

SEA-HOUNDS

LIEUT. LEWIS
R. FREEMAN

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SEA-HOUNDS



BRITISH BATTLE-SHIPS ON PATROL

SEA-HOUNDS

BY
LEWIS R. FREEMAN

Lieut. R.N.V.R.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR



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To

Commodore Sir DOUGLAS BROWNRIGG, Bart.
C.B., R.N., Chief Censor, Admiralty

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SEA HOUNDS

CHAPTER I

THE MEN WHO CHANGED SHIPS

BETWEEN the lighter-load of burning beeves that came bumping down along their line at noon, a salvo of bombs slapped across them at one o'clock from a raiding Bulgar air squadron, a violent Levantine squall which all but broke them loose from their moorings at sundown, and a signal to raise steam for full speed with all dispatch at midnight, it had been a rather exciting twelve hours for the destroyers of the First Division of the —th Flotilla, and now, when at dawn the expected order to proceed to sea was received, it began to look as though there might be still further excitement in pickle down beyond the horizontal blur where the receding wall of the paling purple night-mist was uncovering the Gulf's hard, flat floor of polished indigo.

“It's probably the same old thing,” said the captain of the *Spark*, repressing a yawn after he had given the quartermaster his course to enter the labyrinthine passage where puffing trawlers were towing back the gates of the buoyed barrages, “a

U-boat or two making a bluff at attacking a convoy. They've been sinking a good deal more than we can afford to lose; last week they got an oiler and another ship with the whole summer's supply of mosquito-netting aboard—but that was off the south peninsula of Greece or up Malta way. Here they haven't more than 'demonstrated' about the mouth of the Gulf for two or three months. They know jolly well that if they once come inside, no matter if they do sink a ship or two, that it's a hundred to one—between sea-planes, 'blimps,' P.B.s, and destroyers—against their ever getting out again. There's just a chance that they may try it this time, though, for they must know how terribly short the whole Salonika force is of petrol, and what a real mess things will be left in if they can pot even one of the two or three oilers in this convoy. You'll see a merry chase with a kill at the end of it if they do, I can promise you, for the convoy is beyond the neck of the bag even now, and if a single Fritz has come in after them, the string will be pulled and the rest of the game will be played out here in the 'bull-ring.' ”

The captain had just started telling me how the game was played, when the W.T.* room called him on the voice-pipe to say that one of the ships of the convoy had just been torpedoed and was about to sink, and shortly afterwards a radio was received from the C.-in-C. ordering the flotilla to proceed to

* Wireless Telegraph.

hunt the submarine responsible for the trouble. Then the officer commanding the division leader flashed his orders by "visual" to the several units of the flotilla, and presently these were spreading fan-wise to sweep southward toward where, sixty to a hundred miles away, numerous drifters would be dropping mile after mile of light nets across the straits leading out to the open Mediterranean. Northeastward, where the rising sun was beginning to prick into vivid whiteness the tents of the great hospital areas, several sea-planes were circling upwards; and southeastward, above the dry brown hills of the Cassandra peninsula, the silver bag of an air-ship floated across the sky like a soaring tumble bug. The hounds of the sea and air had begun to stalk their quarry.

"It's a biggish sort of a place to hunt over," said the captain, as the *Spark* stood away on a course that formed the outside left rib of the flotilla's "fan," and took her in to skirt the rocky coast of Cassandra; "and there's so many in the hunt that the chances are all in favour of some other fellow getting the brush instead of you. And unless we have the luck to do some of the flushing ourselves, I won't promise you that the whole show won't prove no end of a bore; and even if we do scare him up—well, there are a good many more exciting things than dropping 'ash-cans' on a frightened Fritzie. It won't be a circumstance, for instance, to that rough house we ran into at the

'White Tower' last night when that boxful of French 'blue-devils' wouldn't stop singing 'Madelon' when the couchee-couchee dancer's turn began, and her friend, the Russian colonel in the next box, started to dissolve the Entente by——"

The captain broke off suddenly and set the alarm bell going as a lynx-eyed lookout cut in with "Con-nin' tower o' submreen three points on port bow," and, with much banging of boots on steel decks and ladders, the ship had gone to "Action Stations" before a leisurely mounting recognition rocket revealed the fact that the "enemy" was a friend, doubtless a "co-huntress."

Although we were still far from where there was yet any chance of encountering the U-boat which had attacked the convoy, there were two or three alarms in the course of the next hour. The first was when we altered our course to avoid a torpedo reported as running to strike our port bow, to discover an instant later that the doughty *Spark* was turning away from a gambolling porpoise. The second was when some kind of a long-necked seabird rose from a dive about two hundred yards on the starboard beam and created an effect so like a finger-periscope with its following "feather" that it drew a shell from the foremost gun which all but blew it out of the water. It was my remarking the smartness with which this gun was served that led the captain, when a floating mine was reported a few minutes later, to order that sinister menace to

be destroyed by shell-fire rather than, as usual, by shots from a rifle. All the guns which would bear were given an even start in the race to hit the wickedly horned hemisphere as we brought it abeam at a range of six or eight hundred yards; but the lean, keen crew of the pet on the fore-castle—splashing the target with their first shot and detonating it with their second—won in a walk and left the others nothing but a hundred-foot-high geyser of smoke-streaked spray tumbling above a heart of flame to pump their tardier shells into.

The captain gazed down with a smile of affectionate pride to where the winners, having trained their gun back amidships, were wiping its smoky nose, sponging out its mouth, polishing its sleek barrel, and patting its shiny breech, for all the world as though they were grooms and stable-boys and jockeys performing similar services for the Derby winner just led back to his stall.

“There’s not another such four-inch gun’s crew as that one in any ship in the Mediterranean,” he said, “which makes it all the greater pity that they have never once had a chance to fire a shot at anything of the enemy’s any larger than that Bulgar bombing plane they cocked up and took a pot at after he had gone over yesterday. I mean that they never had a chance as a crew. Individually, I believe there are two or three of them that have been through some of the hottest shows in the war. That

slender chap there in the blue overall was in the *Killarney* when she was shot to pieces and sunk by German cruisers at Jutland, and I believe his Number Two—that one in a singlet, with his sleeves rolled up and just a bit of a limp—was in the *Seagull* when she was rammed, right in the middle of an action with the Huns, by both the *Bow* and the *Wreath*. A number of ratings from the *Seagull* clambered over the forecastle of the *Bow* while the two were locked together, evidently because they thought their own ship was going down, while two or three men from the *Bow* were thrown by the force of the collision on to the *Seagull*. When the two broke loose and drifted apart men from each of them were left on the other, and by a rather interesting coincidence, we have right here in the *Spark* at this moment representatives of both batches. They, with two or three other Jutland ‘veterans’ who chance also to be in the *Spark*, call themselves the ‘Black Marias.’ Just why, I’m not quite sure, but I believe it has something to do with their all being finally picked up by one destroyer and carried back to harbour like a lot of drunks after a night’s spree. And, to hear them talk of it when they get together, that is the spirit in which they affect to regard a phase of the Jutland battle which wiped out some scores of their mates and two or three of the destroyers of their flotilla. Talking with one of them alone, he will occasionally condescend to speak of the serious side

of the show, but their joint reminiscences, in the constant by-play of banter, are more suggestive of tumultuous 'nights of gladness' on the beach at Port Said or Rio than the most murderous spasm of night fighting in the whose course of naval history. You've got a long and probably tiresome day ahead of you. Perhaps it might ease the monotony a bit if you had a yarn with two or three of them. They'll be bored stiff standing by in this blazing sun with small prospects of anything turning up, and probably easier to draw out than at most times. Gains, there by the foremost gun, would be a good one for a starter. There is no doubt of his having seen some minutes of the real thing in the *Killarney*. Only don't try a frontal attack on him. Just saunter along and start talking about anything else on earth than Jutland and the *Killarney*, and then lead him round by degrees."

We were just passing the riven wreck of a large freighter as I sidled inconsequently along to the forecastle, and the strange way in which the stern appeared to be stirring to the barely perceptible swell gave ample excuse for turning to the crew of the foremost gun for a possible explanation. It was Leading Seaman Gains, as incisive of speech as he was quick of movement, who replied, and I recognized him at once as a youth of force and personality, one of the type to whom the broadened opportunities for quick promotion offered the Lower

Deck through the war has given a new outlook on life.

“She was a tramp with a cargo of American mules for the Serbs, sir,” he said, “and she was submarined two or three miles off shore. The mouldie cracked her up amidships, but her back didn’t break till she grounded on that sand spit there. At first her stern sank till her poop was awash at high tide—there’s only a few feet rise and fall here, as you probably know, sir—but when the bodies of the mules that had been drowned ’tween decks began to swell they blocked up all the holes and finally generated so much gas that the increased buoyancy lifted the keel of the stern half clear of the bottom and left it free to move with the seas. I have heard they intend to blow out her bottom and sink her proper for fear that end of her might float off in a storm and turn derelict.”

That story was, as I learned later, substantially true, but it had just enough of the fantastic in it to tempt the twinkling eyed “Number Two” to a bit of embroidery on his own account. He was the one with the muscular forearms and the slight limp. The suggestion of “New World” accent in his speech was traceable, he subsequently told me, to the many years he had spent on the Esquimault station in British Columbia.

“They do say, sir,” he said solemnly, rubbing hard at an imaginary patch of inferior refulgency

on the shining breech of his gun, "that she's that light and jumpy with mule-gas, after the sun's been beating on her poop all day, that she lifts right up in the air and tugs at her moorings like a kite balloon. And there's one buzz winging round that they're going to run a pipe-line to her end and use the gas for inflating——"

Gains, evidently feeling that there were limits to which the credulity of a landsman should be imposed upon, cut in coldly and crushingly with: "She's not the only old wreck 'round here that they could draw on for 'mule-gas' if there's ever need of it, my boy; and as for her rising under her own power—well, if she ever goes as far as you did under yours the night you jumped from the *Seagull* to the *Bow* I'll——"

The gusty guffaw that drowned the rest of Gains' broadside left us all on good terms, and, by a happy chance, with the "Jutland ice" already broken. Number Two, joining heartily in the laugh, said that, "nifty" as was his jump from the *Seagull* to the *Bow*, it wasn't a "starter" to the "double back-action-summerset" with which Jock Campbell was chucked from the *Bow* to the *Seagull*. "We played a sort of 'Pussy-Wants-a-Corner' exchange, Jock and me," he said, "for Jock was Number Four or 'Trainer' of the crew of one of the fo'c'sle guns of the *Bow*, and I was the same in the *Seagull*. We didn't quite land in each other's place when the wallop came, but it wasn't

far from it; and we each finished the scrap in the other guy's ship. You might pike aft and try to get a yarn out of Jock when 'Pack up!' sounds. He's a close-mouthed tyke, though, and if you can get him to tell how he played the human proj, you'll be doing more'n anyone else has been able to pull off down to now. He's half clam and half sphinx, I think Jock is, and that makes a 'dour lad' when crossed with a 'Glasgie' strain. Which makes it all the sadder to have him qualify for membership in the 'Black Marias,' and me, because I finished in the *Bow*, froze out."

I told him that I would gladly have a try at Jock later, provided only that he would first tell me what happened in his own case, adding that it wasn't every British sailor who could claim the distinction of fighting the Hun from two different ships within the hour.

"It would have been a darned sight better for me if I'd confined my fighting to *one* ship," he replied with a wry smile, "and it was mighty little fighting I got out of it anyhow. But sure, I'll tell you what I saw of the fracas, and then you can take a chance at Jock. It was along toward midnight, and the *Seagull* was steaming in 'line ahead' with her half of the flotilla. The *Killarney* and *Firebrand* was leading us, with the *Wreath* and one or two others astern. I was at 'action station' with the crew of the foremost gun, and keeping my eye peeled all round, for some of the ships astern had just been

popping away at some Hun destroyers they had reported. All of a sudden I saw the officers on the bridge peering out to starboard, and there, coming up astern of us and steering a converging course, I saw the first, and right after, the second and third, of a line of some big lumping ships—some kind of cruisers. All of the flotilla must have thought they was our own ships, for no one challenged or fired all the time they came drawing up past us, making four or five knots more than the seventeen we were doing.

“When the leader was about abreast the *Killarney* and inside of half a mile range, she flashed on some red and green lights, switched on her searchlights and opened fire. Ship for ship, the Huns were just about even with our line now, and the *Firebrand* and *Seagull* must have launched mouldies at the second and third cruisers at near the same moment. Hitting at that range ships running on parallel courses was a cinch, and both slugs slipped home. It was some sight, those two spouts of fire and smoke shooting up together, and by the light of 'em I could see that the *Firebrand's* bag was a four-funneller, and ours a three. The first one keeled right over and began to sink at once, but the one our mouldie hit went staggering on, though down by the stern and with a heavy list to port.

“We would sure have put the kibosh on this one with the next torpedo if we hadn't had to turn

sharp to port to avoid the *Killarney* just then, and so missed our last chance to do something in 'the Great War.' I lost sight of the *Firebrand* and took it for granted she had been blown up. It was not till a week afterwards that we learned she had turned the other way, engaged one Hun cruiser with gunfire, rammed another, just missed being rammed by a third, and finally crawled into port under her own steam.

"The *Seagull* came under the searchlights of the leading Hun cruiser for a few seconds as she came up abreast of the burning *Killarney*, and then the smoke and steam cut off the beam and I was blind as a bat for a minute. The *Killarney* had been left astern when I looked for her again, and seemed all in, with fires all over her and only one gun yapping away on her quarter-deck. I didn't know it at the time, but it was my old college friend, Gains, here, who was passing the projec, for that pert little piece. You'd never think it to look at him, would you?" Gains, feigning to discover something which needed adjustment in the training mechanism, ducked his head behind the breech of his gun at this juncture, and did not bob up again until a resumption of the yarn deflected the centre of interest back to Number Two.

"Turning to port took us over into the line of the other Division, and the first thing I knew the *Seagull* had poked in and taken station astern of the *Bow*, which was leading it. Just then some Hun



GERMAN SHELLS STRIKING THE WATER AT THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND



A BROADSIDE AT NIGHT AT THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

ship, I think it was the same one that strafed the *Killarney*, opened on the *Bow* from starboard, the bursting shell splashing all over her from the funnels right for'ard. *Bow* turned sharp to port to try to shake off the searchlights, and *Seagull* altered at same time to keep from turning in her wake and running into the shells she was side-stepping. All of a sudden I saw another destroyer steering right across our bows, and to keep from ramming her the captain altered back to starboard. That cleared her stern by an eyelash, but the next second I saw that it was now only a question of whether *Seagull* would ram *Bow*, or *Bow* would ram *Seagull*. How a dished and done-for quartermaster, falling across his wheel as he died, decided it in favour of *Bow* I did not learn till later.

“The Hun shells were tearing up the water astern of the *Bow* for half a minute as she began to close us; then they stopped, and the smash came at the end of five or ten seconds of dead quiet. It was pitchy dark, with the flicker of fires on the deck of the *Bow* making trembly red splotches in the smoke and steam. A sight I saw by the light of one of those fires just before the wallop is my main memory of all the hell I saw in the next quarter hour. It has lasted just as if it was burned into my brain with a hot iron, and it figures in one way or other in every nightmare I've had since.”

The humorous twinkle in the corner of the man's eye, which had persisted during all of his recital up

to this point, suddenly died out, and he was staring into nothingness straight ahead of him, where the picture his memory conjured up seemed to hang in projection.

“It was just before we struck,” he went on, speaking slowly, and in an awed voice strangely in contrast to the rather bantering tone he had affected before; “and the bows of the *Bow* were only ten or fifteen yards off, driving down on us in the middle of the double wave of greeny-grey foam they were throwing on both sides. By the light of a fire burning in the wreck of her bridge I saw a lot of bodies lying round on her fo’c’sl’, and right then one of them picked itself up and stood on its feet. It was a whole man from the chest up, and from a bit below the waist down, but—for all that I could see—nothing between. Of course, there must have been an unbroken backbone to make a frame that would stand up at all, but all the shot-away part was in shadow, so I saw nothing from the chest to the hips. It was just as if the head and shoulders were floating in the air. I remember ’specially that it held its cap crushed tight in one of its hands. The face had a kind of a calm look on it at first. Then it turned down and seemed to look at what was gone, and I could see the mouth open as if to holler. Then the crash came, and I didn’t see it again till they were stitching it up in canvas with a fire-bar before dropping it overside the next day. I learned then that an 8-inch shell had done the

trick—rather a big order for one man to try to stop.”

He took a deep breath, blinked once or twice as though to shut out the gruesome vision, and when he resumed the corners of a sheepish grin were cutting into and erasing the lines of horror that had come to his face in describing it.

“There’s no use of my claiming that I was thrown over to the *Bow* by the shock,” he continued, the twinkle flickering up in his eye again, “like Jock was pitched over to the *Seagull*. That *did* happen to three or four ratings from the *Seagull*, though, one signalman and a chap standing look-out being chucked all the way from the fore bridge. But in the case of most of the twenty-three of us who found ourselves adorning the *Bow*’s fo’c’sl’ when the ships broke away, it was the result of a ‘flap’ started by some ijits yelling that we were cut in two and going down. What was more natural, then, with the *Bow* looming up there big and solid—she was a good sight larger than the *Gull*—that the ‘rats’ should leave the sinking ship for one that looked like she might go on floating for a while. I’m not trying to make an excuse for what happened, but only explaining it. The Lord knows we paid a big enough price for it, anyhow.

“The *Bow* hit us like a thousand o’ bricks just before the bridge, and cut more than half-way through to the port side. The shock seemed to knock the deck right out from under my feet, and I

was slammed hard against the starboard wire rail, which must have kept me from being ditched then and there. A lot of the wreckage from the *Bow's* shot-up bridge showered down on the *Seagull's* fo'c'sl', but my friend, Jock Campbell, floated down on the side toward the bridge, so I had no chance to welcome him. From where I was when I pulled up to my feet, it looked as if the *Bow* only lacked a few feet from cutting all the way through us, and as soon as I saw her screws beating up the sea as she tried to go astern, I had the feeling that the whole fo'c'sl' of the *Gull* must break off and sink as soon as the 'plug' was pulled out. I was still sitting tight, though, when that howl started that we were already breaking off and going down, and—well, I joined the rush, and it was just as easy as stepping from a launch to the side of a quay. I'm not trying to make out a case for anybody, but the little bunch of us who climbed to the *Bow* from that half-cut-off fo'c'sl' sure had more excuse than them that swarmed over from aft and leaving the main solid lump of the ship. But we none of us had no business clambering off till we were ordered. In doing that we were only asking for trouble, and we sure got it.

“The fo'c'sl' of the *Bow* was all buckled up in waves from the collision, and there was a slipperiness underfoot that I twigged didn't come from sea water just as soon as I stumbled over the bodies lying round the wreck of the port foremost gun

where I climbed over. We couldn't get aft very well on account of the smashed bridge, and so the bunch of us just huddled up there like a lot of sheep, waiting for some one to tell us what to do. The captain had already left the bridge and was conning her from aft—or possibly the engine-room—at this time. From the way she was shaking and swinging, I knew they were trying to worry her nose out, putting the engines astern, now one and now the other. The clanking and the grinding was something fierce, but pretty soon she began to back clear.

“ It was just a minute or two before the *Bow* tore free from her that the poor old *Gull* got the wallop that was finally responsible for doing her in. This was from a destroyer that came charging up out of the night and wasn't able to turn in time to clear the *Gull's* stern, with the result that she went right through it. Her sharp stem slashed through the quarterdeck like it was cutting bully beef, slicing five or ten feet of it clean off, so that it fell clear and sank. The jar of it ran through the whole length of the *Seagull*, and I felt the quick kick of it even in the *Bow*. In fact, I think the shock of this second collision was the thing that finally broke them clear of the first, for it was just after that I saw the wreck of the *Seagull's* bridge begin to slide away along the *Bow's* starboard bow, as what was left of it wriggled clear.

“ It wasn't much of a look I had at this last

destroyer, but I had a hunch even then that she was the *Wreath*, who had been our next astern. It wasn't till a long time afterward that I learned for certain that this was a fact. The *Wreath* had followed us out of line when we turned to clear the stopped and burning *Killarney*, and then, when we messed up with the *Bow*, not having time to go round, she had to take a short cut through the tail feathers of the poor old *Seagull*. Then she tore right on hell-for-leather hunting for Huns, for it's each ship for herself and the devil take the hindmost in the destroyer game more than in any other.

“ I saw the water boiling into the hole in the side of the *Seagull* as the *Bow* backed away, and expected every minute to see the for'rard end of her break off and sink. But beyond settling down a lot by the head, she still held together and still floated. Bulkheads fore and aft were holding, it looked like, and there was still enough 'ship' left to carry on with. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the blurred wreck of her begin to gather stern way. But it was a fact. Though her rudder, of course, was smashed or carried away, and though she couldn't go ahead without breaking in two, she was still able to move through the water, and perhaps even to steer a rough sort of course with her screws. As it turned out, it wouldn't have made no difference whether we was in her or no; but just the same it was blooming awful, standing

there and knowing that you'd left her while she still had a kick in her. The ragged line where some of the wrecked stern of her showed against the phosphorescent glow of the churn of her screws—that was my good-bye peep at all that was left of the good old *Seagull*. Gains here, or Jock Campbell, can tell you what her finish was. I don't like to talk about it.

“Some of us tried to get aft as soon as we were clear of the *Seagull*, but couldn't make the grade over the wreck of the bridge. As all the officers and men who had been there had either been killed or wounded, or had gone to the after steering position they were now conning her from, we were as much cut off from them as though we were on another craft altogether. All the crews of her fo'c'sl' guns—or such of them as were still alive—were in the same fix. So we just bunched up there in the dark and waited. Some of the wounded were in beastly shape, but there wasn't much to be done for them, even in the way of first aid. Some shipmates of other times drifted together in the darkness, and I remember 'specially—it was while I was trying to tie up some guy's scalp with the sleeve of my shirt—hearing one of them telling another of a wool mat he had just made, all with ravellings from 'Harry Freeman.'* Funny how it's the little things like that a man remembers.

* The bluejackets' name for knitted woollen gifts from friends on the beach.

The gunner whose head I bound up was telling me just how the *Bow* happened to be strafed, but it went in one ear and out of the other.

“ But the queerest thing was me hearing some guy lying all messed up on the deck muttering something about *skookum kluches*, and some more Chinook *wa-wa* that I knew he couldn't have picked up anywhere else but from serving in a ‘T.B.D.’ working up and down the old Inland Passage from Vancouver Island. I felt my way to where he was huddled up in the wreck of a smashed gun, told him that I was another *tilicum* from the ‘Squimalt Base, and asked him what ship he had been there in. I knew there was a good chance that we'd been mates in the old *Virago*, and there even seemed a familiar sound to his voice. But I wasn't fated ever to find out. He just kept on muttering, slipping up on some words as if something was wrong with his mouth, and I didn't dare light a match, of course. When I tried to ease him up a bit by lifting so he'd lie straight—well, all of him didn't seem to come along when I started dragging by his shoulders. I never did find what was wrong with him, for right then new troubles of my own set in.

“ I was still down on my knees trying to locate what was missing with this poor guy, when—out of the corner of my eye, for it was near behind me—I spotted the flash of a ship challenging. *Bow* challenged back—from somewhere aft—and then what

I piped at once for a Hun destroyer switched on searchlights and opened fire. She was about two cables off on our port quarter, heading right for us and blazing away with one or two guns, probably all that would bear on that course. A second destroyer, right astern her, didn't seem to be firing. I heard the bang and saw the flash of two or three shells bursting somewhere amidships, and then the *Bow's* port after gun began to reply. The crews of all the others were knocked out, and so were the searchlights.

“Between the twenty-three from the *Seagull* and what were left of the *Bow's* fo'c'sl' guns' crews, there must have been thirty-five to forty men bunched together there for'ward of the wreck of the bridge. When the firing started, the whole ka-boodle of us did what you're always under orders to do when you have nothing to stand up for—laid down. Or, rather, we just tumbled into a heap like a pile of dead rabbits.

“I went sprawling over the poor devil I was trying to help, and there were two or three on top of me. Into that squirming hump of human flesh one of the Hun's projectiles landed kerplump. It didn't hit me at all, that one, but I can feel yet the kind of heave the whole bunch gave as it ploughed through. Then it was like warm water was being thrown on the pile in buckets, but it wasn't till I had scrambled out and found it sticky that I twigged it was blood.

“Bad as it was, it might have been a lot worse. There hadn’t been enough resistance to explode the proj, and so it killed only four or five and wounded, maybe, twice that, where it would have seoured every man jack of us into the sea and Kingdom Come if it had gone off. The next one found something in the wreck of the bridge hard enough to crack it off though, and it was a ragged scrap of its casing that drove in to the point of my hip and put a kink in my rolling gait that I’ve never quite shaken out yet. It wasn’t much of a hurt to what it gave some, though, ’specially a lad that caught the main kick of it and got ditched to starboard, some of him going under the wire rail, and some over.

“The Huns couldn’t have known how down and out the *Bow* really was, for there was nothing in the world but that one port gun to prevent their closing and polishing her off. The chances are they recognised her class, knew she was more than a match for the pair of them if she was right, and were glad to get off with no more’n an exchange of shots in passing. That was the end of the fighting for the *Bow*, and about time, too. Her bows were stove in, all the fore part of her was full of water, her bridge was smashed and useless, her W.T. and searchlights were finished, all but one gun was out of action, and—when they came to count noses next day—forty-two of her crew were dead. Far from looking for more trouble, it was now only a

question of making harbour, and even that—as it turned out—was touch-and-go for two days.

“It was about one in the morning when that brush with the destroyers came off, and after that there was nothing to do but hang on till daylight and they could clear a way to reach us from abaft the wreckage of the bridge. It was pretty awful, ticking off the minutes there in the darkness. A good many of the worst knocked about were talking a bit wild, but I never heard the guy with the Chinook *wa-wa* again. He must have died and been pitched over while I was being bandaged up. I *did* hear the ‘wool-mat-maker’ yapping again, though, saying how ‘target cloth’ was better to work on than canvas, and describing how to pull the stuff through in a loose loop, and then cut them so that they bunched up in ‘soft, puffy balls.’ Seems like I was cussing him when I dropped off to sleep.

“I must have bled a good deal, for I slept like a log for four or five hours, and woke up only when some one turned me over and began to finger my hip. It was broad daylight, but hazy, and the sun just showing through. Some of the wounded had already been carried aft, and they were mostly dead ones that were lying around. These were being sewed up in canvas to get ready to bury. I thought there was something familiar in the face of one guy I saw them laying out and sort of collecting together, but it wasn’t till later that it suddenly came to me that he was the one I had seen

by firelight when he stood up and looked at himself where he'd been shot in two.

