age, and already mentioned as the man who first sighted the track of the torpedo—and Joseph Parry. Between them, these two saved nearly one hundred lives in a collapsible boat, and were afterwards decorated for their gallantry. There was the first officer, Arthur Rowland Jones, who after working nobly to save life while the ship was still afloat, remained in a boat until eight o'clock in the evening rescuing people from the water and transferring them to vessels sent out from Queenstown; Alfred Bestwick, the junior third officer, who was dragged under with the ship, came to the surface again, and was instrumental in saving many lives. Seamen and men passengers gave up their precious little pieces of wreckage to struggling women and children.

These tales of personal gallantry, heroism and self-sacrifice in the face of death are the only bright things in the tale of a ghastly tragedy which sent 1,195 people to their doom—810 men, 291 women, and 94 children.

There were no naval patrols in the immediate vicinity, though all available vessels at sea and in Queenstown were at once rushed to the scene of the disaster, to rescue many, including Captain Turner who had been in the water for

nearly three hours. Many dead, brought in with the living, lie buried in a common grave in the Old Church Cemetery at Cobh, as Queenstown is now called.

In regard to Captain Turner, I cannot do better than quote the language of Lord Mersey, who, with his Nautical Assessors, investigated his every action from the moment the *Lusitania* entered the war zone.

"The Captain was on the bridge at the time the ship was struck," Lord Mersey recorded, "and he remained there giving orders until the ship foundered." The *Lusitania* was well provided with boats, the report added, and their launching was carried out as well as the short time, the moving ship, and the serious list would allow. The conduct of officers and men was satisfactory. "They did their best in difficult and perilous circumstances, and their best was good.

"Captain Turner was fully advised as to the means which in the view of the Admiralty were best calculated to avert the perils he was likely to encounter, and in considering the question whether he is to blame for the catastrophe in which his voyage ended I have to bear this circumstance in mind. It is certain that in some respects Captain Turner did not follow the advice given to him. It may be (though I seriously doubt it) that had he done so his ship would have reached Liverpool in safety. But the question remains: Was his conduct the conduct of a negligent or of an incompetent man? On this question I have sought the guidance of my assessors, who have rendered me invaluable advice, and the conclusion at which I have arrived is that blame ought not to be imputed to the Captain. The advice given to him, although meant for his most serious consideration, was not intended to deprive him of the right to exercise his skilled judgment in the difficult questions that might arise from time to time in the navigation

of his ship. His omission to follow the advice in all respects cannot fairly be attributed either to negligence or incompetence.

"He exercised his judgment for the best. It was the judgment of a skilled and experienced man, and, although others might have acted differently, and, perhaps, more successfully, he ought not, in my opinion, to be blamed."

Kapitanleutenant Walther Schweiger, commanding submarine U.20, who was responsible for sinking the *Lusitania*, met his fate in September, 1917. On the seventh of that month, in command of U.88, he left Wilhelmshaven for a cruise in company with another submarine. British minelaying in the Heligoland Bight, it should be added, was in full swing, and was daily becoming more effective.

Moving up the Danish coast, the two U-boats dived to pass under the British minefield known to exist off the Horns Reef. Soon afterwards, those in the submarine following U.88 heard a terrific explosion. Blowing the tanks, the vessel was brought to the surface. The captain went to the top of his conning tower, to see a huge, widening area of oil dotted with wreckage in the place where U.88 had dived.

Not a sound broke the silence which once more settled down on those death-strewn waters. Schweiger must have hit a big mine head-on, and possibly detonated his bow torpedoes in one great crash. So perished the man who had struck down the *Lusitania*.

Much more might be written of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and of its effects upon the world in general; but here we may conveniently conclude the account of an ill-conceived and callous blunder, to call it by no harsher name, which inflamed the opinion of all civilised peoples against

Germany, and hastened the abandonment of neutrality by the United States.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] The British times were roughly an hour in advance of the local times.

[B] The exact number as quoted in the *London Gazette* of June 7th, was 335,490.

[C] Official History of the War. “Naval Operations.” Vol. 1. By the late Sir Julian Corbett. Longmans, Green & Co. Revised edition. Page 30, note.

[D] Wreck Commissioner of the Court held in London, June 15th to July 1st, 1915, to inquire into the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

[E] Some accounts say 5,500 cases; but it matters little.

[The end of *The Navy in Action* by Henry Taprell Dorling (as "Taffrail")]