“The two guys who bundled me up in a ‘Neil Robertson’ stretcher and packed me aft, picking their way over and through the wreckage, were both all bound up with rags, and so was about every one else I saw. They took me below into the wardroom, and then, because that was full up, on to some officer’s cabin, where they found a place for me on the deck. After a while, a little dark guy—he was also a good deal bandaged, and so splashed with blood that I didn’t notice at the time he was a sick bay steward—came in, washed my wound out with some dope that smarted like the devil, and tied it up. He worked like a streak of greased lightning, and then went on to some one else. That chap was Pridmore, and, let me tell you, he was the real ‘top-liner’ of all the heroes of the *Bow*. The surgeon had been killed at the first salvo the night before, leaving no one but him to carry on through all the hell that followed. And some way—God knows how—he did it; yes, even though he was wounded three or four times himself, and though he had to go without sleep for more’n two days to find time to dress and tend the thirty or forty crocks he had on his hands. He was sure the star turn, that Pridmore, and I was glad to read the other day that they had given him the D.S.M. Not that he’d have all he deserved if they hung medals all over him; but—well, a guy likes

to have something to show that what he's done hasn't been lost in the shuffle entirely."

I made an entry of "Pridmore, sick bay steward, *Bow*," in my notebook for future reference, and as I was returning it to my pocket a sudden list to starboard, accompanied by a throbbing grind of the helm, heralded a sharp alteration of course. Round she went through ten or twelve points, finally to steady and stand away on a course that seemed to lead toward the dip in the skyline between the jagged range of mountains back of Menastir and the point where a lowering bank of cirro-cumuli hid the ancient abode of the gods on the snow-capped summit of Olympus. On Number Two assuring me that his yarn was spun, that there was nothing more to it save an attempt he had made, in spite of his wound, to get into a fight that started when some of the wounded were hissed by a gang of dockyard "mateys"—I clambered back to the bridge to learn the significance of the new move. I still wanted to hear Gains' story of the *Killarney*, but I had already sized him up sufficiently to know that he was not the type of man who would unbosom himself before his mates. With him, I knew, I should have to watch my chances, and endeavour to have a yarn alone. Number Two's parting injunction was to "try and have a go at Jock Campbell, 'the human proj.' Jock's the guy at the after gun that looks like he was rigged out for deep-sea diving," he said.

“Most likely he’ll only growl at you at first, but if he won’t warm up any other way, try him with a yarn about a skirt. He’s ‘verra fond o’ a braw lass,’ is Jock Campbell.”

Our alteration of course, the captain told me, was the consequence of an order received by wireless directing him to cross over and hunt down a strip along the western shore of the gulf which was not being covered by the present formation of the division. “I’ve had a signal stating that they’re on the track of one U-boat, and there may be something to make them think another has slipped further along and is lying in ambush for the convoy about off Volo. They’re evidently keeping the rest of the division heading in to meet the convoy itself.”

The *Spark* stood on to the north-west until the Vardar marshes showed as an olive-green rim around the bend of the gulf, before turning southward again to skirt the steep shingle-strewn beach along the alluvial “fans” spreading down to the sea from the base of Olympus. The wild-looking Thessalian shepherds were just driving their motley flocks down to the open foreshore to freshen up in the rising midday sea breeze, and it was when I assured Jock Campbell (where I found him leaning on the breech of the after gun and staring landwards with his bushy brows puckered in the incredulous scowl of a man who can’t credit the evidence

of his own eyes) that it was an actual fact that the fuzzy black sheep were wading in and drinking—if sparingly—of the salt water, that a basis of conversation was finally established. Up to that moment he had given no sign that any of my carelessly thrown out tentatives had penetrated to his ears through the “telepad” rig-out which established his connection with the gunnery control. But when, bringing my lips close to his nearest “ear-muff,” I shouted that I had come up along that coast from Lharissa but a few weeks previously by motor and pack-train, and that, in lieu of any fresh water for many miles in either direction, I had actually seen the sheep and goats drinking in flocks from the sea, the look of hostile suspicion in his eyes was replaced by one of friendly interest.

“Weel, weel, y’u dinna say so?” he ejaculated, easing away the edge of the helmet over one ear; “the puir wee beasties!” Then he volunteered that he had once kept from freezing to death in a snowstorm on Ben Nevis by curling up among his sheep, and I told how I had once sheared sheep (not mentioning it was for only half a day, and that my “clip” was composed of about equal parts mutton and wool) on a back blocks station in Queensland. Then he described how he had seen a big merino ram butt a Ford car off the road up Thurso way, and I—with more finesse than veracity—capped that with a yarn of how I had

seen a flock of Macedonian sheep blown up by a Bulgarian air-bomb, and how one of them had landed unhurt upon a passing motor lorry load of forage—and gone right on grazing! I reckoned that might be calculated to remind Jock of something of the same character which had befallen him on a certain memorable occasion, and I was not disappointed.

“ ’Twas verra like wha’ cam ma way on the nicht the *Bow* rammed the *Seagull* at the fecht aff Jutland,” he commented instantly, with no trace of suspicion in his voice. “Wad ye care to hear about it? Ye wud? Weel, then——.” As brief, as direct and to the point was the plain unvarnished tale Jock Campbell told me the while a noon-day storm awoke reverberant echoes of the Jovian thunders in the snow-caverns of Olympus and the *Spark* hunted down through the jade green waters of the Thessalian coast for a U-boat that was supposed to be lurking in their lucent depths “somewhere off Volo.”

“ Ah was at ma action station at the port foremost gun,” he began, wiping his perspiring brow with a wad of greasy waste, which left an undulant trail of oil from the recoil cylinder in its wake, “when we gaed bang into a line o’ big Hun cru’sers, and we lat blaze at them and them at us. The range was short, and wi’ their serchlichts lichten us up oor position wasna that Ah wad ca’ verra pleasant. Up gaed a Hun cru’ser in a spoort

o' flame and reck, hit, Ah thoct, by a mouldie launched by oor next astern. Ah was fair jumpin' wi' joy at the sicht, when a hale salvo o' screechin' projes cam bang into the fo'c'sl'. Ah minded the licht o' them mair than the soun', which was na great.

"The Huns had switched aff their serchlichts when they opened fire, so that noo the projes was bursting in inky mirk. I doubtna oor midships and after guns was firing, but na the foremost, for Ah dinna mind being blinded by their licht afore the Hun projes gan bursting. My ain gun wudna bear on the Huns, so Ah was just standing by for the time, ready to train if we turned.

"Twa salvos cam—maybe frae twa different cru'sers—ane after the ither, wi' aboot half a meenit atween. Ye ken that the licht o' a shell-burst is ower afore ye can even think, and a' the furst ane showed me was just the gun crews, standin', and bracin' themsel's like when a big sea braks inboard. It was ower like a flash o' lichtnin, and the licht had gone oot afore Ah saw anybody blown up or knocked oot. But Ah felt a mighty blast o' air and an awfu' shaikin o' the deck, and then the bang o' lumps o' projes dingin' 'gainst the bridge and smackin' through bodies.

"The flash o' the burst o' the second salvo tellt me what havoc the first had wrocht, but by noo ma een was licht-blind and Ah cudna see weel. The sta'bo'd gun was twisht oot o' shape, and a' the

crew but ane were strechit on the deck. To a' appearance that lad had been laid out wi' the ithers, but noo he was puin himsel' to his feet and crawlin' up the wreck o' the gun when a proj frae the second salvo burst richt alow him. By the flash Ah saw him flyin' inta the air, and—by the licht o' anither flash a bittie efter— then his corp, wi' twa or three ithers, gang ower the side. A lump o' that last proj carried awa' the Number Wan o' ma ain gun, and, onlike some o' the ithers, not a bit o' him was left ahint. Ah mesel' was knockit flat, but wasna much the worse for a' that.

“That was the hinmost Ah saw o' the Huns for that nicht, and the last I mind o' the *Bow* was the dead and decin' wha covert the fo'c'sl', wi' the licht o' the fires burnin' aft flickerin' ower them. Then cam' a cry frae the bridge that a 'stroyer was closin' us to port, and then Ah mind hearin' the captain shoutin' an order ower and ower, like he wasna bein' answered frae the ither end o' the voice-pipe. 'Hard-a-port!' he roared, but weel micht he shout for ay, for the qua'termaster, wi' a' on the signal bridge, was dead by noo, and the helm was left jammed hard-a-sta'bo'd.

“Then Ah felt her shudder as the engines went full speed astern, and Ah got to ma feet in time to see she was headin' straicht for the fo'c'sl' o' a T.B.D. that was steerin' cross her bows. And richt after that she must ha' struck wi' a mighty crash. The next thing Ah mindit—weel, Ah didna

mind much save that I was lyin' on ma back in a sort o' narrow way atween twa high wa's, wi' a turrible pain in ma back and mony sea-boots trampin' ower ma face. The bashin' o' the boots didna hurt me, for Ah was kind o' dazed; but Ah seem to mind turnin' ma face to the wa', just like ye do whan the flees are botherin' ye in the mornin'.

“What brocht me roun', I'm thinkin', was the shock that Ah got whan that wa' 'gan to shak' up and doon, and then slid richt awa', leavin' me hingin' ower the brink o' a black hole, wi' water souchin' about the bottom o't. 'Twas like wakin' oot o' a bad dream and findin' that the warst o' it was true.

“Ah was too groggy to ken richt awa' that the *Bow* had rammed anither ship and that Ah had been pitched oot o' her into the wan she'd hit. Quite natteral, Ah thocht masel' still in the *Bow*, seein' that Ah cud be nae mair use on the fo'c'sl', which was a' smashed and rippit up and drappin' to bits, Ah thocht that Ah ought to run aft to see if Ah could gie a haun.

“But when Ah tried to get up, Ah fund the bane o' ma spine was so sair that Ah cudna stand straicht, and a' Ah cud do was to crawl and stagger alang. Every mon Ah knockit agin, and every bit of wreck Ah felt ower, sent me sprawlin'. Whan I fund that there was no so mony funnels as Ah minded afore, and whan Ah cudna find the W.T.

hooose, Ah thocht that they had been shot awa'. Findin' a crew at stations by a midships gun, Ah speired if they was short o' hauns. They said they werna, so Ah gaed alang aft, lookin' for a chance to be useful.

"Ah was thinkin' to masel', 'she's awfu' little shot up' (for ye ken Ah had expectit her to be a' to bits frae the way Ah'd heard the projet burstin' ahint the bridge), whan a syren gae a mighty shriek a' most at ma lug, and Ah turned to see anither T.B.D., spootin' fire frae her funnels and throwin' a double bow wave higher'n her fo'c'sl', headin' richt inta us. Ah cud see that her helm was hard-a-port by the way her wake was boilin', but it was nae guid. She turned enough to keep frae rammin' us midships, but she cudna miss oor stern.

"Ah had just been tellt by ane o' the after gun's crew to get oot o' the wa' (they not bein' short o' hauns), whan this new craft hove inta sicht. At first it lookit like she wad cut thro' for'ard o' me, leavin' me ahint to drown in the wreck o' the stern. Then Ah thocht she was comin' richt at me, and Ah started crawlin' back to whaur Ah had come frae. But she keepit turnin' and turnin', so that she hit at last richt abaft the after gun. Ah fell a' in a heap at the shock, and, tho' Ah was a guid ten feet frae whaur her stem cut in, the bulge o' her crunched into the quarterdeck till she passed sae close that suthin' stickin' oot frae her

side—it micht hae been the lip o' a mouldie-tube, Ah'm thinkin'—gae ma puir back a sair dig, and there Ah was amang the mess left o' the gun and its crew. Ah was near to bein' dragged owerboard after that T.B.D., and when she was gone Ah fund masel'—for the second time in ane night—hangin' ower the raggit edge o' a black hole listenin' to the swish o' ragin' waters.

“ And then, gin that and ma half-broken back werna enough for ony mon, Ah hear some ane shoutit that they thocht that last rammin' had done in the auld *Seagull*, and that the time wad soon come to 'bandon ship.

“ ‘ *Seagull!* ’ says Ah; ‘ dinna ye ken this ship is the *Bow?* ’ Ah kind o' went groggy after that, and Ah have a sort o' dim remembrance that some ane flashit an 'lectric torch in ma face and said that Ah must have been pitchit ower whan the *Bow* rammed the *Seagull*, and that Ah prob'ly hadna shaken doon to ma new surroundin's. Ah tried hard to speir what kind o' a shakin' doon they meant gin this hadna been ane. But Ah didna seem to have the power to mak' ma words come straicht, and they said, ‘ He's gane a bit off his chuck, ’ and ca'd some ane to carry me below.

“ The pains runnin' up and doon ma spine when Ah was lowered doon the ladder were ower much for me, and Ah passed off for a bit. Whan Ah cam roun' Ah was bein' shoved along the ward-room table—whaur Ah had been lyin'—to mak' room for

a lad wi' bandages roun' his head and a' drippin' wi' salt water. His ship had gone doon twa hours syne, and maist o' the time he had been in the water or roostin' on a Carley Float. That lad's name was Gains, noo the gun-layer o' the fo'most gun o' the *Spark*—him Ah saw ye talkin' wi' just noo. He was strong and cheery himsel', but fower o' his mates were chilled to the bane, and Ah wacht 'em shiver to death richt afore ma een.

“It was aboot daylight when we pickit up a' that was left o' the crew o' the *Killarney*, and aboot an hour efter we fell in wi' the *Sportsman*, wha passed us a hawser and tried to tow, stern-first, what was left o' the *Seagull*. Ah didna see what was wrang, but they tellt me that the wreck o' the stern and the helm bein' jammed hard a-sta'bo'd made sae much drag that the cable partit. Then there was naithing else to do—sin' the *Seagull* cudna steam—but to sink her wi' gun-fire. The captain askit permission for this by W.T., and when it came they ditched the books and signals, transferred abody to the *Sportsman*, and then gae her a roun' or twa at the water-line wi' the *Sportsman's* guns. Doon she gaed, and that,” he concluded with a grin, “is the true yarn o' the sinkin' o' the *Seagull*. If only o' ma mates try to mak' ye b'lieve that she foundert 'count o' bein' hit and holed by a 'human proj' kent as Jock Campbell, I'm hopin' ye'll no listen to 'em.”

CHAPTER II

“ FIREBRAND ”

IT was a little incident which occurred one night when the Grand Fleet was returning to Base from one of its periodical sweeps through the North Sea that set Able-seaman Melton talking of the things he had seen and felt and heard the time he was standing anti-submarine watch in the *Firebrand*, when her flotilla of destroyers mixed itself up with a squadron of German cruisers in the course of the “ dog-fight ” which concluded the battle of Jutland.

I had found him, muffled to the eyes and dancing a jangling jig on a sleet-slippery steel plate to keep warm, when I picked my precarious way along the coco-matted deck and climbed up to the after searchlight platform of the Flotilla Leader I chanced to be in at the time. A fairly decent day was turning into a dirty night, and the steadily thickening mistiness which accompanied a sodden rain in process of transformation into soft snow had reduced the visibility to a point where the Commander-in-Chief deemed it safer for the Fleet to put back to open sea and take no further chances

among the treacherous currents and rocky islands that beset the approaches to the Northern Base.

The Flagship, which had received the order by wireless, flashed "Destroyers prepare to take station for screening when Fleet alters to easterly course at nine o'clock," and shortly before that hour the Flotilla Leader made the signal to execute. Almost immediately I felt the hull of the *Flyer* take on an accelerated throb as her speed was increased, and a moment later the wake began to boil higher as the helm was put hard-a-starboard to bring her round. We were steaming a cable's length on the starboard bow of the *Olympus*, the leading ship of the squadron at the time, and the carrying out of the manœuvre involved the *Flyer's* leading her division across the head of the battleship line and down the other side on an opposite course, so that the destroyers would be in a position to resume night-screening formation when the fleet had finished turning.

Just how the captain of the *Flyer* happened to cut his course so fine I never learned, but the patchiness of the drifting mist must have had a good deal to do with making him misjudge his distance. At any rate, just as we had turned through nine or ten points, I suddenly saw the ominously bulking bows of the *Olympus* come juggernauting out of the night, with the amorphous loom of the bridge and foretop towering monstrously above. The *Flyer* seemed fairly to jump out of the water

at the kick her propellers gave her as the turbines responded to the bridge's call for “More steam,” and a spinning puff of smoke darkened the glow above the funnels for a moment as fresh oil was sprayed upon the fires beneath the boilers.

It was a good deal like a cat scurrying in front of a speeding motor-car, and the consequences would have been more or less similar had not one of the *Olympus's* swarming lookouts, peering into the darkness from his screened nest, gathered hint of the disaster that menaced in time to warn the fore-bridge. The great super-dreadnought responded to her helm very smartly considering her tonnage, and she turned just far enough to starboard to avoid grinding us under. I could almost look up through the port hawse-pipe as the flare of her bow loomed above my head, and the man standing by the depth-charges on the all-but-grazed stern of the *Flyer* might well have been pardoned even if the story his mates afterwards told of his action on this occasion were true—that he had tried to fend off one of the largest battleships afloat with a boat-hook.

A silhouette against the barely perceptible glow at the back of the forebridge of a “brass-hatted” officer shaking his fist as though in the act of ramping and roaring like a true British sailor moved by righteous anger; a forty or fifty degree heel to starboard as the curling bow-wave of the *Olympus* thwacked resoundingly along her port side, and

the *Flyer* drove on into the sleet-shot darkness to blow off accumulated steam in rolling clouds, allow her fluttering pulse to become normal, and resume the even tenor of her way.

Melton, A.B., whistling over and over the opening bars of the chorus of "Do You Want Us to Lose the War?" started his metallicly clanking jig again, but presently, like a man with something on his mind, sidled over and shoved his Balaklava-bordered face against the outside of the closely-reefed hood of my "lammy" coat, and muttered thickly something about being afraid he had got himself into trouble. When I had pulled loose a snap and improved communications by unmuffling a lee ear, I learned that it had just occurred to the good chap that he failed to report to the bridge the battleship he had sighted "fifty yards to the port beam," and he was wondering whether there would be a "strafe" coming from the skipper about it.

"Fact is, sir," he said, speaking brokenly as the galloping gusts every now and then forced a word back into his mouth, "that that rip-rarin' stem, with the white foam flyin' off both sides of it, bearing down right for where I was standin'—all that was so like what I saw the night of Jutland in the *Firebrand* that—that the turn it give me took my mind right back and—and I wasn't thinkin' o' anything else till the '*Lympus* was gone by."

I assured him that, since the *Olympus* had doubt-

less been sighted from the bridge several winks before she had been visible from his less-favourable vantage, they would probably have been too busy to respond to his call at the voice-pipe even had he tried to report what he saw.

“ If I were you,” I said, “ I would forget all about that, and try to explain how a cruiser that the *Firebrand* was about to ram bow-to-bow ” (I had, of course, already heard something of that dare-devilish exploit) “ could have looked to you like the *Olympus* ramping down on a right-angling course and threatening to slice off the *Flyer*’s stern with all her depth-charges. I quite understood that one ramming is a good deal like another, as far as a big ship hitting a destroyer fair and square is concerned, but——”

“ ’Twasn’t that *first* cru’ser ’tall, sir,” Melton interrupted, nuzzling into my “ lammy ” hood again to make himself heard. “ ’Twas ’nother ’un, sir—a wallopin’ big un. The seas was stiff wi’ cru’sers fer a minit, sir, an’ no sooner was we clear o’ the first un than the second come tearin’ down on us, tryin’ to cut us in two amidships. An’ that last un was a battl’ cru’ser nigh as big as the *Lympus*, all shot up in the funnels and runnin’ wild an’ bloody-minded like a mad bull. We were pretty nigh to bein’ stopped dead, an’ if she hadn’t been slower’n cold grease wi’ her helm she’d ha’ eat us right up.”

There had been nothing of malice aforethought in my action in cornering Melton on the search-

light platform that night, for, as it chanced, I had failed to learn up to that moment that he had been in the famous *Firebrand* at Jutland. Nor, with the wind and sea getting up as fast as the glass and the thermometer were going down, was the time or the place quite what a man would have chosen for anything in the way of cosy fireside reminiscence. But, both these facts notwithstanding, I felt that, since I was leaving the *Flyer* to go to another base directly she arrived in harbour on the morrow, it would be criminal to neglect the opportunity of hearing what was perhaps the most sportingly spectacular of all the Jutland destroyer actions related by one who was actually in it. I did not dare to distract Melton's attention from his look-out by drawing him into talking while he was still on watch, but, when he was relieved at ten o'clock, I waylaid him at the foot of the ladder with a pot of steaming hot ship's cocoa (foraged from the galley by a sympathetic ward-room steward) and both pockets of my "lammy" coat filled with the remnants of a box of assorted Yankee "candy" looted from the American submarine in which I had been on patrol the week before.

Melton rose to the lure instantly—or perhaps I should say "fell to the bribe"—for the British bluejacket, if only he were given a chance to develop, is quite as sweet of tooth as his brother Yank. Because I could hardly take him to the captain's cabin, which I was occupying for the

moment, for a yarn, and because he, likewise, could not take me down to the mess deck to disturb the off-watch sleepers with our chatter, there was nothing to do but carry on as best we could in the friendly lee of one of the funnels.

It was a night of infernal inkiness by now, and only clinging patches of soft snow and their blanker blankness revealed the dimly guessable lines of whaler and cowl and torpedo tubes and the loom of the loftier bridge. The battleship line was masked completely by the double curtain of the darkness and the snow, and only a tremulous grey-ness, barely discernible in the intervals of the flurries of flakes where the starboard bow-wave curled back from the *Olympus*, gave an intermittent bearing to help in keeping station. Underfoot was the blackness of the pit, not the faintest gleam reflecting from the waves washing over the weather side to swirl half-knee high about our sea boots. Even overhead all that was visible were fluttering patches of snow flakes dancing through the haloes of pale rose radiance that crowned the tops of the funnels. The wail of the wind in the wireless aerials, the crash of the surging beam seas, the throb of the propellers, and the pussy-cat purr of the spinning turbines—these were the fit accompaniment to which Melton A.B. recited to me the epic of the *Firebrand* at Jutland.

The cocoa I quaffed mug for mug with Melton, down to the last of the sweet, sustaining “set-

tlings" in the bottom of the pot; but the candy I kept in reserve to draw on from time to time as it was needed to lubricate his tongue and stoke the smouldering fires of his memory. I started him off with a red-and-white "barber's pole" stick, which took not a little fumbling with mittened hands to extract from its greased tissue paper wrapper, and the seductive fragrance of crunched peppermint mingled with the acrid fumes of burning petroleum as he leaned close and began to tell how the ——th Flotilla, to which the *Firebrand* belonged, screening the ——th B.S. of the Battle Fleet, came upon the scene toward the end of the long summer afternoon. He had witnessed Beatty's consummate manœuvre of "crossing the T" of the enemy line with the four that remained of his battered First Battle Cruiser Squadron, and he had seen the main Battle Fleet baulked of its action the lowering mists and the closing in of darkness; but it was not until full night had clapped down its lid that the fun for the *Firebrand* really began.

"It was just 'twixt daylight an' dark," he said, reaching me a steadying hand in the darkness as the *Flyer* teetered giddily down the back of a receding sea, "that the flotilla dropped back to take stashun 'stern the battl'ships we was screenin'. The *Killarney* was leadin' an' after her came the *Firebran'*, *Scagull*, *Wreath*, an' *Consort*, makin' up the First Divishun. *Wreath* an' *Consort* sighted some Hun U-boats and 'stroyers while this move was on,

an' plunk'd off a few shots at 'em. Don't think wi' any fatal consequence. Then there come the rattle of light gun fire from the south'ard, like from cru'sers or battleships repellin' T.B.D.'s. Then it was all serene for mor'n an 'our, an' then all hell opens up."

I suspected, from the sounds he made, that Melton had bitten into a block of milk chocolate without removing its wrapping of foil and paper, but presently his enunciation grew less explosive and more intelligible.

"It was Hun cru'sers drivin' down on us from the starboard quarter that started the monkey-show," he said, "an' that bein' the nor'west it was hardly where we'd reason to expect 'em from. It looks like we had 'em clean cut off, wi' the 'hole Battl' Fleet steamin' 'tween 'em an' their way back home, an' that they was tryin' to sneak through in the darkness. The *Wreath*, at the end o' the line nearest 'em, spotted 'em first, and she, 'cause she didn't want to give herself 'way wi' flashin', reported what she'd seen by low-power W.T. to the rest o' the flotilla. Course I—standin' watch aft—didn't know nothin' 'bout that signal, so that the first I hears o' the Huns was when they all opened up on the poor ol' *Killarney*, 'cause she was the leader. I s'pose, and she started firin' back at their flashes.

"The leadin' Hun flashed his searchlight on the *Killarney* as he opened up, but shut off sharp when

Killarney came back at him. I could see some o' the projes flittin' right down the light beam until it blinked off, an' it was a flock of two or three of these that I kept my eye on all the way till they bashed into the *Killarney's* bridge and busted. She was zigzaggin' a coupl' o' points on *Firebrand's* starboard bow just then, so my standin' aft didn't prevent my gettin' a good look at what was happenin'. I could see the bodies o' four or five men flyin' up wi' the wreckage o' the explosion, an' then, all in a minnit, she was rollin' in flames from the funnels right for'ard. By the light o' it I could see the crews o' the 'midships and after guns workin' 'em like devils, an' twice anyhow, an' I think three times, I saw a bright, shiny slug slip over the side, an' knew they were loosin' mouldies to try to get their own back from the Hun.

“The sea was boilin' up red as blood where the light from the burnin' *Killarney* fell on the spouts the Huns' projes was throwin' up all round her. She was the fairest mark ever a gun trained on, and p'raps that was what tempted the Hun to keep pumpin' projes at her instead o' givin' more at-tenshun to the rest of the divishun trailin' astern. That was what gave *Firebran'* her first chance o' alterin' the Hun navy list that night.

“The second cru'ser in the Hun line was bearin' right abeam to starboard by now, an' I could see by her gun-flashes she was of good size, wi' four long funnels fillin' up all the deck 'tween her two masts.

She was firing fast in salvoes wi' all the guns that would bear on the burnin' *Killarney*. I could just make out by the light from the *Killarney*, which was growin' stronger every minnit, that the crew of our after torpedo tube was gettin' busy, an' while I was watchin' 'em, over flops the mouldie and starts to run. I knew it was aimed for one or t'other o' the two leadin' Huns, but wasn't dead sure which till I saw the after funnels an' mainmast o' the second toppl' over an' a big flash o' fire take their place. Then it looked like there was exploshuns right off fore an' aft, and then fires broke out all over her from stem to stern. Next thing I knows, she takes a big list to starboard, an' over she goes, wi' more exploshuns throwin' up spouts o' steam, as she rolls under. The second mouldie—it got away right after the first—was never needed to finish the job. The *Firebran'* had evened up the score for the *Killarney*, wi' a good margin over.

“ The captain turned away to reload mouldies after that, an' just as we swung out o' line I saw a salvo straddle the *Killarney*, and two or three shells hit square 'tween her funnels an' after sup'rstruct'r'. They must have gone off in her engine room, for there was more steam than fire risin' from her as we turned an' left her astern, an' she looked stopped dead. A Hun cru'ser was closin' the blazin' wreck o' her, firin' hard; but, by Gawd, what d'you think I saw. The only patch on the ol' *Killarney* that was free o' the ragin' fires was

her stern, an' from there the steady flashes of her after gun showed it was bein' worked as fast an' reg'lar as ever I seen it done at any night-firin' practice. I looked to see her blow up every minnit, but she was still spittin' wi' that littl' after gun when the sudden flashin' up of the fightin' lights for'ard turned my attenshun nearer home.

“ I could just make out a line of what looked like 'stroyers headin' cross our bows, an' thought we'd stumbled into 'nother nest o' Huns till they answered back wi' the signal o' the day, an' I knew it was one of our own flotillas we'd been catchin' up to. That flashin' up o' lights come near to doin' for us tho', for it showed us up to a big Hun steamin' three or four miles off on the port beam, an' he claps a searchlight on us an' chases it up wi' a sheaf o' shells. The only proj that hit us bounced off wi'out doin' much hurt to the ship, but some flyin' hunks o' it smashed the mouldie davit and knocked out most o' the crews o' the after tubes, includin' the *T.G.M. That put a stop to reloadin' operashuns wi' a mouldie in only one o' the tubes. By good luck we managed to zigzag out o' the searchlight beam right after that, an' was free to turn back an' try to start a divershun for the poor ol' *Killarney*.

“ Her fires looked to be dyin' down when we first picked her up, but right after that some more projetes bust on her an' she started blazin' harder than

* Torpedo Gunner's Mate.

ever. I watched for the spittin' o' that littl' after gun, but when it come it looked to spurt right out o' the heart o' a blazin' furnace, showin' the fire was now burnin' from stem to stern. One more salvo plastered over her, an' that one got no reply. The good ol' ' *Killy* ' had shot her bolt, an' her finish looked a matter o' minnits.

“ It was plain enough if anyone was still livin' they was goin' to need pickin' up in a hurry, an' the captain put the *Firebran*' at full speed to close her an' stan' by to give a han'. Just then I saw a Hun searchlight turned on and start feelin' its way up to where the *Killarney* was burning, wi' a cru'ser followin' up the small end o' the beam, seemin' to be nosin' in to end the mis'ry. She did not bear right for a mouldie, but we opened up wi' the foremost gun, an' I saw the shells bustin' on her bridge and fo'c'sl' like rotten apples chucked 'against a wall. The light blinked off as the first proj hit home, but there was no way to tell if it was shot away or no. It was the second time that night that we'd done our bit to ease off the hell turned loose on the *Killarney*. Likewise it was the last. From then on we had our own partic'lar hell to wriggle out of, wi' no time left to play ' Venging Nemisus ' to our stricken sisters. Just a big bon-fire sittin' on the sea an' lickin' a hole in the night wi' its flames—that was the last I saw of the ol' *Killarney*.”

Melton paused for a moment as if engrossed in

the memories conjured up by his narrative, and I took advantage of the interval to hand him one of those most loved lollipops of Yankee youngsterhood, a plump, hard ball of toothsome saccharinity called—obviously from its resistant resiliency—an “All-Day Sucker.” When he spoke again I knew in an instant that a sure instinct had led him to make the proper disposition of the succulent dainty—that it was stowed snugly away in a bulging cheek like a squirrel’s nut, to melt away in its own good time.

“’Tween the glare of the burnin’ *Killarney*,” Melton went on after thrashing his hands across his shoulders for a minute to warm them up, “the gleam o’ the Hun cru’ser’s searchlight an’ the flash o’ our own gun-fire, we must all have been more or less blinded in the *Firebrand*, for we had run close to what may have been a part of the main en’my battl’ line wi’out nothin’ bein’ reported. Our firin’ had give us away, o’ course, an’ the nearest ships must have had their guns trained on us, waitin’ to be sure what we was. One o’ ’em must have made up his mind we was en’my even before we spotted ’em at all, for the first thing I saw was the white o’ the bow wave an’ wake as she turned toward us, prob’ly to ram. She’d have caught us just about midships if the bridge hadn’t sighted her an’ done the only thing open to do—turned to meet her head on.

“I don’t remember that either she or us switched

on recognition lights, but the Hun opened with ev'rything that would bear just before we slammed together. It must have been by the gun-flashes that I saw she had three funnels, wi' what looked like some kind o' marks painted on 'em in red. I saw our second funnel give a jump and crumple up as a proj hit it, an' then a spurt o' flame—from a big gun fired almost point-blank—looked to shoot right on to the bridge. I thought that it must have killed ev'ry man there an' carried away all the steering gear. But no.

“The old *Firebrand* wi' helm hard-a-port, went swingin' right on thro' the point or two more that saved her life. I could feel by the way she jumped an' gathered herself that last second that the ol' girl was still under control. Then we struck wi' a horrible grind an' crash, an' I went sprawlin' flat.

“If the Hun had hit us half a wink sooner, or if we had turned half a point less, we'd have been swallowed alive and split up in small hunks. As it was, we didn't have a lot the worst o' it, an' p'raps we more than broke even. It was like a mastiff an' terrier runnin' into each other in the dark, an' the terrier only gettin' run over an' the mastiff gettin' a piece bit clean out o' his neck. It was our port bows that come together, an' for only a sort o' glancin' blow. But it was the stem o' the *Firebran'* that was turned in sharpest, an' it was

her that was hittin' up—by a good ten knots—the most speed. She was left in a terribl' mess, but most o' the damage was from her rammin' the Hun, not from the Hun rammin' her. While as for what she did to the Hun, the best proof o' it was the more'n twenty feet of her side-platin'—an upper strake, wi' scuttl' holes in it an' pieces o' gutterway deck hangin' to it—that we found in the wreck of our fo'c'sl'. If the hole that hunk of steel left behind it didn't put that Hun out o' bus'ness as a fightin' unit till she got back to port an' had a refit, I'll eat it."

I wasn't quite clear in my mind whether Melton meant to imply that he would eat the hole in the Hun cruiser or the hunk of steel that came out of it, but there *was* no room for doubt that the violent crunch with which he emphasised the assertion had put a period to the life of his "All-Day Sucker," which was never intended to be treated like chewing toffy. Dipping into the grab-bag of my "lammy" coat pocket for something with which to replace it, therefore, I brought up a stick of chewing gum, and he resumed his story in an atmosphere sweet with the ineffable odour of spearmint and escaping steam.

"How much the Hun was shook up by that smash," Melton continued, "you can reckon from this: We was almost dead stopped for some minnits, an' all out o' control from the time of rammin' till they started connin' her from the en-

gine-room. There was one fire flickerin' in the wreckage o' the forebridge, an' another somewhere 'midships, while there was also a big glare throwin' up where the foremost funnel was shot away. We was as soft an' easy a target as even a Hun could ask for; an' yet that one was in too much of a funk wi' his own hurts to let off a singl' other gun at us in all the time that he must have been flounderin' on at not much more'n point-blank range. Mebbe he was knocked up even more'n we thought. Nothin' else would account for him not havin' 'nother go at us.

“ Just one wild bally mess—that was what the *Firebran*' looked like when I got to my feet again an' cast an eye for'ard. There was too much smoke an' steam to see clear, an' it was mostly flickers o' red light where the fires were startin', an' big, black shadows full o' wreckage. As it looked to *me* from aft—tho', o' course, the full effects wasn't vis'bl' till daylight, the bridge an' searchlight platform an' mast was shoved right back an' piled up on the foremost funnel. The whaler an' dingy was carried away, an' my first thought, for I was sure she was sinkin', was that we had no boats to put off in. I could see two or three wounded crawlin' out o' the raffle, but I knew that the most to be dished would be in the wreck o' the bridge. The queerest thing o' all was the flashes o' green an' blue light flutterin' thro' the tangled steel o' the wreckage. At first I thought

I was sort o' seein' things; but fin'ly I figgered it out as the juice from the busted 'lectric wires short-circuitin'. It meant, I tol' myself, that the men under them tons o' steel was bein' 'lectrocuted on top o' bein' crushed.

"It looked like any one o' three or four things would be enough to finish the ol' *Firebran'*. I remember thinkin' that if she didn't blow up, she was sure to burn up; an' that if, by chance, she missed doin' one o' them, she was goin' to founder anyhow. She was already well down by the head, an'—leastways, it looked so to me at the time—still settlin' fast. An' I was just reflectin' that, even if she was lucky enough not to burn up, or blow up, or founder, she was still too easy pickin' for the Huns to miss doin' her in one way or 'nother, when, thunderin' out o' the darkness an' headin' up to crumpl' underfoot what was left o' the stopped an' helpless *Firebran'*, come a hulkin' big battl' cru'ser, the one I was just tellin' you the '*Lympus* set me thinkin' on a while back.

"Starin' at our own fires must have blinded me a good bit, or I'd have seen him sooner'n I did. He looked like he been gettin' no end o' a hammerin', for his second funnel was gone, an' out of the hole it left a big spurt o' flame an' smoke was rushin' that would have showed him up for miles. There was a red hot fire ragin' under his fo'c'sl', too, an' I saw the flames lashin' round thro' some jagged shell holes in his port bow. Lucky for us, he was

runnin' for his life, an' had no time to more than try to run us down in passin'.

“ It must have been just from habit I yelled down my voice-pipe, for I knew they was no longer controllin' her from the bridge; but the roarin' o' a fire an' the clank of bangin' metal was the only sounds that come back. When I looked up again the Hun was right on top of us, an' I must have just stood there—froze—like to-night wi' the *'Lympus*. By the grace o' Gawd, he hadn't been abl' to alter course enough to do the trick. His stem shot by wi' twenty feet or more clearance, an' it was only the fat bulge of him that kissed us off in passin'. It was by the glare o' his fires, not ours, which throwed no light abaft the superstructure I was on, that I saw some of the hands was already workin' to rig a jury steerin' gear aft. Then he was gone, an' much too full o' his own troubles to turn back, or even send the one heavy proj that would have cooked us for good an' all. A few minutes more, an' the wreck o' the *Firebran'* begun gatherin' way again, an' when I saw her come round to her nor'westerly course an' push ahead wi'out settlin' any deeper, I knew that the bulkheads were holdin' an' that—always providin' we run into no more Huns—there was a fightin' chance o' pullin' thro'.

“ There was about a hundred jobs that needed doin' all at once, an' 'tween the loss o' dead an' wounded—only about half the reg'lar ship's company was fit for work. The bulkheads had to be

shored, for, wi' the fo'c'sl' crumpled up like a concertina an' the deck an' side platin' ripped off from the stem right back to the capstan engine, she was open to the whole North Sea from the galley right for'ard. This made the first an' second bulkheads o' no use, an' made the third bulkhead all that stood 'tween us an' goin' to the bottom. Then there was the fires—'bove deck an' 'tween decks—that had to be put out 'fore they got to the magazines, an' the engines to be kept goin', an' the ship to be navigated, an' the wounded to be looked to. An' on top o' all this, the ship had to be got into some kind o' fightin' trim in case any more Huns come pokin' her way. I won't be havin' to tell you it was one bally awful job, carryin' on like that in the dark, an' wi' half the ship's company knocked out.

“When I saw it was the first lieutenant that seemed to be directin' things, I took it the captain was done for, an' that was what everyone thought till, all o' a sudden, he come wrigglin' out o' the wreck o' the bridge—all messed up an' covered wi' blood, but not much hurt otherways—an' began carryin' on just as if it was 'Gen'ral Quarters.' Some cove wi' the stump o' his hand tied up wi' First Aid dressin' was sent up to relieve me on the lookout, an' I was put to fightin' fires an' clearin' up the wreck 'bove decks. As there ain't much to burn on a 'stroyer if the cordite ain't started, we were not long gettin' the fires in hand, even wi' havin'—cause the hoses an' the fire-mains was

knocked out—to dip up water in buckets thrown over the side. Wi’ the wreckage, the most we could do was to dig out the dead an’ wounded an’ rig up for connin’ ship from aft.

“It was a nasty job when we started in on the wreck o’ the forebridge, for the witch-lights o’ the short-circuit were still dancin’ a cancan in the smashed an’ twisted steel plates an’ girders, an’ it kept a cove lookin’ lively to keep from switchin’ some of the blue-green lightnin’ into his own frame by way o’ his ax or saw. No one that had been on any part o’ the bridge was wi’out some kind o’ hurt, but the three dead was a deal less than was to be expected. There was also three very bad knocked up, an’ on one o’ them the surgeon—a young probasuner R.N.V.R.—performed an operashun in the dark. It was a cove he was ’fraid to move wi’out tinkerin’ up a bit, an’ he pulled him thro’ all right in the end. One o’ the crew of the foremost gun never turned up, an’ we figured he must have been lost overboard when she rammed.

“Pois’nous as it was workin’ on deck, that wasn’t a circumstance to what it must have been carryin’ on below. I didn’t see nothin’ o’ that end o’ the show, thank Gawd, but every man as came out o’ it alive said it was just one livin’ bloomin’ hell, no less. There was a good number o’ coves who did things off han’ that saved the ship from blowin’ up, or burnin’ up, or sinkin’, an’ three o’ the best o’ ’em was a engine-room artif’cer, a stoker P.O., and a

stoker that was in the fore stokehold when the bridge was pushed back an' carried away that funnel. They ducked into their respirators, stuck to their posts a' kept the fans goin' till the fumes was all cleared away. Nothin' else would have saved the foremost boiler—an' wi' it the ship herself—blowin' up right then an' there. Same way, gettin' on the jump in backin' up Number 3 bulkhead—the one that was holding back the whole North Sea—was all that kept it from bulgin' in an' floodin' right back into the stokeholds. It was the chief art'ficer engineer that took on that job, an' it was him, too, that stopped up the gaps left by the knocking down o' the first and second funnels.

“ Even after it at last seemed like we was goin' to keep her from sinkin' or blowin' up, things still looked so bad to the captain that he ditched the box o' secret books for fear o' their fallin' into the hands o' the Hun. As we'd have been more hindrance than help to the Fleet, he did not try to rejoin the flotilla, but turned west an' headed for the coast o' England on the chance of makin' the nearest base while she still hung together. All night she went slap-bangin' along, wi' the engines shakin' out a few more rev'lushuns just as fast as it seemed the bulkhead was shored strong enough to stand the push o' the sea.

“ Mornin' found her still goin', but what a sight she was! My first good look at what was left o' her give me the same kind o' a shock I got the first

time I had a peep at my mug in a glass after havin' small-pox in Singapore. She wasn't a ship at all, any more'n my face was a face. She was just a mess, that's all, an' clinkin' an' clankin' an' wheezin' and sneezin' an' yawin' all over the sea. An' the sea was empty all the way roun', wi' no ship in sight to pass us a tow-line or pick us up if she chucked in her hand an' went down.

“ We had our hands so full keepin' her afloat an' under weigh, that it wasn't till four in the afternoon—more'n sixteen hours after we rammed the Hun cru'ser—that we found time to bury our dead. It was like gettin' a turribl' load off your chest when we dropped 'em over in their hammocks wi' a fire-bar stitched in alongside 'em to take 'em down. Nothin' is so depressin' to a sailor as bein' shipmates wi' a mate that ain't a mate no longer. Even the ol' *Firebran'* 'peared to ride easier an' more b'oyant after the buryin' was over, as if she knowed the worst o' her sorrer was left behind.

“ Luck took a turn against us again just after dark, for the wind shifted six or seven points an' started blowin' strong from dead ahead. We had to alter course some to ease off the bang o' the seas a bit, an' fin'ly the speed had to be slowed even slower'n before to keep the bulkhead from being driv' in. But she weathered it, by Gawd she did, an' next mornin' the goin' was easier. We made the Tyne at noon. It was just a heap o' ol' scrap-iron so far as the eye could see, that they let into

the Middle Dock the next day, but it was scrap-iron that had come all the way from Jutland under its own steam, an' wi' no help from no one save what was left o' the lads as once manned a 'stroyer called the *Firebran'*.

"It hadn't taken long to reduce her from a 'stroyer to scrap-iron, an' it didn't seem like it took much longer—time goes fast on home leave—to turn that scrap-iron back into a 'stroyer again. The ol' *Firebran's* got many a good kick in her yet, so they say, an' I'd ask for nothin' better'n to be finishin' the war in her."

I thanked Melton for his yarn, bade him good night, and was about to start picking my way to my cabin to turn in, when I sensed rather than saw that there was something further he wanted to say, perhaps some final tribute to his officers and mates of the *Firebrand*, I thought. There was a shuffling of sea-booted feet on the steel deck, a nervous pulling off and on of woollen mittens, and it was out.

"I just wanted to say, sir," he said, "that I likes the Yankee Jackies very much; 'specially their candy an' chewin' gum. I was just wonderin' if that last stick you give me was all——"

I emptied both pockets before I renewed my thanks to Melton and bade him a final good night. There are strange ingredients entering into the composition of the cement that is binding Britain and America together, and if there is any objection to chewing gum it certainly cannot be on the ground that it lacks adhesiveness.

CHAPTER III

“BACK FROM THE JAWS”

I HAD gone to the *Nairobi*, not because the rather routine stunt her flotilla was on promised any excitement, but rather because of the notable part she had played in the Jutland action and the fact that I had been assured that there was still in her an officer who was said to have figured prominently in the splendid account she had given of herself on that occasion. As luck would have it, however, this officer had been appointed to another destroyer only a day or two previously, so that no veteran of the great action remained in the ward room. A canvass of the ship's company revealed that one of the stoker petty officers was a Jutland survivor, but before I could run him to cover some kind of a light cruiser affair had occurred down Heligoland Bight way which called for destroyer work in that direction, and the next two days, with the flotilla creasing up the brine at high speed and everyone at Action Stations most of the time, were not favourable for the “intimate reminiscence” I was bent on drawing out.

It was not until the flotilla, salt-frosted and low in fuel, was lounging along in the leisurely dalliance

of half-speed on the way back to base that I cornered Stoker Petty Officer Prince in the angle between the foremost torpedo tubes and the starboard rail, and engaged him in serious discussion of the shamefulness of supplying worn-out films to the Depôt Ship kinema. The second dog watch was only half gone, but in the hour that elapsed before it was over there was no mention of Jutland, or anything else connected with the war for that matter, though the talk ran the full gamut from cabbages to kings. I mean this quite literally, for he began by telling me of what his mother had raised in her allotment at Ipswich, and was describing how, when he was on a cruise in the *Clio* ten years before the war, he had once shaken hands with the King of Fiji, as eight bells went to call him on watch. It was a happy inspiration which prompted me to volunteer to go down and stand a part of his watch with him in the stokehold, for once on his own "dung-hill," his restraint fell away from him and he spoke easily and naturally of the things which had befallen him there and on the deck above.

There is little in the small, neat compartment from which the oil fires of a modern destroyer are fed and controlled to suggest the picture which the name "stokehold" conjures up in the popular mind. There is no coal, no grime, no sweating shovellers, no clanging doors. Under ordinary conditions two leisurely moving men do all there is need of doing,

and with time to spare, and there are occasions at sea, in the winter months, when the stokehold is a more comfortable refuge than the chill fireless ward room. It was my remarking upon the grateful warmth of the stokehold after the cold wet wind that was sweeping the deck, which finally turned the current of Prince's reminiscence in the direction I had been vainly endeavouring to deflect it for the last hour.

“It's all comfy enough, sir, when she's loafing along at fifteen or twenty knots,” he said, slipping aside a “flap” and peering in at his fires with the critical eye of a housewife surveying her oven of bread, “but just tumble in some time when, while she already plugging away at full speed, the engine-room rings up more steam. That's the time she's just one little bit of hell down here, sir, with the white sizzle of the fires turning the furnaces to a red that shows even with the lights on, and the plates underfoot getting so hot that you have to keep dancing to prevent the soles of your boots from catching fire. Why, long toward morning of the night after Jutland——”

It didn't take much manœuvring from that vantage to back him up to the beginning for a fresh start of the story of what is unquestionably one of the most remarkable, as it was one of the most successful, phases of the Jutland destroyer action. The fact that, during the daylight action between the battle cruisers, he had ample opportunity for

observation (through his being on deck standing by in the event of emergency and without active duties to perform) makes him undoubtedly one of the most valuable witnesses of the opening phase of this the greatest of all naval battles. The story which I am setting down connectedly, he told me in the comfortable intervals of his leisurely fire-trimming, and, once he was warmed up to it, with little prompting or questioning from myself. Much of it was punctuated with frequent stabs and slashes with one of the short-handled pokers which perform for the stoker of an oil-burner a service similar to that rendered his brother of the coal-burner by his mighty "slice" of iron.

"Big as the difference is between being on deck and in the stokehold at ordinary times," said Prince, turning round with glare-blinded eyes closed to narrow slits after cracking off the accumulating carbon from an oil-sprayer with his poker, "it is ten times more so when a fight is on, and I'll always be jolly thankful that it was my luck not to be caged up down here during the daylight part of the Jutland show. I had my turn of it at night, and it was bad enough then, even though I knew it was blacker'n the pit above; but, in daylight, with everything in full view outside, I'm not sure I wouldn't have gone off my chuck if I'd had to go 'squirrel-caging' on here with one eye on the fires and the other on the Kilroy. But I didn't. It was my luck to be off watch when the ball opened, so

that my ‘action station’ was just loafing round the deck and keeping a stock of leak-stopping gear—mushroom-spreaders and wooden plugs—ready to use as soon as we got holed. Not having anything to do with navigating the ship, or signalling, or serving the guns or torpedo tubes—though I did get a bit of a chance with a mouldie as it turned out—I not only had time to see, but also to let the sights ‘sink in’ like. For that reason, when it was all over, I was probably able to give a more connected yarn of what happened than anyone else in the ship, not excepting the captain. They’ll take a lot of forgetting, some of the things I saw that day.”

Prince went over and settled down at ease on the steel steps of the ladder. “The worst grudge I had against Jutland—save for the way it whiffed out the lives of some of my friends in some of the other destroyers—” he continued with a grin, “was for making me miss my tea that afternoon. We left base the night before, and about daybreak joined up with the ‘battlers,’ which was our way of speaking of the First Battle Cruiser Squadron, to which the flotilla was attached. It was a fairly decent day, and we were able to make good weather of it with the light wind and easy swell. I had stood the forenoon watch, had a bit of a doss in my hammock in the early part of the afternoon one, and had just gone down to tea before going on for the ‘First Dog.’ There had been some buzz in the morning about the Huns being out; but that was so old a

story that no one paid much attention to it. I was just getting my nose over the edge of a mug of tea when I heard the bos'un growling 'Hands exercise action stations,' and tumbled out on deck to go through the motions of getting ready for a fight that would never come off, or leastways that was how we felt about it. The 'battlers' were speeding up a bit, but there was not even a smudge of smoke on the horizon to hint of Huns. After rigging the fire-hoses and getting out my 'plugs,' I stood by for 'what next,' but nothing happened. At the end of half an hour the order 'Hands fall out' was passed, and, leaving everything rigged, down we went to tea again. The mugs we had left were stone cold by this time, and we were just raising a howl for a fresh lot when, 'Bing!' off goes the alarm bells, and up we rushes again, this time to find signs of what we had been looking and hoping for. A good many hours went by before we went below again, and all through the fight—when things would ease off a bit now and then—I would hear the 'matlos' grouching about missing their afternoon tea.

"The old *Nairobi* was nosing along under the port bow of the *Lion* as I came up, and so close that we saw her guns—trained out abeam with a high elevation, right above us. We seemed to be speeding up to take station farther ahead. There was nothing at all in sight (from the deck, at least; though probably there was a better look-see from

the bridge) in the direction the *Lion's* guns were trained, and it was almost as if a bomb had been dropped from the sky when a shell came plumping down about half-way between our starboard quarter and her port bow. The fact is, having heard no sound of gunfire, I was so surprised that I foolishly asked someone if the *Lion* hadn't blown out one of her tompions testing a circuit. The spout of foam should have told me better, but it goes to show what crazy things run through a man's mind when he can only see effect without the cause. A few moments later I saw unmistakable gun-flashes blinking along the skyline to south'ard and knew that at last we were under the fire of the Huns. The next two or three shots fell singly, and were plainly merely attempts to get the range. Following the first 'short,' there were one or two 'over,' and then a fair hit. This one, falling almost straight, struck the fo'c'sl' of the *Lion*, penetrated the deck and came out on the starboard side. I don't think it exploded, and we were just far enough ahead to see past her bows to where it struck the water with a kind of spattery splash, not at all like the clean spout thrown by a shell which goes straight into the sea.

“Then there was a big spurt of flame from the *Lion*, and the screech of shells reached my ears, even before the heavy crash of her four-gun salvo. Watch as I would, I could not make out the distant fall of shot, but the fluttering flashes of the Hun guns to

the south'ard told where the target was. Firing opened up all along the line of our battle cruisers after that, and the racket from that and the fast falling enemy shells increased till it was a steady unbroken roar. The Hun shells were falling so straight that many of the 'overs' missed by only a few yards. The hits, of which there were quite a number on the leading ships, looked rather awful at the moment of exploding. There would be a wild gush of flame that seemed to be eating up everything it touched, and then, all of a sudden, it was gone, and only a few little fires would be left flickering on the deck. The shells which struck against the sides seemed to nip on into the sea almost before they began to explode. Neither these, nor even those which struck the decks and turrets, seemed to be doing much damage at this stage, and our own firing never slackened in the least. I think none of the destroyers were hit up to now, though there were a number of very near things from some of the 'overs.' Our turn was coming.

“This sort of a give-and-take fight had been going on for some time, when there was a sudden increase of the enemy's fire. From the way the fresh fall of shot came ranging up, it was very plain that new ships were coming into action, while the fact that the splashes were higher and heavier than those from the first salvoes seemed to make it likely that some of the Hun battleships had now arrived at the party. As it turned out, this was just what

had happened, and, although we could not see them from the low decks of the destroyers, the first B.C.S. was soon under the fire of the whole Hun High Seas Fleet. It was to draw these on into action with our approaching Battle Fleet that Beatty now turned away to the north'ard.

“Right here was where the big moment of this part of the fight came. The Huns must have scented the chance of catching our battle cruisers on the ‘windy corner’ as they turned, for suddenly their fire slackened on the ships down the line and concentrated on the point where that line began to bend. It must have been something like the barrage they make at the Front, for at times the water thrown up by the bursting shell made a solid wall which completely cut off my view of the ships beyond it. The way it seemed to boil up and quiet down looked like there was some sort of general control over the bunched fire, though that sort of thing would be pretty hard to handle.

“The *Lion* caught only a corner of the ‘boil,’ and left it on her starboard quarter, but the shell or two that struck her started a fierce fire burning ‘mid-ships, and I did not see the guns of that turret again in action. The ‘P.R.’—the *Princess Royal*—turned in a quiet interval of the barrage, and seemed not to be hit, but the *Queen Mary* steamed right into it, and just seemed to dissolve in a big puff of smoke and steam. I have no special memory of the noise or shock of the explosion, but the pillar of smoke

shot up as sudden and solid as a 'Jack-in-the-box.' It was black underneath, but always with a crown of flame at the top, as though the gases were spouting up inside and taking fire as they met the air. Some of my mates said they saw big pieces of flying wreckage, such as plates from turrets and decks, but I only remember smoke and flame. I never saw a bit of the 'Q.M.' again. When the smoke cloud lifted she was gone completely, with nothing but a gap in the line to mark the place where she had been. The thing looked so impossible that the 'T.I.' (that was what we called the torpedo gunner's mate, because he was also torpedo instructor), who was standing beside me, kept saying over and over again, 'She's not gone up! She's not gone up!'

"Perhaps it was no more than a coincidence, but it has always struck me as being just a bit uncanny the way that barrage on the 'windy corner' seemed to 'work by threes.' The 'Q.M.' was third in line, and up she went after the *Lion* and 'P.R.' had passed unhurt. Then the *Tiger* and *New Zealand* weathered the turn safely, but the poor old *Indefat.*—Number three again—got hers. She went up under a rain of shells plumping down on her deck, just as the 'Q.M.' did, and I remember specially watching the top of a turret go spinning up into the air, till it almost disappeared, and then came slowly down again, till it was lost in the rising smoke of the explosion.

"The fire of the Huns began to be divided more

equally among the four surviving battle cruisers now, and the *Nairobi* was led a lively dance dodging about among the ‘overs.’ It was the big fire raging amidships that turned my eyes to the *Lion* again. One of the guns of the ‘midships turret had a sickly droop to it, but the other three turrets were blazing away as merry as ever. We were close enough to see men on the bridge with the naked eye, and it suddenly occurred to me that one of the quietly moving figures there must be Admiral Beatty, who I knew hated to be cooped up in a conning tower in action. I could not be sure which he was, but everyone in sight looked no more concerned than if they had been steaming out for target practice. I didn’t have time to think of it then, but every time since that I’ve felt surer and surer that no man since the world began ever showed more real guts than Beatty in that part of the Jutland show.”

Prince stood up, and put a forty-five degree kink in his poker by slamming it over the steel rail of the ladder to emphasise his words, and then stopped talking for a minute or two while he worried it straight with a hammer.

“It was just about this time,” he resumed, squinting approvingly down the straightened bar, “that the *Nectar* hoisted the signal, ‘Second Division prepare for torpedo attack,’ and a few minutes later I saw the whole flotilla start streaming out, some ahead of the battle cruiser line, and some through it, toward the Huns. I also have some memory of

seeing the —th flotilla, smoking like young factory chimneys, coming out astern of the line, but I had no chance to see what became of them.

“The range between us and the Huns had been decreasing for some time, and the battle cruisers at the head of the line loomed up pretty big and awful as we started to close them. I’ve never made quite sure yet whether we were sent out to repel an attack of the Hun destroyers, or whether they were sent out to repel our attack. Anyhow, there they were, filtering out through their battle cruisers just as we had filtered through ours. We met and turned them back something more than half-way between the lines, but before we got to that point we had to pass, first through the fire of the Hun heavies, and then through a still hotter zone where their secondaries were slapping down a barrage that took some fancy side-stepping to avoid coming to grief in. The *Onward* was the first of our division to fall by the wayside. She stopped a ’leven-inch shell with her engine-room, and got stopped in turn herself. Luckily it didn’t explode, or she would have been blown out of the water then and there. I saw her fall out of line and disappear in a cloud of steam, and that was the last peep we had of her for many weeks. When she finally rejoined the flotilla, we learned that she and another cripple—the *Fencer*, I think it was—had limped back home together. I don’t remember just where the *Wanderer* got hers, but I think it must have been from the Hun’s

secondaries. Anyhow, the first thing I remember was that she was gone, and that the *Nectar* was leading the *Nairobi*—all that was left of the division—on a course to cross the bows of the enemy battle cruisers. The Hun destroyers, which had no chance with us in a gun fight, had now turned tail and were heading back for the shelter of their battle line. Several of them appeared on fire, but I didn't see any sinking.

“I am not quite sure what orders were made to the flotilla at this time, but I rather think that after the Hun attack had been stopped the signal was hoisted to return to the battle cruisers. I think that is what the other divisions did do, but for our division—or what remained of it—things were looking too promising just then to turn our backs on. I was standing by the foremost tubes at the time, and all of a sudden the Hun line began to turn away, and I saw that the leading ship was being heavily hit and that she was afire in two or three places. As she turned she presented us a fine broadside target at about three thousand yards, and the order came from the bridge to ‘Stand by foremost tubes and fire when sights come on.’

“The turning of the Hun battle cruiser line exposed us to the fire of a number of his light cruisers which had been seeking shelter behind it, and some smashing salvoes from these began to plump down all around us just as we got ready to launch the torpedoes. Though there was not one direct hit, we

were 'straddled' a dozen times, and the foam spouts tossed up by the shells exploding on striking the water made a wall of smoke and spray that almost shut off a view of our target. Shell fragments were slamming up against the funnels and tinkling on the decks, and I believe two or three men were hit by them, though not much hurt. It was this sudden savage shelling that spoiled the only chance we had at the Hun big 'uns. Just as the sights were coming on to the leading ship a salvo came down kerplump right abreast of the foremost tubes, throwing a solid spout of green water all over them. I saw both mouldies start to slide out, but only one struck the water and began to run. A moment later I saw that the other, for some reason we never found out, but probably because it had been knocked sideways by the rush of water or perhaps a fragment of shell, was hanging by its tail to the lip of the tube, with its war-head full of gun-cotton trailing in the sea. It cleared itself when the next sea slapped it against the side, and started diving and jumping about like a wounded porpoise, most likely because its propellers had been knocked out. Luckily, our speed carried us on before it had a chance to 'boomerang' back and blow up the old *Nairobi*. We could not watch the first torpedo run on account of the spouts from the falling shells, but though it started right to cross the enemy's line, there was nothing to make us believe it scored a hit.

"Before there was time to grieve over losing our

chance at the battle cruisers the ‘T.I.’ called me to give him a hand with the ‘midships’ tubes, as one of his men had been knocked out. ‘There’s a light cruiser just going to bear for a shot,’ he yelled from his seat between the tubes as I ran round to the breech; ‘jump up and tell me what speed she’s making. I can’t see her fair from here.’ The trouble was that the awful speed the *Nairobi* was going at settled her down so low that, anywhere abaft the bridge, a man couldn’t see over the bow wave from the deck. But, standing on top of the tubes, I was high enough to get a good look at the Hun, when he wasn’t shut off by the spouts from the fall of shot. He was a small three-funnelled light cruiser, and every gun he had looked to be training on us. Another cruiser astern of him was also firing on the *Nairobi*, while two or three others were concentrating on the *Nectar*. She was getting it even hotter than we were, and all I could see of her—when one of her zigzags brought her to one side or the other so the bridge didn’t cut her off from my view—was some masts and funnels sliding along in the middle of a dancing patch of foam fountains. Both *Nectar* and *Nairobi* were replying for all they were worth with their foremost guns; the after ones were too low down to fire at such close range with much effect. I saw one of our shells bursting on the Huns, and why their shooting at us was so bad I have never quite understood. The fact we were settled so deep aft from our speed was plainly making a lot

of shells ricochet over what would otherwise have been hits, but, at the same time, the bows being so much higher out of the water offered all the more target for'ard. It was more 'Joss' than anything else, I suppose. Besides, the *Nectar* was just on the edge of getting hers anyhow.

"I saw all these things out of the corner of my eye like, for my mind was centred on getting what the 'T.I.' wanted to know about his cruiser. I knew just what this was to a 't,' for I'd taken many a turn of drill at the tubes. 'Parallel courses, thousand yards range, speed about twenty-five,' I shouted, jumping down again; 'and you'll have to slip her right smart or you'll miss your chance.' Right then the seas flattened down for a few seconds, and the 'T.I.', giving me an order of how to train her, set his sights and pulled the cocking lever. A moment later he fired, and the mouldie slipped out smooth and easy and started running straight and true for a point the Hun was going to arrive at about a minute later."

Prince had been poking away at a sprayer as he talked, with the fluttering light-mote from the fire in the heart of the furnace playing on one of his squinting eyes in a way that, with the other quenched in shadow, gave his face a look of Cyclopean fierceness. "I jumped up on the tubes again to follow our little tin fish on its swim," he resumed. "There seemed to be a bit of a flap on the cruiser, for its next salvo fell a long way short of us. One

of the shells—a five- or six-incher—did not explode, but bounced off the water and came ‘skip-jacking’ along straight for us. It kicked into the water twice before it reached us, the second time right at the base of the wave that was rolling up and hiding our sunken stern, and that seemed to give it just enough of an up-flip to make it clear the *Nairobi’s* shivering hull. It came so slow that I caught the glint of the copper band round its base, and so low that the after superstructure blotted it off from my sight as it passed over the stern. One of the after gun’s crew told me he could have reached up and patted it as it tumbled along over his head. He said it was going so slow that he hardly felt any wind at all from it. Perhaps that was because he had his own wind up, though, for it was making a great buzz, and must have been carrying a big ‘tail’ of air in its wake.

“I lost track of our mouldie when I ducked—no, I don’t mind admitting that’s just what I did, though it missed me by a mile—and before I could get my eye on its wake again it had gone home. I think they must have spotted it coming on the cruiser, for I saw her begin to alter course away just about the time I figured it was due to arrive. If they were altering to avoid the mouldie, they turned the wrong way, for it only brought right abreast the funnels what’d ‘a’ been a hit somewhere about the bridge. I’ve got a picture in my mind of what happened that I’m dead certain is as true

as a photograph, and the spout of water that went up must have been almost exactly amidships. If the hit had been anywhere for'rard it would never have broken her back the way it did, and she might have got away. The funny part of it was that it was not the 'midships section of her, where the mouldie hit, that seemed to be lifted by the explosion. That part of her seemed just to go to pieces and begin to sink all at once, while the bow and stern halves started to come up and close together like a jack-knife. She must have gone down inside of a minute or two, but things were happening so fast I don't think I was looking when she disappeared."

Prince, engrossed in his story, forgot that the end of his poker had a sheet of flame playing upon it, and the heat which crept back from the rosy-red tip gave his palm a sharp singe as he clutched the handle preparatory to executing one of his sweeping gestures. From then on to the end of his narrative he paused frequently to lick with his tongue the blistered cuticle, the stoker's sovereign remedy for a slight burn. "I was just starting to give the 'T.I.' an account of what I had had a lot better chance to see than he had," he went on thickly, still touching the blisters gingerly with an extended tongue-tip, "when I heard him growl, 'Stand by! here's another one. What speed d'you think she's making?' I was still standing up on top of the tubes, and—to get a better view—right in front of

the 'T.I.', with my waist on just about the level of his face. As I turned my head to look at the second Hun he straddled us fair with a full salvo. Most of it went over, but one proj struck right alongside and just about flooded us out. But there was something heavier than water that it sent aboard. I felt a sharp sting across my stomach, as if someone had given me a cut with a whip. As I put my hand down to it the whole front of my overall dropped away where a fragment of shell casing had shot across it. A few threads—I found out later—had been started on my singlet, but my hide was not even scratched. I heard the 'T.I.' give a yell, and when I looked round saw his face covered with blood, and a flap of skin from his forehead hanging down over one eye like a skye terrier's ear. The piece of proj had caught him a nasty side-swipe, though without hurting anything but his looks in the least. And it wasn't that he was yelling about, either, but at me for not giving him the course and speed of the second cruiser. He had the flap of skin tied up out of his eye—using a strip of my overall because neither of us could find a handkerchief—by the time I was back at the handle. I saw the blood dribbling over his sights, but he seemed to be seeing through them all right, for he was telling me how to train when I felt the helm begin to grind as it was thrown hard over to make a sudden alteration of course. She heeled fifteen or twenty degrees as she turned six points to star-

board, and the boil of her wake flooded across her stern three or four feet deep. The sudden heel threw me off my feet, and I pulled up just in time to see us rushing by, and just missing by a few yards, a stopped destroyer that was nothing but spurts of fire flashing under a rolling cloud of steam and smoke.

“She seemed to be afire all over, and about ready to blow up; yet, from the quick flashes of some of the spurts of fire, I knew they came from a hard-pumped gun that some stout-hearted lads were working to the last. There was nothing in the look of that spouting volcano of smoke and steam that would help a man to tell whether it was a battleship or a trawler, but I knew that it could be only the *Nectar*, our Division leader. We never saw her nor anyone in her again. She must have gone down within a few minutes, and anyone that survived fell into the hands of the enemy. She led us a fine dance while it lasted, and the only pity was that she couldn't trip it to the end.

“That left the old *Nairobi* as the last of the Division, and I haven't any recollection of any of the rest of the flotilla being in sight by then. Not that I had any time to look for them, though. Our sudden change of course to keep from ramming the *Nectar* spoiled our chance at the second Hun cruiser, but we were left no time to mourn that any more than the finish of the *Nectar*. Hardly had we left the wreck of her astern than a full salvo of

large shells—I think they must have come from one of the battle cruisers, for they were much heavier than anything the light cruisers were firing—struck only thirty or forty yards short of us. The shells were bunched together like a salvo of air-bombs kicked loose all at once. The wall of water they threw up shut everything on that side off from sight for a few seconds, and when the spouts settled down there was a Hun destroyer inside of a mile away. I jumped up to give her course and speed to the ‘T.I.’, but before I had time more than to see that she had two funnels and many tubes the bursting projectiles from our foremost and midships guns began knocking her to pieces so fast that I soon saw there was no use of wasting a moultrie on the job.

“I saw the captain waving encouragement from the bridge to the crew of the midships guns, and, when the noise died down for a moment, I heard him shout, ‘You’ve got her! Give it to her!’ Just then another salvo was plastered a-straddle of us, and I saw a fragment of shell knock the sight-setter of the midships gun out of his seat. He looked a little dazed as he climbed back, but his eye must have been as good as ever, for I saw his next shot make a hit square on a whaler they were lowering from the sinking Hun and blow it to bits. A minute or two more, and the destroyer itself blew up and disappeared under a column of steam and smoke.

“That,” continued Prince, beginning to prod anew his neglected sprayers, “just about concluded

our day's work. As there was no longer any prospect of getting in moultie-range of any of the big Huns, and as none of the little Huns were in sight to fight with gun-fire, it must have occurred to the captain that it was time he was rejoining the flotilla. There was only some dark blurs on the north'ard skyline to steer for at first, and the Huns did all they knew to keep us from getting there, too. For a while we were doing nothing but playing 'hide-and-seek' among the salvoes they tried to stop us with, and I have heard since that the way the captain used his helm to avoid being hit at this stage of the show was rated as about the cleverest work of the kind in the whole battle.

"It was the Fifth B.S.—the *Queen Elizabeth* class—that we caught up to first, and a grand sight it was, the four of them standing up and giving battle to about the whole of the High Sea Fleet. They were taking a heavy pounding without turning a hair, so far as a man could see, and even when the *Warspite* had her steering gear knocked out and went steaming in circles it didn't seem to upset the other three very much. We sighted our own Battle Fleet about six, and rejoined the flotilla in good time to be back with the battle cruisers when Beatty took them round the head of the Hun line and only failed to cut off their retreat through night coming on.

"Compared with what the next six or eight hours held for some of our destroyers—or even

with what we had just been through ourselves—the night for us was fairly quiet. We were in action once or twice, and I saw several ships—mostly enemy, but one or two of our own—go up in flame and smoke before I went on watch down here at midnight. But through it all the devil’s own luck which had been with us from the first held good. Although we were through the very hottest of the day action, and not the least of the night, the old *Nairobi* did not receive one direct hit from an enemy shell. She accounted for at least two Hun ships, saw the other three destroyers of her division sunk or put out of action, and returned to base with almost empty oil tanks and perhaps the largest mileage to her credit of any craft in the Jutland battle—all without a serious casualty or more than a few scratches to her paint. On top of it all, on the way back to harbour, by the queerest fluke you ever heard of, she rammed and exploded the air-chamber of a mouldie that had been fired by a Hun U-boat at the destroyer next in line ahead of her. As the Yanks say, ‘Can you beat it?’”

CHAPTER IV

HUNTING

“IF it’s destroyer work you want, there are five of them getting under weigh at four o’clock,” said the “Senior Officer Present,” looking at his watch. “You’ll have just about time to pick up your luggage and connect if you want to go. I can’t tell you what they’re going to do—they won’t know that themselves till they get to sea, and their orders may be changed from hour to hour, and things may happen to send them to the Channel, France, or to several other places, on and off the chart, before they put in here again. But there’ll be work to do—plenty of it. That’s the best part of this corner of the North Atlantic in which our Allies have done the American destroyers the honour of setting them on the U-boats. Whatever else you may suffer from, it won’t be from ennui.” It was luck indeed, on two hours’ notice, to have the chance of getting out in just the way I had planned, where I had been quite prepared to stand-by for twice as many days, and I fell in with the arrangement at once.

Captain X—— ran his eye down a board where the names of a number of destroyers were dis-

played against certain data indicating their whereabouts and disposition. "*Zop, Zap, Zip, Zim, Zam,*" he read musingly. "*Zip*—yes, I don't think I can do better than send you on the *Zip*. Her skipper is as keen as he is able, and the *Zip* herself has the reputation of having something of a nose for U-boats on her own account. I'll advise him you're coming. Pick up your sea togs and put off to her as soon as you can. Good luck." The American naval officer, like the British, never says "Good-bye" if it can possibly be avoided.

They were already preparing to unmoor as I clambered over the side of the *Zip*, and by the time I had shifted to sea-boots and oilskins in the captain's cabin—which, unoccupied by himself during that strenuous interval, was to be mine at sea—she was swinging in the stream and nosing out into the creaming wakes of the two of her dazzle-painted sisters who were preceding her down the bay.

There are several things that strike one as different on going to an American warship after a spell in a British ship of the same class, but the one which surges to meet you and goes to your head like wine is the all-pervading spirit of vibrant, sparkling, unquenchable youthfulness. Everything you see and hear seems to radiate it—every throb of the engines, every beat of the screws—and at first you may almost get the impression that it comes from the ship herself. But when you start to trace it

down, you find it bubbles from a single fount, the men, or rather the boys—the lounging, laughing, devil-may-care boys. Theirs the alchemy to transform every one and everything that comes near them into the golden seeming of themselves.

This youthfulness of the American destroyers is in the crew rather than the officers, for the latter—especially the captain and executive—will average, if anything, a shade older than their “opposite numbers” in a British destroyer. There is a certain minimum of highly specialised work in navigating and fighting a destroyer which must be in the hands of officers and men who can have only attained the requisite training in long years of technical study and practical experience. Given these, and the remainder of the ship’s company—provided only that they have digestive organs that will continue to function when tilted through a dozen different slants and angles in as many seconds—can be trained to perfection in an astonishingly short time. Here it is that America has scored, for there is no doubt that the youngsters that have rushed to enrol themselves for her destroyer service are better educated and quicker in mind and body than those available for any other navy in the war. It is the incomparable adaptability these advantages have conspired to give him that has made the Yankee destroyer rating a combination of keenness and efficiency that leaves little, if anything, to be desired on either score.

Here is the way a British naval officer who is familiar with the work of the American destroyer flotilla expressed himself in this connection: "The ship's company of any one of these American destroyers," he said, "will average a good five years younger than that of a British destroyer. Off hand, one would say that this would tell against them, but, as a matter of fact, quite the contrary is the case.

"Given that the command and the technical operations are in the hands of highly trained and fairly serious-minded officers, you can't have too much slapbang, hell-for-leather, devil-take-the-consequences spirit in the ship's company. And where will you find that save in the youngsters—tireless, fearless, careless boys. They've found that out in the air services, and we're finding it out in the destroyers. And right there—in these quick-headed, quick-footed super-boys of theirs—is where the Yankee destroyers have the best of us. It is they—working under consummately clever officers—that enabled the American destroyer flotilla to reach in a stride a working efficiency which we had been straining up to for three years."

The green hills astern had turned grey and dissolved in mist and darkness before the captain was able to announce what work was afoot for us. The *Zim* and *Zam*, it appeared, were to be detached on some mission of their own, while the *Zop*, *Zap*,

and *Zip*, after "hunting" submarines for some time, were to proceed to a certain port, pick up the *Lymptania*, and escort her through the danger zone on her westward voyage. The captain was grinning as he finished reading the order. "I can't give you any definite assurance," he said, "that the hunt part of the stunt is going to scare up any U-boats, although the prospects this week are more promising than for some time; but"—he turned his level gaze to the westward, where the in-rolling Atlantic swells were blotting with undulant humps the fading primrose of the narrow strip of after-glow—"if this wind and sea keep the same force and direction for three or four days more, I'll promise you all the excitement your heart can desire when we take on our escort duties. The last time we took out the old *Lymptania*—well, I've got marks on me yet from the corners I got banged up against, and as for the poor little *Zip*—but she's had a refit since and most of the scars have been removed. As you will have ample chance to see for yourself, there isn't a lot of *dolce far niente* in any of this life we lead in connection with our little game here, but if there is one phase of our activities that is farther removed from 'peace, perfect peace' than any other, it is trying to screen an ex-Atlantic greyhound that is boring at umpty-ump knots into a head wind and sea. Strafing U-boats is a Sunday-school picnic in comparison at any time; but it will be worse this week because they have just

put down a couple of big liners, and the skipper of the *Lymptania*, knowing they will be laying for him, will force her like he was trying to get his company the trans-Atlantic mail subsidy. For us to cut zigzags around that kind of a thing—but you'll be able to judge for yourself. I only hope we can catch you a U-boat or two by way of preliminary, so as to lead up to the climax by slow degrees."

Things were fairly comfy that night—that is, as comfort goes in a destroyer. There was a good stiff wind and a good deal more than a lop of sea running; but as both were coming on the quarter and we were plodding along at no great speed, the *Zip* made very passable weather of it. The bridge, save for occasional showers of light spray where a sea slapped over the side, was quite dry, and even on the long run of low deck amidships there were several havens of refuge where the men off watch could foregather to smoke and yarn without fear of more than an occasional spurt of brine. A dry deck does not chance every day that a destroyer is on business bent at sea, and when it does, like sunshine in Scotland, is a thing to luxuriate in.

As the twilight deepened and melted into the light of a moon that was but a day or two from the full—"bad luck for the *Lymptania* convoy, that moon," the captain had said as he noted how it was waxing on his chart—I came down from the bridge and worked along from group to group of the sailor

men where, lounging and laughing, they sheltered in the lee of funnel and boat and superstructure. The first one I pushed into was centred round a discussion, or rather an argument, between two boys, the one from Kansas and the other from Oklahoma, as to which had raised the best and biggest corn in the course of some sort of growing competitions they had once taken part in. Several others standing about also appeared to have come from one or other of those fine naval-recruiting States of the Middle West, and seemed to know not a little about intensive maize culture themselves. I was just ingratiating myself with this party by nodding assent and voicing an emphatic "Sure!" to one's query of "Some corn that, mister, hey?" when I discovered a cosmopolitan group (two Filipino stewards, the coloured cook, and three or four bluejackets in sleeveless grey sweaters) collaborating in the arduous task of teaching a very sad-faced white mongrel to sit up on his haunches and beg. Or rather it was an elaboration of that classic trick. On drawing nearer I perceived that the lugubrious-visaged canine already had mastered begging for food, and that now they were endeavouring to teach him to beg for mercy. At the order "Kamerad!" instead of sitting with down-drooping paws, he was being instructed to raise the latter above his head and give tongue to a wail of entreaty. He was a brighter pup than his looks would have indicated,

and had already become letter perfect in the wail. "Kamerading" properly with uplifted paws, however, was rather too much for his balance, at least while teetering on the edge of a condensed milk case which was itself sliding about the deck of a careening destroyer. The dog had been christened "Ole Oleson," one of the sailors told me, both because he was "some kind of a Swede" and because, like his famous namesake, he had tried to come aboard in "two jumps" the day they found him perched on a bit of wreckage of the Norwegian barque to which he had belonged, and which had been sunk by a U-boat an hour previously. The men seemed to be very fond of him, and I overheard the one who picked him up off the box to make a place for me to sit on, whisper into his cocked ear that they were going to try to catch a Hun in the next day or two for him to sharpen his teeth on.

These boys told me a number of stories in connection with the survivors they had rescued, or failed to rescue, from ships sunk by U-boats. Most of them were the usual accounts of firing on open boats in an attempt to sink without a trace, but there was one piquant recital which revealed the always diverting Hun sense of humour at a new slant. This was displayed, as it chanced, on the occasion of the sinking of "Ole's" ship, the Norwegian barque. After this unlucky craft had been put down by shell-fire and bombs, the U-boat ran along-

side the whaler containing the captain and mate, and they were ordered aboard to be interrogated. Under the pretence of preventing any attempt to escape on the part of the remainder of those in this boat, the Germans made them clamber up and stand on the narrow steel run-way which serves as the upper deck of a submarine. No sooner were they here, however, than the Hun humorist on the bridge began slowly submerging. When the water was lapping round the necks of the unfortunate Norwegians, and just threatening to engulf them, the nose of the U-boat was slanted up again, this finely finessed operation being repeated during all of the time that the captain and mate were being pumped below by the commander of the submarine. No great harm—save that one of the sailors, losing his nerve when the U-boat started down the first time, dived over, struck his head on one of the bow-rudders and was drowned—was done by this little pleasantry, but it is so illuminative of what the Hun is in his lightsome moods that I have thought it worth setting down.

The American is more violent in his feelings than the Briton, and much more inclined to say what he thinks; and I found these boys—to use the expressive phrase of one of them—“mad clean through” at the Hun pirate and all he stands for. America—with more time to do that sort of thing—has undoubtedly gone farther than any other country in the war in trying to give her soldiers



"KAMERADING" WITH UPLIFTED PAWS



HELPING THE COOK TO PEEL POTATOES

and sailors a proper idea of the beast they have been sent out to slay. These lessons seem to have sunk home with all of them, and when it has been supplemented—as in the case of the sailors in the destroyers—by the first-hand teachings of the Huns themselves, it generally leaves a man in something like the proper state of mind for the task in hand. Not that I really think any of the Americans, when they have the chance, as happens every now and then, will carry out all the little plans they claim to be maturing, but—well, if I was an exponent of the U-boat branch of German kultur, and my *unterseeboot* was depth-charged by a British and an American destroyer, and I came sputtering up to the surface midway between them, I don't think I would strike out for the lifebuoy trailing over the quarter of the one flying the Stars and Stripes. I may be wrong, but somehow I have the feeling that the Briton—be he soldier, sailor, or civilian—hasn't quite the same capacity as the Yank for keeping up the temperature of his passion, for feeling "mad clean through."

Joining another group bunched in the lee of a tier of meat-safes, I chanced upon a debate which threw an illuminative beam on the feelings of what might once have been classified as hyphenated Americans. At first the whole six or eight of them, in all harmony and unanimity, had been engaged in cursing Sinn Feiners, with whom it appeared they had been having considerable contact—phy-

sical and otherwise—in the course of the last few months. Then one of the more rabid of them on this particular subject—he and one of his mates had been waylaid and beaten by a dozen hulking young Irishmen who resented the attentions the Yankees were receiving from the local girls—threw a bone of dissension into the ring by declaring that a Sinn Feiner was as bad as a Hun and ought to be treated the same way.

The most of them could hardly bring themselves to agree to this, but in the rather mixed argument which followed it transpired that the lad who had led the attack on Sinn Fein was named Morarity and had been born in Cork, and that the one who maintained that nothing on two legs, not even a Sinn Feiner, was as “ornery as a Hun,” was named Steinholz, and had been born in St. Louis of German parents.

The wherefore of this they explained to me severally presently, when it turned out that their views—as regards their duties as Americans—were precisely similar. Like all good Yankees, they said, they had it in for both the Hun and the Sinn Feiner; but, because each of them had a *name* to live down, he felt it incumbent on himself to out-strafe his mates in the direction from which that name came. It was a bit naïve, that confession, but at the same time highly instructive; and I wouldn't care to be the Hun or Sinn Feiner that either of those ex-hyphenates had a fair chance at.

A very domestic little party I found cuddled up aft among the depth-charges. One lad—he had been a freshman at Cornell, I learned later, and would not wait to train for a commission, so keen had he been to get into the war—was just back from a week's leave in London, and was telling about it with much circumstance. There were many things that had interested and amused him, but the great experience had been three days spent as a guest in an English home at Wimbledon. The head of the family, it appeared, was some kind of a City man, and, encountering the doubtless aimlessly wandering Yank at Waterloo, had forthwith carried him home. Everything had bristled with interest for the young visitor, from the marmalade at breakfast and the port at dinner to croquet on the lawn and a punt on the Thames at Richmond. But the best of it all had been that he had brought a standing invitation from the same family to any of his mates who might be coming up to London while the war was on. During the refit, which was supposed to be imminent, two of these, who had plumped for the great London adventure, had screwed up their courage to following up the invitation to the hospitable home in question. Out of his broader experience, their worldly mate was tipping them off against possible breakers. This is the only one I remember: "You'll find," he said, gesturing with an admonitory finger that could just be dimly guessed against the phosphorescence of the tossing

wake, "that they don't seem to have any great grudge 'gainst us for licking them and going on our own in '76; but go easy on rubbing it in just the same, 'cause you're a guest in the house. Best forget the Revolution while you're over here. That scrap was more'n a hundred years ago, and we've got another on now. Half the people you meet here never heard of it, anyhow, and when you mention it to them they think you refer to another Revolution in France which came off about the same time."

It was at about this juncture that a change of course brought seas which had been quartering a couple of points forward of the beam, and in a jiffy the swift spurts of brine had searched out the last dry corner of the deck and sent scurrying to shelter every man who had not a watch to stand. Three times I was completely drenched in groping forward from the after-superstructure to the ward-room, under the bridge, so that I was a good deal inclined to take it as a joke—and a rather ill-timed one at that—when an ensign about to turn in on one of the transoms muttered something about being thankful that we were going to have *one* quiet night when a man could snatch a wink of sleep. I asked him if he referred to the night we expected to be in port waiting for the *Lymptania*, but the fact that he had already dozed off proved that he really had not been trying to be funny at my expense. Indeed, it was a fairly quiet night, as

nights go in destroyers; but, even so, I needed a good high sideboard to keep from rolling out of the captain's bunk, and then two sofa pillows and my overcoat to keep from pulping my shoulder against the sideboard.

We were still sliding easily along at the same comfortable umpteen knots in the morning, but with the breaking of the new day a subtle change had come over the spirit of the ship. It was just such a change as one might observe in a hunter as he passes from a plain, where there is little cover, to a wood where every tree and bush may hide potential quarry. And that, indeed, was precisely the way it was with us. The night before we were "on our way"; this morning we were ploughing waters where U-boats were *known* to be operating. It was only a couple of days previously that the good old *Carpathia* had been put down, and not many hours had passed since then but what brought word, by one or another of the almost countless ways that have been devised to trace them, of an enemy submarine working in those waters. We were ready enough the night before, ready for anything that might have turned up; but this morning we were more than that.

There was a new tenseness now, and a feeling in the air like that which follows the click-click after a trigger is set to "hair." It was as though everyone, everything, even the good little *Zip* herself, was crouched for a spring.

There was an amusing little incident I chanced to see which illustrates the keenness of the spirit animating the men even in the moments of waiting. A favourable course had left the deck unswept by water for an hour, and a half-dozen boys, off watch, but too restless to turn in, were trying to kill time by helping the cook peel potatoes. It was one of these whom I saw stand up, take several swift strides forward across the reeling deck, draw a rag from the pocket of his "jeans," and then, with great care and deliberation, begin to polish a patch of steel plate that was exposed in the angle of two strips of coco-matting. "Wha' cher holystoning deck yetawhile fer, Pete?" one of his mates shouted. "Can'cher wait till we gets back to port? We may have to foul your pretty work with greasy Huns any minnit." Unperturbed, Pete went right on rubbing, testing the footing every now and then with the sole of his boot. Only when the job, whatever it was, was done to suit his fastidious taste did he return to his seat on the reversed water-bucket and start peeling potatoes again. Not till a full dozen or more neatly skinned Murphies had passed under his knife did he vouchsafe to reply to the half-curious, half-pitying looks and remarks his mates had continued to direct at him. Then his explanation was as crushing as complete.

"It don't look much as if you guys wants to get a Hun," he observed finally, running a critical eye over them. "Oh, you do, do you? My mistake.

Well, then, don't try to be funny with another guy that's doing his best to effect that same good end. Now looka here. From where I sits to my gun-station is just six steps. Six for me, I mean; it'd be more for most of you 'shorties.' Now I just figures that step number four lands my foot square in the dribble of oil on that patch where there ain't no matting; so what was more natural than for me to go and swab it up. Last time the gong binged I hit half a preserved peach, and sprained a wrist and ankle so bad that I woulda been dead slow on the gun if we'd had to fire it. Keeping my eye peeled for another piece of peach, I pipes that gob of oil, and so goes and gets rid of it. It's painful having to explain a simple thing like that to you bone-heads, but, now that you got it, p'raps you'll ease off on your beefing, and peel spuds. *That don't take no brains."*

Two or three times in the course of the morning the look-out's shout of "Sail!" bearing this way or that, brought those in sound of it to their feet in the expectation that it would be followed by the welcome clanging of the alarm bell; and once or twice the wireless picked up the S.O.S.—they do not send it out that way now, but these letters are still the common term in use to describe the call of a ship in distress—of a steamer that had been torpedoed. But the sails turned out to be friends in every case, while both of the ships reported sinking were too far away for us to be of any use to them.

Early in the afternoon a suspiciously cruising craft, which proved presently to be a friend, got a high-explosive shell under her nose as a consequence of her deliberation in revealing that fact. The smartness with which the men tumbled to quarters, and the almost uncanny speed with which the fore-castle gun was served, boded well for developments in case the real thing turned up.

“Do you always fire a blank across their bows when you don't quite like the look of 'em?” I asked the captain innocently, as he gazed dejectedly through his glass at certain unmistakable evidences proving that he had been cheated of his quarry. “Blank!” indignation and half the look that sits on the face of a terrier who discovers that he has cornered his own family's “Tabby” instead of the neighbour's “Tom”; “blank!—did you ever see a blank ‘X-point-X’ that threw up a spout as high as a masthead, and all black with smoke? That was the worst punisher we have in our lockers; and, what's more, it was meant to be a hit. And the next one would have been,” he added. “You can't afford to waste any time where five or ten seconds may make all the difference between bagging and losing a Hun.”

“But how about bagging something that isn't a Hun?” I protested. “I told you, I think, that I had arranged to go out next week on patrol in one of the American submarines; but after what I've just seen——”

“The burden of proof is up to the craft under suspicion,” cut in the captain, “and they ought to have no trouble in supplying it if they have their wits about them.” Then, with a grin, “But if you’re really going out on submarine patrol next week, why—I’ll promise to look twice before turning loose one of those—those ‘blanks.’” How he kept his word is another story.

It was about an hour or two later that the wireless winged word that seemed at last to herald the real thing. It was the S.O.S. of a steamer, and conveyed merely the information that she had just been torpedoed, with her latitude and longitude. The position given was only thirty or forty miles to the northward, and though the name in the message—it was *Namoura* or something similar—could not be found on any of our shipping lists, the *Zop*, as senior ship, promptly ordered course altered and full speed made in the hope of arriving on the scene in time to be of some use. With every minute likely to be of crucial importance, it was not an occasion to waste time by waiting or asking for orders. A swift exchange of signals between ships, a hurried order or two down a voice-pipe, an advancing of the handle of the engine-room telegraph, a throwing over of the wheel, and we had spun in the welter of our tossing wake and were off on a mission that might prove one of either mercy or destruction, or, quite conceivably, both. The formation in which we had been cruising when

the signal was received gave the *Zip* something like a mile lead at the get-away, and this—though one of the others was a newer and slightly faster ship—she held gallantly to the end of the race. By a lucky chance, though there was a snoring wind and a lumpy sea running, the course brought both abaft the beam and permitted us to run nearly “all out” without imposing a serious strain on the ship. The difference between running before and bucking into seas of this kind I was to learn in a day or two. For the moment, conditions were all that could be asked to favour our getting with all dispatch into whatever game there was to be played.

Many a so-called express train has travelled slower than any one of those three destroyers was ploughing its way through solid green water. For a few seconds after “Full speed!” had been rung down to their engine-rooms, swift-spinning smoke rings had shot up from their funnels and gone reeling off down to leeward; then, with perfect synchronisation of draught and oil, the duskiness above the mouths of the stumpy stacks had cleared, and only the mirage on the horizon astern betrayed the up-spouting jets of hot gases. Only the vibrant throb of the speeding engines—so pervading that it seemed to pulse like heart-beats through the very steel itself—gave hint of the mightiness of the effort that speed was costing. With that throb stilled—and the mounting wake quenched—the progress of that thousand tons or so of steam-driven

steel would have seemed scarcely less effortless than that of an aeroplane.

An order from the Commander-in-Chief—which was picked up presently—to go to the assistance of the torpedoed ship and to “hunt submarine” had been anticipated; but the real name of the steamer—finally transmitted correctly—brought to me at least a distinct shock. It was H.M.S. *Marmora*, and the *Marmora*, the former P. & O. Australian liner, was an old friend. To anyone who loves the sea a ship, no matter of what kind, has a personality. But in the case of a ship in which he has sailed—lived in, worked and played in, been happy in, perhaps gone through certain dangers in—has more than a personality, it has a place in his heart. Many and many a morning since the first U-boat campaign was started I had read—and never without a lump rising in my throat—of the passing of just such a friend, of the going out of the world of something—almost of “some one”—which I had always looked forward to seeing again. *Afric*, *Arabic*, *Aragon*, I knew their names well enough to compile the list alphabetically. It would have run to some score in length, and from every name would have led a long train of treasured memories. But the blow had never come quite this way before, never fallen quite so near at home. An especially dear friend had just been stricken less than a degree of latitude away; but the poignancy of that realisation was tempered by the thought that I was

in a ship rushing to her assistance, a ship that could be as swift to succour as to avenge.

I must confess to a queerly mixed state of mind that next half-hour. Consumed as I was with interest in our terribly purposeful progress leading up to the entrance into that grim drama approaching its climacteric act just beyond the sky-line, there were also vivid flare-backs of memory to the days of my friendship with the *Marmora*, arresting flashlights of the swift refreshing morning dive into the canvas pool on her forecastle, of lounging chairs ranged in long rows 'twixt snowy decks and awnings, of a phosphorescent bow-wave curling back and blotting the reflections of stars in a tropical sea. There was a picture of the clean sweet lines of her as—buff, black, and beautiful—she lay at the north end of the horseshoe of the Circular Quay at Sydney, with a rakish Messageries liner moored astern of her and a bluff Norddeutscher Lloyd packet ahead. It was her maiden voyage, and Australia, which had never seen so swift and luxurious a liner before, was receiving her like a newly arrived *prima donna*. I took passage in her back as far as Colombo. That fortnight's voyage had been diverting in a number of ways, I recalled, but most of all, perhaps, as a consequence of the throwing together of a large party of Wesleyan missionaries from Fiji and the members of a London musical comedy company returning from its Australian "triumphs." I was

just beginning to chuckle inwardly at the recollection of what one of the missionary ladies had said to a buxom chorus-girl who tripped out to the fancy dress cricket-match in her pink tights and a ballet skirt, when the ting-a-ling of a bell brought the captain to the radio-room voice-pipe. "Message just received," I heard him repeat. "All right, Send it up." He slapped down the voice-pipe cover, and a messenger had handed him the signal before he had paced twice across the bridge.

"*Marmora* just sunk," he read; "survivors picked up by P.B.'s X and Y."

The sinking made no immediate change in our plans. There was still a chance we might be of use with the survivors, and also the matter of the U-boat to be looked after. With no abatement of speed, all three destroyers drove on. The navigating officer reckoned that in another fifteen minutes we should be sighting the rescuing craft, and probably wreckage; but when twice that time still left a clear horizon ahead, it began to appear as though there had been a mistake of some kind. And so there had, but it was a lucky mistake for us. It was some time later before they figured just how it had chanced, but what had happened was this. The *Marmora's* last despairing call—doubtless sent out by a breaking-down radio—gave her position as some ten or twelve miles out from what it really was. The consequence was that, heading somewhat wide of the sinking ship, to which, how-

ever, on account of the presence of the patrol boats, which had evidently been close enough to come to her immediate assistance, we could have been of small use, we had steered directly for the one point where it was most desirable we should make our appearance at that psychological moment: for the point, in short, at which the coolly calculative skipper of the U-boat responsible for the outrage, after running submerged for an hour or more and doubtless figuring he had come sufficiently far from the madding crowd that would throng the immediate vicinity of the wreckage to be at peace, had come up to smoke his evening pipe and cogitate upon the Freedom of the Seas.

It was just as it began to become apparent that we were badly adrift as regards the point where the *Marmora* had gone down that a whine from the lookout's voice-pipe reported to the bridge that it had sighted a "sail—port, ten."

"What is it?" asked back the captain.

"Looks like subm'rine," came the reply; and with one quick movement the captain had started the alarm-bell sounding "General quarters!" in every part of the ship. With every man knowing precisely what he had to do, and how to do it, there was incredible speed without confusion. Tumbling to their stations like hounds on a hot scent, they yet managed to avoid getting in each other's way, even in the narrow passages and on the ladders. The

loom of the conning-tower was plain to the naked eye, now that one knew where to look for it, but only for a few minutes. Even as a swiftly passed shell was thrown into the open breech of the fore-castle gun, came the look-out's whine through the voice-pipe, "She's going down, sir; she's gone!" The breech of the gun spun shut, but the eye of the sightsetter groped along an empty horizon.

"Never mind," muttered the captain grimly. "Couldn't have croaked him with one shot anyhow. Got something better'n shells for him. Now for it," and his hand went back to pull the wire of a gong which gave certain orders to the men standing-by with the depth-charges. That, a word down the engine-room voice-pipe, and a fraction of a point's alteration in the course—and there was only one thing left to be done. The time for that had not quite arrived.

Because a destroyer's engine-room telegraph-hand points to "Full speed!" it does not necessarily mean that there are not ways of forcing more revolutions from the engines, of driving her still faster through the water should the need arise. Such a need now confronted the *Zip*, and, like the thoroughbred she was, her response was instant and generous. The pulsing throb of her quickened till it was almost a hum; the quivering insistency of it struck straight to the marrow of the bones, drummed in the depths of one's innermost being.

If there is anything to stir the blood of a man like a destroyer beginning to see red and go Berserk, I have yet to encounter it.

There must have been something like three miles to go from the point where the U-boat had been sighted to the point where the inevitable patch of grease would mark the place where it had submerged, and rather less than twice that many minutes had elapsed when the cry of "Oil slick—starboard bow!" came almost simultaneously from the look-outs in the foretop and on the bridge. Over went the helm a spoke or two, and the executive officer, in his hand a thin piece of board with a table of figures pasted on it, moved up beside the captain. Straight down the wobbly track of iridescent film drove the *Zip*, and when a certain length of it had been put astern, the captain turned and drew a lever to him with a sharp pull.

Three, four seconds passed, and then, simultaneously with a heavy knocking thud, a round patch of water a hundred yards or so astern quivered and fizzed up sharply like the surface of a glass of whisky-and-soda after the siphon has ceased to play on it. Following that by a second or two, a smooth rounded geyser of foam boiled up a dozen feet or so, and then gradually subsided. That one, plainly, was a deep-set charge, whose force was expended far beneath the surface. A second one threw a geyser twice as high as the first, and a third, which fizzed and spouted almost simultan-

ously, blotted out a great patch of sternward sky with its smoke-shot eruption.

Presently the *Zop* "struck oil," and then the *Zap*. Soon the muffled booms of their rapidly scuttled depth-charges began to drum, while astern of them the foam-spouts nicked the sky-line like a stubby picket fence.

Perhaps the lad whom I later overheard describing that bombardment by saying that "'tween the three of us, we was scattering 'cans' like rice at a wedding" was guilty of some exaggeration; but it is a fact that they were spilling over very fast and, there is little doubt, with telling effect. The savageness of the bolts of wrath released by the exploding charges was strikingly disclosed when two of them chanced to be dropped at nearly the same time by destroyers a mile or more apart, when the under-sea "jolts" would meet half-way and form weird evanescent "rips" of dancing froth strongly suggestive of chain-lightning. The way in which even the most distant of the detonations made a destroyer "bump the bumps," quite as though it was striking a series of solid obstructions, gave some hints of the bolts that were descending upon the lurking pirate.

At the end of a minute or two a quick order from the captain sent the wheel spinning over, and, with raucous grinding of helm, round we swung through sixteen points to head back in reverse over the path of destruction we had just traversed. Just as the

steel runners of a racing skater throw ice when he makes a sudden turn, so the screws of a speeding destroyer hurl water. The stern sank deep into the propeller-scooped void, so that the high-tossed side-slipping wake buried it beneath a frothing flood. Through several long seconds I saw the water boiling above the waists of the men at the depth-charges, without appearing to disturb them in the least; then the wheel was spun back 'midships—and a spoke or two beyond to meet and steady her—the bow wave resumed its curled symmetry and the wake began trailing off astern again.

It was into a peaceful sea, indolently rolling, sunset tinged and slightly sleeked with a thin streak of oil, that we had raced five minutes before; it was a troubled sea, charge-churned and wave-slashed, that we now nosed back into to see what good our coming had wrought. The grey-blue-black of the long oil wake had been scattered into broken patches by the explosions. Most of these were pale, sickly, and highly anæmic in colour, and of scant promise; but for one, where fresh oil rising spread rainbow-bright upon the surface, the *Zip* headed full tilt. The explosion here appeared to have been an unusually heavy one, for the sea was dotted with the white bellies of stunned fish, most of them floating high out of the water, with trickles of blood running from their upturned mouths and distended

gills. A six or eight-foot shark, wriggling drunkenly along the surface with a broken back, was hailed with a howl of delight by the men, who claimed to see in the fact that the unlucky monster could not submerge his telltale dorsal, a sign that their Fritz might be in the same difficulty.

Another "can" or two was let go as we dashed through that iridescent "fount of promise"; and when we turned back to it again the wounded shark had ceased to wriggle and now floated inertly among his hapless brothers. But of Fritz—save for a glad new gush of oil—no sign. Prisoners or wreckage are rated as the only indubitable evidence of the destruction of a U-boat, and neither of these were we able to woo to the surface in that busy hour which elapsed before the descending pall of darkness put a period to our well-meant efforts. During that time not the most delicate instrument devised by science for that purpose revealed any indication of life or movement in the depths below. As the water at this point was far too deep to allow a submarine to descend and lie on the bottom without being crushed, this fact appeared morally conclusive. It was this I had in mind when I tried to draw the captain out on the subject. "Of course there's no doubt we bagged him?" I hazarded, in a quiet interval when we were watchfully waiting for something to turn up, or rather come up. He smiled a rather tired smile. "Oh, very likely we

have," he replied. "But, unluckily, there's nothing we can lay our hands on to carry away and prove it. In case this particular Fritz doesn't come to life and sink another ship in the course of the next few days, there is just a chance that we may be credited with a 'Possible.' They never err on the optimistic side in sizing up a little brush of this kind, and perhaps it's just as well. Anyhow, a game like this is worth playing on its own account, whether you come in with a scalp at your belt every time or not."

It was just as darkness was slowing down our anti-U-boat operations, that a signal came through stating that there were believed to be several survivors still alive among the wreckage of the *Marmora*, and ordering us to proceed to the scene of her sinking with all dispatch. The moon was rising as we began to nose among the pathetic litter of scraps that was all that remained afloat of what, five or six hours previously, had been a swift and beautiful auxiliary cruiser.

There was enough light for us to be reasonably sure, at the end of an hour's search, that our mission was in vain; that there remained no living man to pick up. There was something strangely familiar, though, in the lines of a cutter which, in spite of a smashed gunwale, was still afloat, and I was just thinking of how grateful a lee, in the monsoon, the windward side of the old *Marmora's* lifeboats had furnished for a deck-chair or two, when

the captain, advancing the handle of the engine-room telegraph, turned to me with: "We're off to rendezvous with the *Lymptania* now; I think we can promise you some real excitement in the course of the next day or two."

CHAPTER V

THE CONVOY GAME

THE fantastic pile of multi-coloured slabs blotting out a broken patch of sky above the seaward end of the estuary, if it had been on land, might have been anything from a row of hangars, viewed in slant perspective, to the scaffolding of a scenic railway, or a "Goblin's Castle" in Luna Park. But there in the middle of the channel, the mountainous bulk could only be one thing, the *Lympantia*, the ship which our division of American destroyers had been ordered to escort on that part of its westbound voyage in which there was reckoned to be danger of submarine attack. Distorted by the camouflage, the tumbled mass of jumbled colours continued to loom in jagged indefinitiveness as we closed it from astern, and it was only when we had come up well abreast of it that the parts settled down into "ship-shapeliness," and the silhouette of perhaps the most famous of the world's great steamers sharpened against the sunlit afternoon clouds.

The change which had been wrought in the appearance of the *Lympantia* since last I had seen her was almost beyond belief. Then she had been

a hospital ship, with everything about her, from snowy whiteness to red crosses in paint and coloured lights, calculated to establish her character, to give her the protection of conspicuousness. Now she sought protection in quite the opposite way. Every trick of scientific camouflage had been employed to render her inconspicuous; while, if that failed, there were the destroyers. The protection of these big liners is a considerable undertaking, but it has its redeeming features. As U-boat bait they are unrivalled, and the number of German submarines which have been sent to the bottom as a direct consequence of attempting to sink one of them will make a long and interesting list when the time comes to publish it.

There was something almost awesome in the emptiness of the great ship, in the lifelessness of the decks, in the miles of blinded ports. The heads of a few sailors "snugging down" on the fore-castle, a knot of officers at the end of the bridge, and two stewardesses in white uniforms leaning over the rail of one of the upper decks—that was all there was visible of human life on a ship which a few days before had been packed to the funnels with its thousands of American soldiers. A lanky destroyer gunner lounging by a ladder, described her exactly when he said to one of his mates: "Gee, but ain't she the lonesome one!"

The captain of the *Zip* turned his glasses back to cover the little group of officers on the liner's

bridge. "There's the skipper," he said presently. "I only hope he's well ahead of the game on the sleeps, for I wouldn't mind betting that he won't be leaving that bridge for a cup of coffee for some time. It's going to be an anxious interval for him—very anxious. It's quite beyond calculation, the value to the Allies at this moment of a ship of the size and speed of the *Lymptania*, and her skipper must know from what has happened the last week, that the Huns are all out to bag her this time, and he can hardly be able to extract any too much comfort out of the fact that it's about a hundred to one that we'll bag the Fritz that tries it—either before or after the event. Yes, it will be an anxious time for him—but," a grimly wry smile coming to his face as he turned his eyes to the opening seaward horizon, "even so, it'll be nothing to the time we're in for in the *Zip* and all the rest of the escort. *He'll* be able to sleep if he happens to take a notion to; *we* won't, at least, not during the time we've got *her* to shepherd. Again, he's only got the *chance* of being hit by a torpedo to worry about; we've got the *certainty* of being hit by head-seas that have as much kick in them to a driven destroyer as a tin-fish full of gun-cotton. Unless the weather gets either a good deal better or a shade worse, we're sure up against the real thing this time.

"The fact is," continued the captain, taking up the slack in the hood of his weather-proof jacket as a slight alteration of course brought a new slant

of wind; "the fact is, I'd much rather see it get worse than better. If it would only kick up enough sea so that there was no chance of a submarine operating in it, she could drive right along on her own without any need of destroyers. But so long as we've this weather there's a possibility of a torpedo running in, we've got to hang on to the last shiver, and there are two or three things which are going to make 'hanging on' this particular trip just a few degrees worse than anything we've stacked up against before. This is about the way things stand: The *Lymptania's* best protection is her speed; but while she is just about the fastest of the big ships, she is also just about the biggest of the fast ships. This means that the size of the target she presents goes a long way toward offsetting the advantage of her speed; so that the presence of destroyers—in any kind of weather a submarine can work in—is very desirable, and may be vital.

"Now the escorting of any steamer that makes over twenty knots an hour is a lively piece of business, no matter what the weather, for destroyers, to screen most effectively, should zigzag a good deal more sharply than their convoy, and that, of course, calls for several knots more speed. This can be managed all right in fair weather, or even in rough, where there is only a following or a beam sea; but where the seas come banging down from more than a point or two for'ard of the beam it is

quite a different matter. In that event, the speed of the whole procession depends entirely on how much the destroyers can stand without being reduced to scrap-iron. Naturally, the ship under escort endeavours to make her speed conform to the best the destroyers can do under the circumstances; but since an extra knot or two an hour might well make all the difference in avoiding a submarine attack, the tendency always is to keep the escorting craft extended to just about their limit of endurance.

“Just how the mean will be struck between what a fast steamer thinks its escorting destroyers *ought* to stand, and what the destroyers really *can* stand, depends upon several things. Perhaps the principal factor is the state of mind of the skipper of the steamer, and that, in turn, is influenced by the value of his ship—both actual and potential—and the danger of submarine attack at that particular time in the waters under traverse. When the destroyers set out to escort a very fast and valuable ship, steering into heavy head seas in waters where there are known to be a number of U-boats operating, they’ve got the whole combination working against them, and the result is—just what you’re slated to see this trip. Best take a good look at the *Zip* while you’ve got a chance; she may be quite a bit altered by the time we get back to port again. And you might take a squint at the *Flossie* over there, too. She’s our latest and swiftest, the

Fotilla's pride. But this is her first experience of taking out an ex-ocean greyhound, and if, in a burst of fresh enthusiasm, she chances to tap any of these several extra knots of speed she is supposed to have—well, the *Flossie's* sky-line in that case will be modified more than those of all the rest of her older and wiser sisters put together."

Those were prophetic words.

"The one thing that makes it certain that we'll be put to the limit to-night," resumed the captain, after he had rung up more speed on our coming out into opener water, "is the news in this morning's official announcement of the sinking of the *Justicia*. We seem just to have struck the peak of the mid-summer U-boat campaign. It was scarcely a week ago that they got the *Carpathian*. Then, a few days later, came the *Marmora* (you won't forget for a while the strafe we had at the U-boat which put her down), and now it's the *Justicia*, the biggest ship they've sunk in a year or so. That's the thing that must be worrying the skipper of the *Lymptania*, for it shows they're after the great troop-carriers. The way they stuck to the *Justicia* proves they're not yet beyond taking some risk if the stake is high enough. Now and then some Fritz is found desperate enough to commit hari-kari by coming up close (if the chance offers) and making sure of getting his torpedo home. He gets what's coming to him, of course, but there is also a fair chance of his getting the ship he is after; and

a fast liner for a U-boat is a poor exchange—from our standpoint. Naturally, these things all make the skipper of the *Lymptania* anxious to minimise his risks by hitting up just as hot a pace as he can, and that, with her size and her power, will be just about full speed. I can't tell you to a knot how fast that is, but I can tell you this: if you were on the bridge of a destroyer going at that speed when it hit a good heavy head-sea, the only thing that would tell you it wasn't a brick wall she had collided with would be the sort of moist feeling about the pile-driver that knocked you over the side. So it looks like the rub is going to come in getting the *Lymptania* to content herself with a speed at which—well, at which you can detect some slight difference between a head-sea and a brick wall from the bridge of the destroyer doing the butting. Whatever that proves to be, you'll have such a chance as you may never get again to see what stuff your Uncle Sam's destroyers are made of."

We made screening formation as soon as we were well clear of the barraged waters of the estuary, though the sea we had to traverse before entering the open Atlantic was considered practically empty of menace. The *Lymptania*, making astonishingly little smoke for a coal-burner, worked up to somewhere near her top speed in a very short time; but, with the light-running seas well abaft the beam, the destroyers cut their zigzags round and about her with many knots in reserve. The big

liner, with much experience to her credit, knew precisely what to do' and how to do it, and the whole machine of the convoy worked as though pulled by a single string. Her very movements themselves seemed to give the various units of the escort their cues, for, though she steered a course so devious and irregular that no submarine could have possibly told how to head in order to waylay her, she was never "uncovered." Ahead and abreast of her, going their own way individually, but still conforming their general movements to hers, the destroyers wove their practically impenetrable screen.

Whatever there was ahead, it was ideal destroyer weather for the moment, and all hands came swarming out on the dry sun-warmed deck to make the most of it while it lasted. An importunate whine from a nest of arms and legs sprawling abreast the midships torpedo-tubes attracted my attention for a moment as I sauntered aft to see what was afoot, and presently the rattle of dice on the deck and an imploring "Come on, you Seven!" told me they were "shooting Craps," with, I shortly discovered, bars of milk chocolate and sticks of chewing-gum for stakes. Several others were playing "High, Low, Jack," and here and there—using elbows and knees to keep the bellying pages from blowing away—were little knots clustered about the latest Sunday Supplement from New York.

But quite the best thing of all was two brown-armed youngsters going through a proper battery warming-up with a real baseball. I had seen enthusiasts on two or three of the American units with the Grand Fleet playing catch right up to the moment "General Quarters" was sounded for target practice; but that was on the broad decks of battleships, with some chance of saving a ball that chanced to be muffed. But here the pitcher had to wind-up with a sort of a corkscrew stoop to keep from hitting his hand against a stay, while the catcher braced himself with one foot against a depth-charge and the other against the mounting of the after-gun. There were four or five things that the ball had to clear by less than a foot in its flight from one to the other, but the only ones of these I recall now are a searchlight diaphragm and a gong which sounded from the bridge a standby signal to the men at the depth-charges. I actually saw that skilfully directed spheroid make two complete round-trips, from the pitcher to the catcher and back, before it struck the gong a resonant bing! caromed against the side of an out-slung boat and disappeared into the froth of the wake.

The pitcher and catcher were in a hot argument as to whether that was the twenty-sixth or the twenty-seventh ball they had lost overboard since the first of the month, but they fell quiet and turned sympathetic ears to my description of a net

I had seen rigged on one of the American battle-ships to prevent that very trouble.

"Nifty enough," was the pitcher's comment when I had finished describing how the net was drawn taut right under the stern to prevent all leakage. "Only thing is, the captain might rule it off on the score that it'd catch the 'cans' we was trying to drop on Fritz as well as the 'wild pitches.' Might do for harbour use, though. Lost balls is a considerable drain even there."

It was just before dinner-time that the lengthening life of the seas gave warning that we were coming out into the Atlantic. The force of them was still abaft the beam, however, and their principal effect was to add a few degrees of roll, with an occasional deluge dashing in admonitory flood across the decks. But it was enough to make the Ward Room untenable, so that dinner had to be wolfed propped up on the transoms, one nicely balanced dish at a time. There would be about an hour more of this comparative comfort, the captain said, before we reached a position where the full force of the seas would be felt, but things would not really "begin to drop" till the *Lymptania* altered course and headed westerly. "If you have any writing, reading, sleeping, or anything except just existing to do," he warned, as he kept his soup from overflowing by an undulant gesture of the hand which poised it, "better do it now. It's your last chance."

The forty winks I managed to snatch as a result of following up the sleeping part of that recommendation stood me in good stead in the times ahead. It took no little composing to doze off even as it was, and it was the sharp bang my head got from the siderail of my bunk that put a period to the nap I did get. The rolling had increased enormously, and though it was apparent we were not yet bucking into it, the swishing of the water on the forecastle overhead indicated that there had been enough alteration of course to bring the seas—on one leg of the zigzags at least—well forward of the beam. I climbed out, pulled on my weather-proof suit and sea-boots, and clambered up to the bridge.

There were still a couple of hours to go before dark, and in the diffused light of a bright bank of sunset clouds the gay dazzle colours of all the ships showed up brilliantly as they ploughed the white-cap-plumed surface of a sea which now stretched unbrokenly to the westward horizon. There was a world of power behind the belligerent bulk of swells which had been gathering force under the urge of a west-nor'-west wind that had chased them all the way from Labrador, and the destroyers, teetering quarteringly along their foam-crested tops, were rolling drunkenly and yawing viciously ahead of jagged wakes.

Still driving on at express speed, however, they continued to maintain perfect formation on the swiftly steaming *Lymptania*. The latter, appar-

ently as steady as though "choked up" in a dry-dock, drove serenely on in great swinging zigzags.

The captain came up from the chart-room and took a long look around. "It's just about as I expected," he said, shaking his head dubiously. "It isn't so rough but what a submarine might stage an attack if her skipper had the nerve; and it's a darn sight too rough for destroyers to screen the *Lymptania* with her holding to anything like full speed. It's all up now to *what* speed she will try to hold us to."

"But what's the matter with this?" I protested. "We're still hitting the high places for speed, and, while I wouldn't call this exactly comfortable, we still seem to be making pretty good weather of it."

The captain smiled indulgently. "You're right," he said, "as far as you go. We are indeed hitting the high places, but—the high places haven't started hitting us yet. Wait just about five or ten minutes," he added, turning his glasses to where the great liner, silhouetted for the moment against the sunset clouds, ploughed along on our port beam, "and you'll see the difference. Ah!" this as he steadied his glasses on where the boiling wake of the *Lymptania*, beginning to bend away in a sharp curve indicating a considerable alteration of course. "There she goes now. Hold tight!"

With his hand on the engine-room telegraph, the captain gave the men at the wheel a course to con-

form to that of the *Lymptania*. Quick as a cat on her helm, the *Zip* swung swiftly through eight points and plunged ahead. This brought on her bows seas that had been rolling up abeam, and we were up against the real thing at last.

The first sea, which she caught while she was still turning, the *Zip* contented herself with slicing off the truculently-tossing top of before crunching it underfoot. It was a smartly-executed performance, and seemed to promise encouragingly as to the way she might be expected to dispose of the next ones. The second in line, however, which she met head-on and essayed the same tactics with, dampened her ardour—and just about everything and everybody else below the foretop—by detaching a few tons of its bumptious bulk and raking her fore-and-aft with its rumbling green-white flood. The bridge was above the main weight of that blow, but 'midships and aft I saw men bracing themselves against a knee-deep stream. One bareheaded and bare-armed man, who had evidently been surprised in making his way from one hatch to another, I saw rolled fifteen or twenty feet and slammed up against the torpedo-tube which prevented his going overboard. He limped out of sight, rubbing his shoulder, and probably never knew how lucky he was in being caught by *that* wave instead of one which came along a minute later.

The slams which she received from the next two

or three seas left the *Zip* in a somewhat chastened mood, and rather less sanguine respecting her ability to go on pulling off that little stunt of surmounting waves by biting them in the neck and then trampling their bodies under foot. She was beginning to realise that she had a body of her own, and that there was something else around that could bite—yes, and kick, and gouge, and punch below the belt, and do all the other low-down tricks of the underhand fighter.

Languid and uncertain of movement, like a dazed prize-fighter, she was just steadying herself from the jolt a bustling brute of a comber had dealt her in passing, when the skyline ahead was blotted out by the imminent green-black loom of a running wall of water which, from its height and steepness, might well have been kicked up by a Valparaiso “Norther” or a South Sea hurricane.

It may have been the chastened state of mind the last sea had left her in which was responsible for *Zip's* deciding to take this one “lying down”; or again, it may be that she was acting, in reverse, after the example set by the rabbit who, because he couldn't go under the hill, went over it. At any rate, after one shuddering look at the mountainous menace tottering above her bows, she made up her mind that she was better off under the sea than on the surface, and deliberately dived. Of course, it was the Parthian kick the last sea had given her stern that was really responsible for her bows

starting to go down at the very instant those of every other ship that one had had experience of would have been beginning to point skyward, but to all intents and purposes she looked, from the bridge, to be submerging of her own free and considered decision. The principal thing which differentiated it from the ordinary dive of a submarine was the fact that it was made at a sharper angle and at about four times the speed.

There was something almost uncanny in the quietness with which that plunge began; though, on the latter score, there was nothing to complain of by about half a second later. I have seen at one time or another almost every conceivable kind of craft, from a Fijian war canoe to the latest battle-cruiser, trying to buck head seas, and invariably the wave that swept it had the decency to announce its coming by a warning knock on the bows. This time there was nothing of the kind. The retreating sea had lifted her stern so high that the forecastle was under water even before the coming one had begun to topple over on to it. The consequence was that there was no preliminary bang to herald the onrush of the latter.

The base of the mountainous roller simply flooded up over the diving forecastle and crashed with unbroken force against the bridge. We had collided with the "brick wall" right enough, and for the next few seconds at least the result was primal chaos.

I have a vivid but detached recollection of two or three things in the instant that the blow impended. One is of the helmsman, crouching low, with legs wide apart, locking his arms through the slender steel spokes of the wheel the better to steady her in the coming smash. Another is of the captain, with hunched shoulders and set jaw, throwing over the telegraph to stop the engines. But the clearest picture of all is of the submarine lookout on the port side—a black-eyed, black-haired boy with a profile that might have been copied from an old Roman coin—who was leaning out and grinning sardonically into the very teeth of the descending hydraulic ram. It was his savagely-flung anatomy, I believe, though I never made sure, which bumped me in the region of the solar plexus a moment later and broke my slipping hold on the buckling stanchion to which I was trying to cling.

There was nothing whatever suggestive of water—soft, fluent, trickling water—in the first shattering impact of that mighty blow. It was as solid as a collision between ship and ship; indeed, the recollection I have of a railway wreck I was once in on a line in the Argentine Pampas is of a shock less shattering. It is difficult to record events in their proper sequence, partly because they were all happening at once, and partly because the self-centred frame of mind I was in at the moment was not favourable for detached observation. The noise and the jar of the crash were stupendous, yet

neither of these has left so vivid a mental impression as the uncanny writhing of the two-inch-thick steel stanchion to which I was endeavouring to hold, and the nerve-racking sound of rending metal. I have no recollection of hearing the clink of broken glass, nor of being struck by pieces of it; yet all the panes of heavy plate which screened the forward end of the bridge—of a thickness, one had supposed, to withstand anything likely to assail them—were swept away as though they had been no more than the rice-paper squares of a Japanese window.

The rush of water, of course, followed instantly upon the crash, yet, so vivid are my impressions of the things intimately connected with the blow itself that it seems as though there was an appreciable interval between the fall of that and the time when the enveloping cataclysm transformed the universe into a green-white stream of brine. From ahead, above and from both sides the flood poured, to meet and mingle in a whirling maelstrom in the middle of the bridge. There was nothing of blown spindrift to it; it was green and solid and flowed with a heave and a hurl that made no more of slamming a man to the deck than of tossing a life-buoy. I went the whole length of the bridge when I lost my grip on the port stanchion, brought up against the after-rail, and then went down into a tangle of signal flags. I remember distinctly, though, that the walls of water rushing by completely blotted out sea and



WHERE THE GREAT LINER PLOWED ALONG



WE HAD COLLIDED WITH THE "BRICK WALL"



NOW SHE WAS BACK AT BASE

sky to port and starboard, and that there was all the darkness of late twilight in the cavern of the engulfed bridge. Then the great sea tumbled aft along the main deck, and it grew light again.

The captain and the helmsman had both kept their feet, and the latter, dripping from head to heel, was just throwing over the engine-room telegraph as I shook off my mantle of coloured bunting and crawled back to my moorings at the stanchion. Immediately afterwards I saw him jump on to the after-rail and make some sort of negative signal to a couple of half-drowned boys who, waist-deep in swirling water, were pawing desperately among the depth-charges. Then he came over and joined me for a few moments.

“Some sea, that,” he said, slipping down his hood and throwing back the brine-dripping hair from his forehead. “It’s happened before, but never like that. Lord only knows what it’s done to her. S’pose we’ll begin to hear of that in a minute.” He pointed to a string of porcelain insulators dangling at the end of twisted bits of wire in front of one of the paneless windows. “That’s the remains of our auxiliary radio,” he said, grinning; “and look at the fo’c’sle. Swept clean, pretty near. Thank heaven, the gun’s left. But, do you remember that heavy iron bar the muzzle rested on? Gone! It was probably that, with some of the shells in the rack, that made all that rat-a-tat. But what of it? Look how she rides ’em now that she’s

eased down a bit. Only trouble is, she's got to go it again. Look how we've dropped back." And he gave the engine-room, by voice-pipe, a new "standard" speed, and threw the telegraph over to "Full."

The pulsing throb began anew, and under the urge of speeding propellers the *Zip*, steering in narrowed zig-zags quickly regained her station. All of the destroyers, and the *Lymptania* as well, had eased down slightly, and the reduced speed meant also a reduction of the danger of another of those deep-sea dives, something no craft but a submarine is built to stand the strain of. But even as it was we were driving right up to the limit of endurance all the time, and the sea that did not come rolling up green right over the bows was the exception rather than the rule. From the forecastle right away aft there was never more than a few seconds at a time when the main deck was free of rollicking cascades of boiling brine, and there were moments when only the funnels and the after superstructure, rearing up like isolated rocks on a storm-beaten coast, were visible above the swirling flood. There were times when the men standing-by at the guns and torpedo-tubes seemed almost to be engulfed; yet none of them was swept away, and they even—from the way they kept joking each other in the lulls—appeared to be getting a good deal of sport out of the thing.

The barometer was falling, and both wind and

waves gained steadily in force as the afternoon lengthened and merged into a twilight that was itself already melting before the rising moon. Clouds were few and scattering, and it was plain there were to be no hours dark enough to offer any protection from submarine attack. Looming as large as ever, the big liner offered scarcely a better target on the side she was illuminated by the moonlight than on the one from which she was silhouetted against it. From either side a fifth of a mile of steel would "take a lot of missing," and her captain, sensibly enough, would not ease his engines by a revolution more than was necessary to keep within his destroyer screen. It was plainly up to the destroyers to stick it to the limit, and that is just what they did. As I heard one of the men put it, it was the "bruisiest" bit of escort-work they had ever been—or probably ever will be—called upon to face, but every one of those Yankee destroyers stayed with it to the finish.

Now it would be the *Zop* that would emerge from under a mountainous sea and come drifting back without steerage weigh, rolling drunkenly in the trough, and now it would be the *Zap*. And now this or that result of a "hydraulic ramming" would disable one of the others temporarily. But, game to the last flake of brine-frosted camouflage, back they came to it again, and again, and yet again. Sunrise of the next day found them plugging on in station, and in station they remained

until the *Lymp-tania*, beyond the zone of all possible submarine danger, made a general signal of "Thank you," and headed off to the westward on her own.

Out of the dim grey dawn of the morning after the night before, battered and buckled, but still unbroken, the wearily wagging line of the *Lymp-tania's* late escort trailed back into harbour. The mussed-up silhouette of every one of them bore mute testimony to the way she had been put "through the mill," and, in most cases, the things that met the eye were not the worst. The *Zop* needed every yard of the channel as she zig-zagged up it under a jury steering-gear, and the *Zap*, like a man dazed from a blow, would have sudden "mental hiati" in which she would straggle carelessly out of line with an inconsequential going-to-pick-flowers-by-the-roadside sort of air. The *Zim's* idiosyncrasies had more of an epileptic suddenness about them, and her hectic coughing plainly indicated some kind of "lung trouble." Our little *Zip* presented a very brave front to the outer world, but I heard hollow clankings punctuating the erst-while even hum of the engines, while the drip, drip, drip and the drop, drop, drop through the crinkled sheet-steel sheathing of my cabin told that the deck-plates of the forecastle fitted a good deal less snugly than before they had played anvil to the lusty head-sea hammer.

But the *Flossie*, the "latest, the swiftest, the flotilla's pride"—the wounds of all the rest of us put together were as nothing to those of the *Flossie*. In trying to maintain her pride of place at the head of the escort, she *had*, for a brief space, unleashed those extra knots of speed the captain had spoken of, and all that, and even more than, he had prophesied had come to pass. It was just such a swaggerer of a sea as that first one that *Zip* had dived into which did the trick, only, as the *Flossie* was going faster, the impact was somewhat more severe. She was a mile or more distant from us when it happened, and, watching from the bridge of the *Zip*, we simply saw her dissolve into a sky-tossed spout of foam. When she reappeared she was floating, beam-on, to the seas, and, for the moment, an apparently helpless hulk.

The captain's instant diagnosis of a couple of muffled detonations which followed was entirely correct.

"That sea must have 'jack-knifed' the *Flossie* so sharply," he said, "that the recoil took up the slack in the wires, releasing two 'cans' she seems to have had set and ready. It's about the same thing as just happened to us, except that the tautened wire only rang the stand-by bell, the signal for the men to set the depth-charges. First thing I did after we came to the surface was to negative that supposed order. That was what I was doing when I waved to those boys who were clawing at

the 'cans,' with their heads under water. Lucky they weren't carried away."

It was a chastened *Flossie* which had gone floundering back to station a few minutes later, but somehow or other she had managed to carry on, and now she was back at Base. I won't "give comfort to the enemy" by trying to describe her appearance, but some hint of it may be gleamed from the laconic comment of one of the *Zip's* signalmen, as the "Flotilla's Pride" was warping in to moor alongside the mother ship.

"Gee whiz!" he ejaculated. "See the old *Vindictive* limpin' home from Zeebrugge! S'pose they'll fill her up with concrete now an' block a channel."

The captain grinned as he overheard the remark where he waited by the starboard rail for the last of the mooring lines to be made fast. "It's not quite so bad as that," he said. "If need be, they'll have her, and all the rest of us, right as trivets in three or four days, and quite ready to take the sea again when our turn comes. It's all in the convoy game, anyhow, and not such bad fun after all, 'specially when it's behind you, and you've got a bath, and a change, and a lunch at the Club, and an afternoon of tennis in immediate prospect. Come along."

CHAPTER VI

YANK BOAT *versus* U-BOAT

IT was the turn of the tide and the turn of the day on the "quiet waters of the River Lee." Pale blue columns of smoke rose above the verdant boskiness which masked the squat brown cabins where the peat fires smouldered, and along the straggling stone wall which crowned the ridge the swaying heads of home-returning cows showed intermittently against the glowing western sky. The peacefulness of it was almost palpable. You seemed to breathe it, and could all but reach out with the hand and touch it.

It permeated even to the long lines of lean destroyers in the stream, and it was the subtly suggestive influence of it which had deflected homeward the minds of the motley-clad sailors who were lounging at ease about the stern of the first of a "cluster" of three of these—like a sheaf of bright multi-coloured arrows the trim craft looked, with the level rays of the setting sun striking across them where they lay moored alongside each other—and set tongues wagging of the little things which, magnified by distance, loom large in the imaginations of men in exile.

They were deep in the "old home town" stuff when I sauntered inconsequently aft on the off-chance of picking up a yarn or two, but as there appeared to be no one present from my part of the country, no immediate opportunity to break in presented itself. Equally an outsider was I when the flow of discussion turned to woollen sweaters and socks and mufflers, and the golden trails of romance leading back from the names and messages sewed or knitted into them.

No fair unknowns had ever sent *me* any of these soft comforts, and after I had heard a lusty youngster from Virginia tell how a "sweater address" he had written what he described as a "lettah that was good and plenty w'am, b'lieve me," replied that she was "jest goin' twelve years," and that her mother didn't think she ought to be thinking of marriage just yet—after that I didn't feel quite so bad over not having had a chance to open one of these "woolly" correspondences. There was some solace, too, in hearing a pink-cheeked young ex-bank clerk tell how the "abdominal bandage" (they name them, as a rule, after the garment that starts the correspondence), with whom he had exchanged something like a dozen letters of cumulative passion, brought the affair to a sudden and violent end by some indirect and inadvertent admission which showed that she remembered when Grant was President.

But when the talk drifted, as it always does in

the end, to baseball and baseballers, I knew that there was going to be an opening for me presently, and stood by to take advantage of it. A three-year absentee from the bleachers, I was not sufficiently up on last season's pennant race "dope" to do more than make frequent sapient observations on this or that big-leaguer's stickwork or fielding as he was mentioned; but when they began to discuss, or rather to wrangle over, for discuss is far too polite a term, the theory of the game and to grow red in the face over such esoterics (or "inside stuff," to put it in "Fanese") as how and when a "squeeze" ought to be pulled off, I showed them the bulbous first joint of the little finger of my right hand—which there is no other way of acquiring than by the repeated telescopings of many seasons on the diamond—and was welcomed at last on equal terms. A seat was offered me on a depth-charge, across the business end of which an empty sack had been thrown to prevent a repetition of what came near happening the time a stoker, who was proving that Hans Wagner could never again be a popular idol now that we were at war with the Huns, punctuated his argument by hammering with a monkey-wrench on the firing mechanism.

They were not as impressed as they should have been when I told them that I learned the game under the tutelage of the mighty Bill Lange (this, of course, because the incomparable "Big Bill" was at his zenith long before their time); but they

were duly respectful when I said I had played three years' Varsity baseball, and became quite deferential when I assured them I had also survived a season of bush-league in the North-West. There was some kind of electrician rating in the crowd who had been a bush-league twirler before his "wing went glass," as he put it, and he, it soon transpired, had played in one place or another with a number of my old team mates of the Montana League. Deep in reminiscence of those good old days, I quite forgot my subtle scheme of using baseball as a stalking-horse for destroyer yarns, when the arrival of some callers from a British sloop lying a mile or two farther down the harbour recalled it to me. They had been in the *Moonflower*, the man next me said, when she put a U-boat out of business not long before, and one of them—he had some sort of decoration for his part in the show—spun a cracking good yarn about it if you got him started. This latter I managed to do by asking him how it chanced that the *Moonflower* was allowed to sport a star on her funnel. The story he told, the while he rolled cigarettes and worked his jaws on Yankee chewing-gum, revealed rather too much that may be used in some future surprise party to make it possible to publish just yet, but it had the desired effect of turning the current of reminiscence U-boatward. That was what I wanted, for, now that men from several other destroyers had come aboard and sauntered aft to join

the party, the opportunity for finding out at first-hand just what the American sailors thought of the anti-submarine game at the end of a year and a half of it was too good to be missed.

There was a considerable variety of opinions expressed in that last hour of the second dog-watch on the intricate inside stuff of the anti-U-boat game, just as there had been about baseball, but there was one point on which they were practically agreed: that Fritz, especially during the last six months, was not giving them a proper run for their money. This is the way one of them, a bronzed seaman gunner, with the long gorilla-like arms of a Sam Langford, and gnarled knots of protuberant muscles at the angles of his jaws, epitomized it: "We sees Fritzie, or we don't. Mostly we don't, for he ducks under when he pipes our smoke. If he's stalkin' a convoy there's jest a chance of him givin' us time for a rangin' shot at him on the surface. Then we waltzes over to his grease and scatters a bunch of 'cans' round his restin'-place. An' if the luck's with us, we gets him; an' if the luck's with him, we don't. If we crack open his shell, down he goes; if we jest start him leakin', up he comes. Only dif'rence is that, in one case, it's all hands down, and in t'other, all hands up—'Kamerad!' In both cases, no fight, no run for our money. Now when we first come over, an' 'fore we'd put the fear o' God into Fritzie's heart, he wasn't above takin' a chance at a come-back now an'

again. *Then* there was occas'nal moments of ple'surabl' excitement, like the time when"—and he went on to tell of how an enterprising U-boat commander slipped a slug into the *Courser* abreast her after superstructure, and "beat it" off before that stricken destroyer had a chance to retaliate. Only the fact that, by a miracle, the torpedo failed to detonate her depth-charges saved the *Courser* from destruction, and even as it was, rare seamanship had been required to take her back to port. And he also told of the unlucky *John Hawkins*, which a U-boat had actually put down, and the grim situation which confronted the sailors when they found themselves sinking in a ship which carried a number of depth-charges set on the "ready." But all that, he said, with the air of an old man speaking of his departed youth, was before they had begun to learn Fritzie's little ways, and before Fritz, perhaps as a consequence, had begun to lose his nerve. Now, far from being willing to put up a fight with a destroyer, it was only "onct in a blue moon that he's got the guts to put up a scrap even to save his own hide."

A slender fair-haired lad, with a quick observant eye which revealed him as a signalman even before one looked at his sleeve, cut in sharply at this juncture.

"Then there must have been a blue moon shedding its light over these waters last month," he said decisively. "I quite agree with you that

Fritz hasn't got the nerve—or it may be because he's got too much sense—to take a chance at a destroyer any more. But in the matter of putting up a fight for his life—yes, even for giving a real run for the money—well, all I can say is that if you'd been out on the *Sherill* about three weeks ago, you wouldn't be making that complaint about one particular Fritz at least. If going eighteen hours, with two or three destroyers and a sloop or two doing everything they know how to crack in his shell all the time, without chucking his hand in, and very likely getting clear in the end—if that isn't putting up a fight for life and giving a run for the money, I don't know what is."

I had heard this astonishing "battle of waxes and wits," as someone had christened it, referred to on several occasions, but had never had the chance to hear any of the details from one who had had anything like the opportunities always open to a signalman to follow what is going on. "Most of the bunch have heard all they want to hear of it already," the lad replied with a laugh when I asked him to tell me the story; "and, besides, a more or less long-winded yarn of the kind I suppose you want would tire 'em to tears anyway. If you really want to hear something of it, come over to the *Sherill* (that's her stern there, just beyond the *Flossie*) any time after eight bells. I go on watch then, but it's a 'stand easy' in port, and there'll be time for all the yarning you want."

I closed with that offer at once, and eight bells had not long gone before I had picked my precarious way over to the *Sherill*, and climbed the ladders to her snug little bridge. My man was there already, whiling away the time by rewriting an old college football song (he had been in his freshman year at Michigan when America came into the war) to fit destroyer work in the North Atlantic. I found him stuck at the end of the second line of the first verse, because the only rhymes he could think of for flotilla were Manila and camarilla, neither of which seemed sufficiently opposite to be of use, and he was rather glad of an excuse for putting the job by to await later inspiration.

I gave him a "lead" for the U-boat yarn he had lured me there to hear, and he launched into it at once. This is the story the young signalman of U.S.S. *Sherill* told me, the while the red squares of the cottagers' windows blinked blandly along the bank in the lengthening twilight and the purple shadows of the western hills piled deeper and duskier upon the "quiet waters of the River Lee."

"We were out on convoy," he said, speaking the first words slowly between the teeth which held the string of the tobacco sack from which the gently manipulated paper in his hand had been filled. "It was some kind of a slow convoy—probably a collier or an oiler or two—and there were only two of us on the job—the *McSmall* and the *Sherill*. It was

just the usual ding-dong sort of a drudge up to about four in the afternoon of the first day out, when the *McSmall* made a signal that she had sighted a submarine on the starboard bow of the convoy, distant about five miles, and immediately stood off to the west to see if anything like a strafe could be started. She was more than hull-down on the horizon when I saw, by the way the angle of her funnels was changing, that she was manoeuvring to shake loose a few 'cans' into the oil-slick she had run into, but I remember distinctly that I felt the jolt of the under-water explosions stronger than from many we had kicked loose from the *Sherill*, and which had detonated only a hundred yards or so off. It's just a little trick the depth-charge has. The force of it seems to shoot out in streaks, just like an explosion in the air, and you may feel it strong at a distance and much less at fairly close range. So far as we ever learned, this opening salvo did not find its target.

"Meanwhile the *Sherill* was escorting to the best of her ability alone. Or at least we thought we were alone. About half an hour after the *McSmall* had laid those first 'cans,' however, one of the quartermasters reported sighting a periscope on the port quarter of the convoy, about five hundred yards distant, and headed away. We signalled its presence to the convoy, turned eight points to port, and drove at full speed for the point where the wake of the moving finger had pinched out.

“ We had received a report that morning to the effect that two submarines were operating in these waters, and there is just the chance, therefore, that this was a joint attack. Everything considered, however, we have been inclined to believe that the Fritz we were now starting to make the acquaintance of was the same one which the *McSmall* was still assiduously hunting some miles off to the westward. It was a mighty smart piece of ‘Pussy-wants-a-corner’ work, shifting his position like that under the circumstances; but it was quite possible if the Fritz only had the guts for it, and that I think you’ll have to admit this particular one had.

“ It’s seconds that count in a destroyer attack on a U-boat, and the captain hadn’t lost a tick in jumping into this one. The dissolving ‘V’ which the ducked-in periscope had left behind it was still visible in the smooth water when the *Sherill’s* fore-foot slashed into it, and it was only a few hundred yards beyond that a slow undulant upcoiling of currents marked, faintly but unmistakably, the under-water progress of the game we were after. There was no oil-slick, understand, because an uninjured submarine only leaves that behind—except through carelessness—when it dives after a spell on the surface running under engines. Then the exhausts cough up a lot of grease and oil, and a layer of this, sticking to the stern, leaves a trail that rises for some little time after submergence,

and which almost any kind of a dub who has been told what to look for can follow.

“The spotting of the surface wake of a deep-down submarine, and the holding of it after it almost disappears with the slowing down of the screws that make it, is quite another thing. *That* takes a man with more than a keen eye—it takes instinct, mixed with a lot of common sense. It’s a common thing to say of a successful look-out that he has a ‘quick nose for submarines.’ The expression is used more or less figuratively, of course; and yet the nose—the sense smell—is by no means a negligible factor in detecting the presence, and even the bearing, of a hunted U-boat. I will tell you shortly how it figured in this particular instance.

“That wake was swirling up so strong when we struck it that it was plain the submarine was still only on the way down, and it was no surprise when, a few seconds later, the distinct form of it was visible, close aboard under the starboard side of the bridge.

“I don’t mean that it was distinct in the sense that you could see details such as the bow or stern rudders, or even the conning-tower, but only that a moving cigar-shaped blob of darker green could be plainly made out. The for’ard end was rather more sharply defined than the after, probably because the swirl from the propellers made uneven refraction about the tail. It was doubtless a good deal deeper than it looked, and the fact that it

could be seen at all must have been almost entirely due to the fact that the absence of wind left the surface quite unrippled.

“The appearance of the submarine abreast the bridge was our cue to get busy, and I won't need to tell you that we went to it good and plenty. We were primed for just that kind of an emergency, and we slapped down a barrage in a way that looked more like chucking coppers for kids to scramble after than the really scientific planting of high explosives that it was. For a minute or two the little old *Sherill*, dancing down the up-tossed peaks of the explosions, jolted along like the canoe you are dragging over a 'corduroyed' portage. Then the going grew smooth again, and under a hard-over right rudder we turned back rejoicing to gather in the sheaves. Yes, it looked quite as simple as harvesting on the old home farm, and it didn't seem that there could be anything left to do but to go back and pick up with the rake what the mower had brought low. And so it would have been on an ordinary occasion, which, unluckily, this was not. From the first to last, indeed, it was quite the contrary.

“The whole map of that little opening brush was spread out before us as we came back, and almost as clearly, for the moment, as though modelled in coloured clay. The *Sherill's* wake, though it had obliterated that of the submarine, coincided with the tell-tale swirl of the latter we had followed,

while the round patches of spreading foam made the dizzily dancing buoys temporarily superfluous as markers of the spots where the depth-charges had exploded. Like every other story that is writ in water, this one was rapidly dissolving; but, from all that we needed to learn from it, the record was as complete as a bronze relief.

“That there was to be another chapter to the story became evident before we had doubled back half the length of that part of the wake we had sprinkled with ‘cans.’ At about the point where two-thirds of that sheaf of depth-charges had been expended a clearly defined wake of oil and bubbles turned sharply off to the left. The presence of that little trail cleared up several important points right then and there without following it any farther, though I will hardly need to tell you that we didn’t drop anchor to hold a court of inquiry over it. The vital thing it told us was that—strange as it seemed—our under-water bombardment had not sent the U-boat to the bottom, nor even injured it sufficiently to compel it to come to the surface. But that it was injured, and probably fairly badly, was proved by the wake of oil and bubbles. Don’t ever let any one delude you with that yarn about the way Fritz sends up oil and bubbles to baffle pursuit. There may be circumstances under which he could work that particular brand of foxiness with profit, but if there is one place where you could be sure he would

not try anything of that kind on, it is when a destroyer has got his nose on his trail, with her eye and ears a-cock for just that kind of little first-aid to 'can-dropping.' For a submarine voluntarily to release air or oil when a destroyer is ramping round overhead would be just about like a burglar scattering a trail of confetti to baffle the pursuit of the police. Fritz is as full of ways that are dark and of tricks that are vain as Ah Sin, but—with the hounds at his heels—nothing so foolish as that oil and bubble stunt of popular fiction.

“The first few of the 'cans' had evidently burst near enough to this Fritz to buckle his shell and release the oil and air, but his sharp right-angled turn to the left had taken him quite clear of the last of the charges, which had only been thrown away. Wounded and winged as he appeared to be, the next thing in order was to polish him off. Slowing down slightly, the captain steadied the *Sherill* on the wake.

“As we passed the point where this was rising, the rate at which it was extended gave the approximate speed of the U-boat, and the fact that this was not above three knots seemed only another indication that all was not well with him. Holding on past the 'bubble fount,' we passed over the point below which the U-boat must have been moving, but now he was so much more deeply submerged than before that no hint of his outline was visible on either side. We knew he was there, however, and

when we hit the proper place shook loose another shower of 'cans' over him.

"There is nothing deeply mysterious about the calculations in dropping depth-charges, for in no sense of the term can it be called an instrument of precision. Indeed, it is of the bludgeon rather than the rapier type. If you have a wake to guide, you approximate his speed and course from that, guess at his depth, set the charge at the corresponding depth from which you judge its explosion will do most good, and then, allowing for your own speed and course, release it at a point which you reckon the target will have reached by the time the charge gets down on a level with it. It is something like bomb-dropping from an aeroplane, only rather less accurate, because you don't see your target as a rule.

"This is more than compensated for, however, by the greater vulnerability of its target and the fact that the force of an under-water explosion is felt over a wider area than that of an air-bomb. That's about all there is to it. Success in 'can-dropping' depends about half on the skill and judgment of the man directing it, and about half on luck. Or perhaps I should say that fifty-fifty was about the way it stood when we started in at the game. Naturally, as we have accumulated experience, skill and judgment begin to count for more and luck for less, though we are a long way from reaching the point where the latter is eliminated entirely.

“ Again we circled back to pick up the pieces, and again we found only a wake of oil and bubbles angling sharply off from where the ‘ cans ’ had been dropped. It was encouraging to note that both oil and bubbles were rising faster than before, but there was surprise and disappointment in the fact that they were now streaming along at a rate which indicated Fritz was hitting an under-water speed of six or seven knots.

“ By now it was plain what his method was, however. This was to steady on his course till his hydrophones, which all U-boats are fitted with, of course, told him we were bearing down on him, and then to start making ‘ woggly ’ zigzags. The captain was doing some deep thinking as we headed in for the next attack, and I noticed him following his stopwatch with more than usual care as he jiggled off the ‘ cans.’

“ One of the detonations had a different kick from the others, and I was just speculating if it had been a hit, when up comes Fritz, rolling like a harpooned whale.

“ We were just turning sharp under left rudder and, not wanting to take any chances, the captain gave orders for all guns fearing to open fire. No. 1 and No. 2 of the port battery got off about five rounds apiece, and when the splashes from the exploding shells had subsided Fritz had gone. It looked like a hundred to one that we had finished him—until we ran into another of those darn wakes

of oil and bubbles reeling off at a good five or six knots.

“ Again we ‘canned’ him, and again the thickening trail of grease gave promise that, if nothing else, we were at least bleeding him hard, perhaps to death. As there was no doubt that he was still a going concern, however, the captain decided on a change of tactics, to try attrition, so to speak, instead of direct assault.

“ There is, of course, a limit to the number of ‘cans’ a destroyer can carry, and those which still remained he wanted to husband against a better chance to use them with effect. The several remaining hours of daylight would be enough, if the U-boat could be kept running at maximum speed, to exhaust its batteries in and force it to come to the surface for lack of power to keep going submerged. A submarine, you understand, unless it can lie on the bottom, which was impossible here on account of the depth, must keep under weigh to maintain its bouyancy, so it follows that the exhaustion of its batteries leaves no alternative but coming up. That was what we were now driving at with this one.

“ About this time, hearing the radio of the *Cushman* close aboard, the captain sent a signal requesting her help in clearing up the job in hand. She hove in sight presently, accompanied by the *Fanny*, which was out with her on some special stunt of their own. They had an hour to spare for us, and

in that time we played just about the merriest little game of hide-and-seek that any of our destroyers have had with a Fritz since the Yanks came over.

“ He wasn’t left time to sit and think for a single minute. Now a destroyer would come charging up his wake from astern and shy a ‘can’ at his tail; now one would ambush him from ahead and try and have one waiting where his nose was going to be.

“ It was a good deal like when three or four of us kids used to spear catfish in a muddy pool. We were always grazing one, but never quite getting it. And, believe me, the wake of one of those catfish didn’t have anything on the wake of that Fritz for sinuosity.

“ He was zigzagging constantly, and just after charges had been dropped on him he twice broached surface. It was only for a few seconds though, and never long enough to offer a target for even a ranging shot. Once we tried to ram, but he turned as he submerged, and the forefoot cut into nothing more solid than his propeller swirl.

“ After the *Cushman* and *Fanny* left us to resume their own job the *Sherill* took up the chase again on her own account. There were still about three hours to go till dark, and two of these we spent in keeping our quarry on the jump by every trick we knew. Then we stood away, and gave him a chance to come up and start charging on the surface. When it finally became evident that he was not going to take advantage of our consideration on this



A LIMIT TO THE NUMBER OF "CANS" A DESTROYER CAN CARRY

score, we closed in again, picked up his wake, sent down another 'can' or two to tell him what we thought of him.

"The last of these must have been near to a hit, for it brought up oil bubbles three feet in diameter, with smaller bubbles of air inside of them. The oil-slick left behind by his wake was so heavy that, even in the failing light, it was visible for several miles. He was now making about five knots. We followed that broad slick of oil for some time after darkness had fallen, and it was not till a little before midnight that we lost it.

"There wasn't much hope of regaining touch before daybreak, but on the off-chance the captain started circling in a way that would cover a lot of sea, and yet not take us too far from the centre of interest.

"It was a little after one in the morning that one of the look-outs—perhaps 'sniff-outs' would be a better term under the circumstances—reported an oil smell to windward. The captain promptly ordered her headed up into the wind, with sniffers stationed to port and starboard, fore and aft. Every man on watch was sniffing away on his own, of course, and you can bet it would have been a funny sight if there had only been enough light for us to see one another in. Nosing—I can use the term literally this time—slowly along, turning now to port, now to starboard, as the oil smell was strongest from this side or that, within ten minutes

we picked up a slick which, even in the darkness, it was evident was trending to south'ard. For an hour and a half we zigzagged up along that wake, keeping touch by smell until just before three o'clock, when the new well-risen moon showed it up distinctly to the eye. No," answering my frivolous interruption, "I don't recall noticing at the time that it was a *blue* moon.

"Ten minutes later we came up to where the wake turned to south-westward, and had a brief glimpse of Fritz trying to evade detection by running down the moon-path. He was plainly near the end of his juice, and taking every chance that offered to charge on the surface. He ducked under before there was time for a shot, but, knowing that he could hardly stay there for long, we continued following down his wake.

"It was broad daylight when, at half-past four, we sighted him again, running awash about five hundred yards ahead and slightly on the starboard bow. Ordering the bow gun to open fire, the captain put the *Sherill* at full speed and headed in to ram. The shots fell very close, but no hit was observed.

"He turned sharply to port, preparing to dive. We tried to follow with full left rudder, but missed by twenty feet. His conning-tower and two periscopes showed not over thirty feet from the port side as we swept by. It was too close for a torpedo, nor was there a fair chance for a depth-charge.

The port battery was opening on him as he submerged.

“The strengthening breeze began kicking up the surface about this time, making it difficult to follow the wake. It was six o'clock before we circled into it again, to find that Fritz was now trying to blind pursuit by steering his course so that the wake led away straight toward the low morning sun. It was probably by accident rather than design that his now reversed course also laid his wake across some of the zigzags of his old oil-slick. At any rate, between that and the sun, we got off the scent again, and did not get in touch till an hour later, when a thin blue-white vapour to the eastward revealed the blow-off of his exhaust where he had resumed charging on the surface.

“He was a good five miles away, but we turned loose at him with the bow gun and started closing at full speed. At almost the same time, the British sloop *Moonflower*—the same one we were talking about this evening—stood in from eastward, also firing at the enemy, who was about midway between us.

“Fritz disappeared under the foam-spouts thrown up by the fall of shot, and, although two more destroyers joined in the hunt, which was continued all that day and on to nightfall, no further trace of him was discovered. Even if he did not sink at once, the chances are all against his being in shape ever to get back to base. But just the

same," he concluded, with a wistful smile, "it would have been comforting to have had something more tangible than the memory of an oil smell and thirty-six hours without sleep as souvenirs of that little brush."

It had been dark for an hour where the waters of the River Lee were streaming seaward with the ebbing tide, but the tree-tops along the crest of the eastward hills were silvering in the first rays of the rising moon. The signalman was looking at it when I bade him good night and started down the ladder to the main deck.

"I hope it isn't a blue one," he said with a grin; "we're expecting to go out again tomorrow."

CHAPTER VII

ADRIATIC PATROL

BORING into a North Sea blizzard in a destroyer off the coast of Norway is not exactly the kind of thing that one would think would turn a man's thoughts to sunny climes, with scented breezes blowing over flowery fields, and cobalt skies arching over sapphire waters, and all that sort of thing; but the human mind moves in a mysterious way, and that is just what Lieutenant K—— started talking about the night we were shepherding the northbound convoy together, after it had been temporarily scattered by what had proved to be an abortive German light cruiser raid.

Sea-booted, muffled and goggled, and ponderous where his half-inflated "Gieve" bulged beneath his ample duffle-coat, he leaned over the starboard rail of the bridge for a space to get the clear view ahead that the frost-layer on the wind-screen denied him from anywhere inboard. Then, just ducking a sea that rolled in tumultuously fluent ebony over the forecastle gun and smothered the bridge in flying spray, he nipped across and threw a half-Nelson around a convenient stanchion before the pitch, as she dived down the back of the

retreating wave, threw him against the port rail.

"Got 'em all in line again," he said, pushing his face close to mine. "That's something to be thankful for, anyhow. Didn't expect to round up half of 'em before we had to stand away to pick up the southbound. Piece of uncommon good luck. Now we can stand easy for a spell."

I was about to observe that "stand easy" didn't seem to me quite the appropriate term to apply to the act of keeping one's balance on a craft which was blending thirty-degree rolls with forty-degree pitches to form a corkscrew-like motion of an eccentricity comparable to nothing else in the gamut of human experience, when he continued with: "Not much like what I was enjoying a month ago, this," indicating the encompassing darkness with a rotary roll of his head. "I was in a destroyer at an Italian base then—Brindisi—with the smell of dust and donkeys and wine-shops in the air, and straight-backed, black-haired, black-eyed girls, with rings in their ears and baskets of fruit—soft red and yellow and blue fruit—on their heads. Now it's"—and she put her nose deep into a wave that dealt her a sledge-hammer blow and sent spray flying half-way to the foretop in a solid stream—"this, just this. Grey by day, black by night, and slap-bang all the time. No light, no colour, no atmosphere, no——"

"I quite understand," I cut in. "No straight-backed girls with rings in their ears and fruit-

baskets on their heads. Of course, there's more light and colour down there than here; but wasn't there also a bit of slap-bang to it now and then?"

"Ay, there was a bit," he replied. "There was the time——" He started to tell me the already time-worn yarn of the Yarmouth trawler skipper and the Grimsby trawler skipper, each of whom, enamoured of the same Taranto maid, wooed her while the other was absent on patrol; of how one of them, looking through his glass as he stood in toward the entrance on one of his return trips, saw his rival walking on the beach with arm round the waist of the artful minx in question, and her red-and-yellow kerchief-bound head resting on his shoulder; of how the one on the trawler, consumed by a jealousy fairly Latin in its intensity, swung round his six-pounder, discharged it at the faithless pair, and—so crookedly did the rage-blind eyes see through the sights—hit a fisherman's hut half a mile away from his target!

I had heard the story in Taranto a year previously, and knew it to be somewhat apocryphal at best. "I didn't mean that kind of 'slap-bang,'" I said. "I was under the impression that the destroyers had some rather lively work down there on one or two occasions."

"There were several brushes which might have been called lively while they lasted," he admitted. "I was in one of them myself just before I was transferred north."

“ You don’t mean the recent attack on the drifter patrol—the one where two British destroyers stood the brunt of the attack of four Austrian destroyers and a light cruiser or two?” I asked. “ I have always wanted to hear about that. I’ve heard Italian naval men say some very flattering things of the way the British carried on.”

“ That’s the one,” he replied. “ I was in the *Flop*—the one that got rather the worst banging up.”

“ You’ve just got time for the yarn before your watch is over,” I said, settling myself into the nearest thing to a listening attitude that one can assume on the bridge of a destroyer bucking a north-east gale. “ Fire away.”

I didn’t much expect he would “ come through,” for I had failed in so many attempts to draw a good yarn by a frontal attack of this kind that I had little faith in it as compared with more subtle methods. Perhaps it was because rough methods were suited to the rough night; or it may have been only because K——’s mind (his non-working mind, I mean; not that closed compartment of sense and instinct with which he was directing his ship) had drifted back to the Adriatic, and he was glad of the chance to talk about it; at any rate, in the hour that had still to go before eight bells went for midnight, to the accompaniment of the banging of the seas on the bows and the obligato of the spray beating on the glass and canvas of the screens, he told me the story I asked for.

“I don't need to tell you,” he said, after giving the man at the wheel the course for the next zigzag, “that the Adriatic is full of various and sundry little traps and contrivances calculated to interfere as much as possible with the even tenor of the way of the Austrian U-boats which, basing at Pola and Trieste, sally forth in an endeavour to penetrate the Straits of Otranto and attack the commerce of the Mediterranean. You doubtless also know that this work is very largely in British hands. This is no reflection whatever on our Italian ally. Italy simply did not have the material and the trained men for the task in hand, and since Britain had both, it was naturally up to us to step in and take it over. This was done over two years ago; but, like the anti-submarine work everywhere, it is only now just beginning to round into shape to effect its ends. The winter of his discontent for the U-boat in these waters is closing in fast.

“You will understand, too, that these various anti-U-boats contrivances take a lot of looking after to prevent their interference with, or even their complete destruction, by enemy surface craft. All the good harbours are on the east coast of the Adriatic, and that sea is so narrow that swift Austrian destroyers can raid all the way across it at many points, and still have time to get back to their bases the same night. With our own bases—the only practicable ones available—at the extreme southern end of the Adriatic, our greatest

difficulty, perhaps, has been in guarding against these swift tip-and-run night-raids by the enemy's speedy surface craft. I don't know whether the fact that we seem to have about put an end to their operations of this kind is a greater tribute to our enterprise or the Austrians' lack of it. The brush in question occurred as a consequence of the latest of the Austrian attempts to interfere with the measures which, he knows only too well, will ultimately reduce his U-boats to comparative impotence.

“ I was Number Two in the *Flop*, which, with the *Flip*, was patrolling a certain billet well over toward the Austrian coast of the Adriatic. We had turned at about eleven o'clock, and were heading back on a westerly course, when the captain sighted a number of vessels just abaft the starboard beam. Being almost in the track of the low-hanging moon, they were sharply silhouetted; but the queer atmospheric conditions played such pranks with their outlines that, for a time, he was deceived as to their real character. The warm, coastal airs, blowing to sea for a few hours after nightfall, have a tendency to produce mirage effects scarcely less striking than those one sees on the desert along the Suez Canal. It was the distortion of the mirage that was responsible for the fact that the captain mistook two Austrian light cruisers for small Italian transports (such as we frequently encountered on the run between Brindisi and Valona or Santi Quaranti),

and that he reported what shortly turned out to be enemy destroyers as drifters.

“The captain had just made a shaded lamp signal to the *Flip*, calling attention to the ships and their supposed character, when the white, black-curling bow-wave of the two leaders caught his eye and made him suspect they were warships. The alarm bell clanging for ‘Action Stations’ was the first intimation I had that anything was afoot. In the Adriatic, as everywhere else, everyone in a destroyer turns in ‘all standing’; so it was only a few seconds until I was out of my bunk and up to my station on the bridge. It was not many minutes later before I found myself in command of the ship.

“It was now clear that the force sighted consisted of two enemy light cruisers and four destroyers, the latter disposed two on each quarter of the rear cruiser. They were closing on us at high speed at a constant bearing of a point or two abaft the beam. It was up to the *Flip*, as senior ship, to decide whether to fight or to run away on the off-chance of living to fight another day, something which was hardly likely to happen in the event we closed in a real death grapple. The disparity between our strength and that of the enemy would have entirely justified us in doing our utmost to avoid a decisive fight, had it been that the cards on the table were the only ones in the game. But this was hardly the case. Out of sight, but still not so many miles distant, was another subdivision

of our destroyers, while overwhelming forces would ultimately be hurrying up to our aid in case the enemy could be delayed long enough. To close in immediate action was plainly the thing, and the *Flip* was turning in to challenge even as she made us a signal indicating that this was her decision. A moment more, and we were turning into line astern of her.

“Out of the moon-track now, the outlines of the enemy ships were indistinct and shadowy, and it was from the dull blur of opacity above the slightly phosphorescent glow of the ‘bone’ in the teeth of the leading cruiser that the opening shot was fired. It lighted her up brilliantly for the fraction of a second, and the ghostly geyser from the bursting shell showed up distinctly a few hundred yards ahead of the *Flip*. Both the sharpened image of the cruiser in the light of the gun-fire and the time of flight of the shell helped us with the range, and the fall of shot from the *Flip*’s opener looked like a very near thing. We followed it with one from our fo’c’sl’ gun, which was a bit short, and the next, if not a hit, was only slightly over. At this juncture, all six of the enemy ships came into action with every gun they could bring to bear, and the *Flip* and the *Flop* did the same. For the next few minutes things happened so fast that I can’t be sure of getting them in anywhere near their actual sequence.

“We began hitting repeatedly, and with good

effect, after the first few shots, and the *Flip* also appeared to be throwing some telling ones home. The enemy were hitting the both of us about the same time, however, and, of course, with many times the weight of metal we were getting to him. At this juncture the skipper of the *Flip*, evidently figuring that the Austrians, now that they were fully engaged and had a good chance of polishing us off, would not break off the fight, turned southward with the idea of drawing them toward the other forces which we knew would be rushing up in response to the signal we had sent out the instant the character of the strange ships was evident.

“The *Flip*, like a big squid, began smoke-screening heavily as she turned, the *Flop* following suit. The sooty oil fumes poured out in clouds thick enough to walk on, but unluckily, neither our course nor the state of the atmosphere was quite favourable for making it go where it would have served us best. Possibly it was because the *Flip* was making a better screen than the *Flop*, or possibly it was because they were concentrating on the ‘windy corner’ just as we were rounding it. At any rate, trying to observe through our rather patchy smoke the effect of what appeared to be a couple of extremely well-placed shots of ours on the leading cruiser, I suddenly became aware that all four of the destroyers and the second cruiser were directing all of their fire upon the poor little *Flop*. I don’t recall exactly whether I twigged this

before we began to feel the effects of it or not, but I am rather under the impression that I seemed to sense it from the brighter brightness—a gun firing directly at you makes a more brilliant flash than the same gun laid on a target ahead or astern of you—of the flame-spurts even before I was aware of the sudden increase of the fall of shot.

“They had us ranged to a yard by this time, of course, and the captain turned away a couple of points in an endeavour to throw them off. I recall distinctly that it was just as the grind of the ported helm began to throb up to the bridge that a full salvo—probably from one of the cruisers—came crashing into us. My first impression was that we were blown up completely, for of the two shells which had struck for’ard, one had brought down the mast and the other had scored a clean hit on the forebridge. There was also a hit or two aft, but the immediate effects of these were not evident in the chaos caused by the others. This was absolutely beyond description.

“The actual shock to a ship of being struck by a shell of even large calibre is nothing to compare with that from almost any one of these seas that are crashing over us now. But it is the noise of the explosion, the rending of metal, and the bang of flying fragments and falling gear that makes a heavy shelling so staggering, to mind if not to body. Of course everyone on the forebridge was knocked flat by the explosion of the shell which hit it, and

the worst of it was that the most of us didn't get up again. The sub and the midy who were acting as Control Officers were blown off their platform and so badly knocked up that they were unable to carry on. One signalman and one voice-pipe man were killed outright.

“The rest of us were only shaken up or no more than slightly wounded by this particular shell, but the one which brought down the mast added not a little both to casualties and material damage. The radio aerials came down with the mast, of course, and it was some of the wreckage from one or the other that fell on the captain, wounding him severely in both arms. Dazed and shaken, he still gamely stuck to the wreck of the bridge, but the active command now fell to me.

“This damage, serious as it was, was by no means the extent of that inflicted by this unlucky salvo. A third shell, as I shortly learned, had passed through the fore shell-room and into the fore magazine. In which it exploded I could not quite make sure, but both were set on fire. This fire got to some of the cordite before it was possible to get it away, and the ensuing explosion killed or wounded most of the supply parties and the crews of the twelve-pounders. It was brave beyond all words, the fight those men made to save the ship down in that unspeakable hell-hole, and it was due wholly to their courage and devotion that the explosion was no worse than it was. This trouble,

luckily, was hardly more than local, but a number of good lives was the price of keeping it so.

“ There was one other consequence of that salvo, and though it sounds funny to tell about it now, it might well have made all the difference in the world to us. In the bad smashing-up of the bridge of any ship by shell-fire the means of communication with the rest of her—the voice-pipes, telephones, telegraphs, etc.—are among the first things to be knocked out. This means, if there are no alternatives left, that directions have to be relayed around by shouting from one to another until the order reaches the man to carry it out. This would be an awkward enough expedient for a ship that is not under fire and fighting for time and her life. What it is with the enemy’s shell exploding about you, and with your own guns firing, I will leave you to imagine. Well, we had all this going on, and besides that a fire raging below that always had the possibilities of disaster in it until it was extinguished. Also, we were already short-handed from our losses in killed and wounded. There wasn’t anyone to spare to relay orders about in any case. But what capped the climax was this: When the mast was shot down, some of the raffle of rigging or radio fouled the wires leading back to both of the sirens, turning a full pressure of steam into them and starting them blowing continuously. It was almost as though the poor maimed and mangled *Flop* were wailing aloud in her agony.

“ I didn't think of it that way at the time, though, for I had my hands full wailing loud enough myself to make even the man at the wheel understand what I wanted him to do. Luckily, the engine-room telegraph, though somewhat cranky, was still in action, and orders to other parts of the ship we managed to convey by flash-lamp or messenger. It was ten minutes or more before they contrived to hush the sirens—it was cutting off their steam that did it, I believe—and by then a new and even more serious trouble had developed through the jamming of the helm. It was hard over to starboard at that, so that the *Flop* simply began turning round and round like a kitten chasing its tail. This involuntary manœuvre had one favourable effect in that it seemed to throw the Austrian gunnery off for a bit, though one shell which penetrated and exploded in the after tiller-flat shortly after she began cutting capers did not make it any easier to coax the jammed helm into doing its bit again.

“ Our ‘ring-around-the-roses’ course had resulted in our coming much nearer to the enemy, who, seeing a chance to finish us off, was trying to close the range at high speed. Our rotary course brought them on a continually shifting bearing, and it was while they were coming up on our port bow at a distance of less than a mile that it suddenly became evident that the cruisers were about to present us the finest and easiest kind of a torpedo target. The captain, who, in spite of his wounds,

was still trying to stick the show through, saw the opening as soon as I did, and, because there was no one else free to attempt the trick, tackled it himself. But it was a case of the spirit being willing and the flesh weak. With every ounce of nerve in him he tried to make his almost useless hands work the forebridge firing-gear. The chance passed while he still fumbled frantically but vainly to release the one little messenger—a mouldie—that would have been enough to square accounts, and with some to spare. It was the hardest thing of all—not being able to take advantage of that opening.

“It was twenty minutes before the helm was of any use at all, and the Austrians had only their lack of nerve to thank for not putting us down while they had a chance. It must have been because they were afraid of some kind of a trap, for there were a half-dozen ways in which a force of their strength could have disposed of a ship as helpless and knocked-out generally as was the *Flop*. The *Flip* had also been hard hit, and when I had a chance for a good look at her again it appeared that her mast, like ours, was trailing over the side. She was still firing, however, and it was she rather than the enemy that was trying to close. We were quite cut off from wireless communication, as all attempts to disentangle the aerials from the wreckage of the mast had been unsuccessful; but it was evident that help was coming to us, and that the Austrians had in some way got wind of it. At

any rate, our immediate responsibilities were over. We had prevented the enemy from reaching his objective, and possibly delayed him long enough for some of our other ships to have a chance at harrying his retreat. It was now up to us to limp to port on whatever legs we had left.

“We were still a long way from being out of action even now, but with the fires continuing to burn fiercely in the fore magazine and shell-room, with the helm threatening to jam every time course was altered, and with a considerable mixture of water beginning to make its presence felt in the oil, there was no telling what complications might set in at any moment. As one of the Italian bases in Albania was rather nearer than any port on the other side of the Adriatic, it was for that we set our still erratic course.

“Our troubles were not yet over, however. Just as the moon came down and sat on the sea preliminary to setting, squarely against the round yellow background it formed I saw the silhouette of the conning-tower of a U-boat. At almost the same instant the helm jammed again. Then it worked free for a few seconds, but only to jam presently, just as before. This continued during two or three minutes, and just as it was wangled right and we began to steady again I saw the wake of a torpedo pass across our bows. Half a minute later another one missed us in the same way, and by about the same distance. I have always thought

that nothing but that providential jamming of the helm just then saved us from intercepting both of those mouldies.

“The fires in the fore shell-room and magazine were eventually got under control by flooding, and we were fairly cushy when we dropped anchor at base a little before daybreak.”

K—— lurched over to the starboard rail and counted the dark blurs that represented the units of the straggling convoy. He was wiping snow and spray from his face as he slid back on the roll to our stanchion.

“Fine place, Southern Albania,” he muttered. “Plenty of heat and dust and sunshine and——”

I never did hear what the rest of those Albanian attractions were. At that juncture dusky figures emerging from the deeper gloom of the ladder heralded the appearance of the middle watch, and for those relieved, including myself, the world held just one thing—a long, narrow bunk, with a high side rail to prevent the occupant from rolling out. You go at your sleep on a destroyer as a dog dives at a bone, for you never know how long it may be before you get another chance.

CHAPTER VIII

PATROL

THE Senior Naval Officer (or the S.N.O., as they clip it down to) at X—— had prepared me for finding an interesting human exhibit in the sharp-nosed, stub-sterned little craft snuggled up to the breast of its mothership for a drink of petrol, or whatever other life-giving essence she lived and laboured on, but hardly for the highly diversified assortment that was to reveal itself to me during those memorable days we were to rub shoulders and soak up blown brine and grog together as they threaded the gusty sea lanes of her winter North Sea patrol.

“ I am sending you out on M.L.*——,” the S.N.O. had said as he gazed down with an affectionate smile at the object of his remarks, “ for several reasons, but principally on account of the men that are in her. You’ll find them a living, breathing object-lesson in the adaptability of the supposedly stodgy and inflexible Anglo-Saxon race. Her skipper, to use one of his own favourite expressions, is a live wire—always seems to be able to spark when there’s trouble in the wind. He came from some-

* Motor launch.

where in Western Canada, I believe. Seems to have tried farming there for a spell, and I think he said something once about running his own agricultural tractor. At any rate, in some way or another, he has picked up more practical knowledge of petrol engines than many of our so-called experts.

“The fact is,” continued the S.N.O. as we turned back towards his office at the end of the quay, “the fact is that D——, though he never saw salt water before he crossed the Atlantic to do his bit in the War, and though he never has got and never will get, I’m afraid, his sea-legs, is in many respects the most useful M.L. Officer I have ever had to do with, and that’s saying a good deal, let me assure you.

“He’s always sick as a dog from the time he puts to sea to the time he returns to port. The only thing that is liable to be more sick is the Hun submarine he once gets his nose on. I’ve heard him say in a joking way, two or three times, that he always could scent a Hun as far as he could a skunk—I think that’s what he calls it; and from some of the things he’s done I must confess I’m more than half inclined to believe him. Perhaps his most remarkable achievement, however, is that of taking eight or ten men, just as green as he was himself regarding the sea, and making of them a crew that will handle that cranky little lump of a craft pretty nearly as smartly as old trawler-men would on the nautical side, and at the same time having a fund of resource always on tap that is

positively uncanny—almost Yankee, in fact,” he added with a smile. “Indeed, I believe D— speaks of having knocked about the States a bit, which may account for some of the ‘wooden-nutmeg’ tricks he has played on the U-boats. Try to get him to tell you some of them. You’ll hardly be allowed to write much of them for a while yet— certainly not until they have become obsolete through the introduction of new devices; but you’ll find it good material some day.”

M.L.—looked more diminutive than ever as I was rowed out to her anchorage in the chill grey mists of the following morning; but a raw cold, which had been striking through to the marrow of my bones, dissolved, as by magic, before the friendly warmth of the welcome which awaited me, when I had clambered up the sawn-off Jacob’s Ladder and over the wobbly wire rail. A slender but lithely active chap in a greasy overall and jumper, to give it the Yankee name, gave me a finger-crushing grip with his right hand, while with his left he deftly caught and saved from immersion my kit-bag, which had fallen short in the toss that had been given it from below. Just for an instant the absence of visible insignia of rank made me think that he was a petty officer of engineers, or something of the kind; then the magnetism of his personality flowed to me through the medium of his hand-clasp, and I knew I was looking into the eyes of a man who

would not be likely to figure for long as anything less than "Number One" on any kind of job he ever undertook.

"You're just in time for a 'square,'" he said heartily, leading the way to the tiny hatch and preceding me down the ladder. "You'll be needing it, too, after that pull with nothing more than that sloppy dish-wash kaffy-o-lay that you get at the hotel at this hour of the morning on your stomach. Don't try to bluff me that you had anything more. I know by sad experience. Now *I'll* give you something that'll stick to your ribs. What do you say to some Boston baked beans and a 'stack o' hots'? Guess I know what a 'Murican likes. Sorry my maple syrup's gone, but here's some dope I synthesised out of melted sugar and m'lasses—treacle, they call it over here."

Reaching the lower deck, we edged along to a transom at the end of a table which all but filled the tiny dining-cabin.

"Shake hands with Mac," said the skipper by way of introducing me to a tall and extremely good-looking youth in a Cardigan jacket, duffel trousers, and sea-boots, who rose with a smile of welcome as we dropped down beside him. "Mac's a Canuck, like myself," he went on, after asking me if I liked my eggs "straight up" or "turned over," and passing the order on to a diminutive Cockney with a comedian's face, who came tripping in almost as though wafted on the "smell o' cooking" which

preceded him through the opened galley door.

“Mac learned his sailing on his dad’s yacht on Lake Ontario, and I learned mine driving a ‘deep-seagoing’ side-wheel tractor on a ranch in Alberta. Only time I was ever afloat before I became a ‘Capt’in in the King’s Navee’ was on a raft on the old Missouri, in Dakota; and that isn’t really being afloat, you know, for ’bout one half the water of that limpid stream is mud and the other half cat-fish. A great pair of old salts, we two—hey, Mac?

“And the rest of the crew’s no more ‘saline’ than its ‘orfficers.’ That’s the way they say it, ain’t it, Mac? Little ’Arry, the galley-slave, was a knock-about artist in the London music-halls before he ’eard the sea a-callin’, and now he doesn’t ’eed nothin’ else, do you, Harry? And you’ll hear the sea a-callin’ that nice big breakfast of yours just as soon as we get outside the Heads, won’t you, Harry? And then you won’t ’eed nothin’ else for quite a while. And so’ll Mac hear the sea a-calling his breakfast, and so’ll I, and so’ll all the rest of us—every mother’s son. It’s a fine lot of Jack Tars we are, the whole bunch of us. Did I tell you that one of my quartermasters is an ex-piano-tuner, and that the other was a Salvation Army captain before he entered the Senior Service for the duration? And my Chief—that’s him you hear alternating between tinkering and swearing at the engines on the other side of that bulkhead you’re leaning against—owned a motor-boat of his own before the War, and

appears to have divided his waking hours between racing that and his stable of motor-cars? You can tell he was a gentleman once by the fluency of his cussing. He's the only man I've met over here that could give yours truly any kind of a run in dispensing the pungent persiflage; but I had the advantage of driving mules as a kid.

"But cussing, though it helps with a lot of things, doesn't make a sailor, and the Chief's no more of a Jack Tar than me or Mac or Harry. Fact is, that the only man aboard who ever made his living out of the sea before the war is a fisherman from the Hebrides; and even the glossary in the back of my Bobbie Burns won't translate his lingo. Two or three times, when the sea has been kicking up a bit, he has managed to tell us that no self-respecting God-fearing sailor would be oot in such weather. Possibly he's been right; but, as none of us are sailors, we don't feel called on to pay much attention to his ravings. Our duty is to harass any Huns that encroach on our beat; and the fact that we've had a modicum of success in that line proves you don't have to be a sailor to qualify for the job. Which don't mean, though," he concluded with a smile of sad resignation as he rose and reached for his oil-skins, "that I don't hope and pray that I'll develop the legs and stomach of a sailor before the war's over."

When breakfast was eaten, forward and aft, all hands were piped on deck, and in less than ten

minutes M.L.— was under way and threading the winding channels of a cliff-begirt Firth to the mist-masked waters of the North Sea.

As I picked my way forward to the little glassed-in cabin, which served the double purpose of navigating-bridge and wheel-house, I told myself that I was sure of two things—first, that the skipper, by birth, breeding, residence, and probably citizenship, was an American of Americans, and, second, that the chances were he would not admit that fact unless I “surprised him with the goods.” An Englishman will often mistake a Canadian for an American but a Yankee himself will rarely make that error. I was sure of my man on a dozen counts, and resolved to lay in figurative ambush for him.

I all but had him within the hour. We were clear of the Heads, and the skipper, having turned over to Mac, was trying to forget that imperious call o’ the sea he had chaffed ’Arry about by showing me round. He had explained the way a depth-charge was released, and was just beginning to elaborate on the functions of an old-fashioned lance-bomb.

“Now this fellow,” he said, balancing the ungainly contrivance and giving it a gingerly twirl about his head, “is a good deal like the sixteen-pound hammer which I used to throw at college.”

Knowing that the hammer-throw was not a Canadian event, I promptly cut in with “What col-

lege?" "Minnesota," he answered readily enough; adding, as I began to grin: "A good many Canadians go across there for the agricultural courses." I resolved to await a more favourable opportunity before bringing my "charge" point-blank. It came that afternoon, when I stood beside him on the bridge as he bucked her through ten miles of slashing head-sea, which had to be traversed to gain the shelter of a land-locked bay beyond a jutting point, where we were to lie up for the night. He was telling me U-boat-chasing yarns in the patchy intervals between the demands of *mal de mer* and navigation, and one of them ended something like this: "Old Fritz—just as we intended he should—caught the reflection of the flame through his upturned periscope and, thinking his shells had set us afire, rose gleefully to gloat over his Hunnish handiwork. Bing! I let him have it just like that."

The motion with which he flung the lemon he had been sucking as an antidote for sea-sickness could not have been in the least suggestive of what really happened; but that straight-from-the-shoulder, elbow-firting, right-off-the-ends-of-the-fingers action was so like another motion with which I had long been familiar, that, with a meaning side-squint, I observed promptly:

"So you add baseball to your other accomplishments, do you? Did a bit of pitching, if I don't miss my guess? How long have you played?"

“Since I was a kid,” he admitted with a grin that sat queerly on the waxy saffron of his sea-sick face. “Yes, I even ‘tossed the pill’ at college—that is, until a shoulder I knocked out trying to slide home one day spoiled my wing.”

I knew I had him the instant that first admission left his lips. “Since the kids weren’t playing sandlot baseball in Canada twenty years ago,” I said, ducking low to let the spray from a sea which had just broken inboard blow over, “you might just as well ‘fess up and tell me which neck of the Mississippi Valley you hail from. Just as one Yankee to another,” I pressed, as his piercing eye turned on me a look that seemed to bore right through and run up and down my spine; “even as one Middle Westerner to another, for I was born in Wisconsin myself.”

For an instant his lips hardened into a straight line, and the flexed jaw-muscles stood out in white lumps on either side; then his mouth softened into a broadening grin, and a moment later he burst into a ringing laugh.

“Sure thing, old man, since you put it on ‘sectional’ grounds, and since we’re going to be shipmates for a week, and”—fetching me a thumping wallop on the back—“since we both wear the same uniform, anyhow, curly stripe and all, I’ll make a clean breast of it. I was born in Kansas—got a farm there, near a little burg called Stockton, today—and was never out of the Middle West in my

life till I crossed over into Canada to enlist in the first year of the war. I felt I had to get into the show somehow, and the little old U.S.A. was hanging fire so in the matter of coming in that I just couldn't wait. I'll tell you the whole story when we're moored for the night."

I have never been able to recall my yarn with D—— that evening without a hearty guffaw. A rising barometer had cleared the grey smother of mist from the sea, but a shift of the wind from south-east to north-east exposed us to a blast which, chilled at its fount in the frozen fjords of Norway, knocked the bottom out of the thermometer and filled the air with needle-like shafts of congealed moisture that seemed to have been chipped from the glassy steel dome of the now cloudless sky. There was a fligree of frost masking the wheel-house windows before the early winter night clapped down its lid, and the men who went forward to pass a line through the ring of the mooring-buoy pawed the icy deck with their stiff-soled sea-boots without making much more horizontal progress than a squirrel treading its wheel.

It would have been bracing enough if there had been a cheery open fire, or at least a glowing little sheet-iron stove, to thaw and dry out at, as there is on most patrol craft, and even on many trawlers. But in the particular type to which M.L.—— belonged (the units of which are said to have been

built in fulfilment of a rush order given one winter on the assumption that the War would be over before the next) there was no refinements and few comforts. Heating is not included among the latter: the only stove in the boat being in the galley, where the drying of wet togs in restricted quarters is responsible for a queer but strangely familiar taste to the pea-soup and Irish stew which you never quite account for until you discover the line of grease on the corner of the tail of your oilskin or the toe of your sea-boot.

The diminutive electric heaters are true to the first part of their name rather than the last: that is to say, while they are undeniably electric, it is equally certain that they do not heat. There is a certain amount of warmth in them, as I discovered the time I scorched my blankets by taking one to bed with me; but that is of use only when you can confine it and apply locally, which is rarely practicable in a small craft at sea, even when you have the time for it.

It will be readily understood, therefore, why on a M.L., at sea in really wintry weather, the only alternative to sitting up and being slowly but surely chilled to the marrow is to doff wet togs as soon as you come off watch, don dry ones, bolt your dinner, and turn in. This is just what we had to do on M.L. — that night; for, besides the really intense cold, a sea which came through the sky-light of the little dining-cabin early in the afternoon had

drenched cushions and curtains, with enough left over to form an inch or two of swashing swirl upon the deck. Poor 'Arry, with the effects of the "call o' the sea" still showing in his hollow eyes and pasty cheeks, was not in shape to do much either in the way of "slicking up" or "snugging down"; while the extent of his culinary effort was limited to a kedgerie of half-boiled rice and pale canned salmon, and a platter of eggs fried "straight up," according to D——'s order, with the yolks glaring fish-eyedly at you from a smooth, waxy expanse of congealed grease. D——, who was still somewhat "introspective" himself, turned down the "straightups" straightaway, bent a look that was more grieved than angry on the forlorn 'Arry, and then, rising shiveringly, started edging along over the sodden divan toward his cabin door.

"As principal medical officer of this ship," he said through chattering teeth, "I prescribe the only treatment ever found to be efficacious in such circumstances as the present—bunk, blankets, and hot toddy."

There were two bunks in D——'s narrow cabin, and it was not until we had turned into these—he in the lower, I in the upper—that the mounting glow of soul and body thawed the reserve which had again threatened to grip him in the matter of where he came from, and set his tongue wagging of his life on the old home farm, and from that to a sketchy but vivid recital of things that he had done,

and hoped still to do, as the skipper of a British patrol boat. It is the vision that the memory of that recital conjures up: D——, with a Balaclava helmet pulled low over his ears, gesticulating excitedly up to where I, the unblanketed portion of my anatomy shrouded to the eyes in a wool duffel-coat, leaned out over the edge of the bunk above—that I can never dwell on without laughing outright.

The story of the way in which it happened that D—— came over to get into the game in the first place did not differ greatly from those I have heard from a score or more of young Americans who, partly inspired by a sense of duty and partly lured by the promise of adventure, sought service in the British Army or Navy by passing themselves off as Canadians. He had intended to enlist in the Army at first; but when he found that six months or more might elapse before he would be sent to the other side, he crossed at his own expense on the chance of avoiding the delay. At the end of a disappointing month spent in trying to enlist in some unit that had a reasonable expectation of going into active service at once, the intervention of an old college friend—an able young chemical engineer occupying a prominent post in Munitions—secured him a sub-lieutenant's commission in the R.N.V.R. Although, as he naïvely put it, the sea was no friend of his, it appears that the M.L. game had proved congenial from the outset: so much so, indeed, that

something like three years of service found him with two decorations and innumerable mentions to his credit, to say nothing of the reputation of being one of the most resourceful, energetic and generally useful men in a service in which all of those qualities are taken more or less as a matter of course. He had gone in as a Canadian for fear that he might be turned down as a Yankee, and then, to use his own words: "By the time the U.S.A. began to take a hand, I had told so many darn lies about hunting and fishing and farming in Alberta and British Columbia that I concluded it would be less trouble to go on telling them than to start in denying them. The boundary between Canada and the U.S.A. is more or less of an imaginary line, anyhow, and so is that between the average Yankee and Canuck. I reckon I've made it just as hot for the Hun as the latter as I would have as the former, and that's really the only thing that counts at this stage of the game." It was this last observation, I believe, which started D—— talking of his work.

"Generally speaking," he said, reaching up the match with which he had just lighted a cigarette to rekindle the tobacco in my expiring pipe, "the rôle of the M.L. is very much more defensive than it is offensive. It is supposed to police certain waters, watch for U-boats, report them when sighted, and then carry on as best it can till a destroyer, or sloop, or some craft with a real punch in it, comes up and takes over. Well, my idea from

the first has been to make that 'defensive' just as 'offensive' as possible, and it's really astonishing how obnoxious some of us have been able to make ourselves to the Hun. Off-hand, since, with his heavier guns, the average Hun is more than a match for us even on the surface, there wouldn't seem much that we could do against him beyond running and telling one of our big brothers. The perfecting of the depth-charge gave us one very formidable weapon, however, and that of the lance-bomb another, though the days when Fritz was tame and gullible enough to allow himself to be enticed sufficiently near to permit the use of the latter are long gone by. The most satisfying job I ever did, though, was pulled off with a lance-bomb; and, since there is not one chance in a thousand of our ever getting away with the same kind of stunt again, there ought to be no kick on my telling you just how it happened.

"You see," he went on, pulling a big furry-backed mitten on the hand most exposed to the cold in gesticulation, and tucking the fingers of the other inside the neck of the Balaclava for warmth, "Fritz is an animal of more or less fixed habits, and so the best way to hunt him, like any other animal, is to begin by making a study of his little ways. I specialised on this for some months, confining myself almost entirely to what he did in attacking, or when being attacked by, M.L.s, and ignoring his tactics with sloops, trawlers, and other

light craft. It wasn't long before I discovered that his almost invariable practice—when it was a matter of only himself and a M.L.— was to get the latter's range as quickly as possible, endeavour to knock it out, or at least set it afire, by a few hurried shots, and then to submerge and make an approach under water for the purpose of making a closer inspection of the damage inflicted. In this way the danger of a hit from the M.L.'s gun was reduced to a minimum—an important consideration, as a holing by even a light shell might well make it impossible to submerge again. And a U-boat incapable of seeking safety in the depths is, in any part of the North Sea where it would have been likely to meet a M.L., just as good as done for.

“I also found that when explosions had taken place in the M.L., or when it was heavily afire by the time the U-boat drew near, it was the practice of the latter to come boldly up and finish the good work at leisure, with the addition of any of the inimitable little Hunnisms—such as firing on the boats, or ramming them, or running at full speed back and forth among the wreckage so as to give the screws a good chance to chop up the swimming survivors—of which *Unterseeboot* skippers were even then becoming past masters.

“In short,” here D—— paused for a moment while he lifted the little electric heater and lighted a fresh cigarette on one of the glowing bars, “in short, I studied the vermin in just the same way I



A DEPTH CHARGE



DISABLED DESTROYER IN TOW

did the gophers and prairie-dogs when I started to exterminate them on my Kansas farm. I found out when they were most likely to come up, when to stay down; what things attracted them, and what repelled. Then I went after them. Of course, there was no chance for the clean sweep I made of the gophers and prairie-dogs, but we've still managed to keep our own little section of the beat pretty clear.

“ Having satisfied myself regarding the Hun's penchant for stealing up, submerged, to gloat over the dying agonies of his victim, it seemed to me that the obvious thing to do was to lead him on with an imitation death-agonny, and then have a proper surprise waiting for him when he came up to gloat. The first thing I started working on was how to 'burn up' and 'blow up' with sufficient realism to deceive the skipper of a submerged U-boat, and still be in shape to spring an effective surprise if he could be tempted into laying himself open to it.

“ My first plan proved too primitive by far. I reckoned that the 'blowing-up' touch might be provided by dropping a depth-charge, and that of 'burning up' by playing my searchlight on the surface of the water on the side the approach was to be expected from. Neither was good enough. The 'can' might have been set to explode on the surface, but that could not be affected without running the chance of blowing in my own stern. But the bang of a depth-charge detonating well under

the water is quite unmistakable, and the first U-boat I tried to lure with one made off forthwith, plainly under the impression that it was the object of an active attack. As for the searchlight, I saw that it wouldn't do the first time I went down and took a peep at a trial of it through the periscope of one of our own submarines. The beam did cast a patch of brightness discernible through the up-turned 'eye' at a depth of from sixty to eighty feet, but it was neither red enough nor fluttery enough to suggest anything like a burning ship. I set to work to devise something more life-like, without ever waiting for a chance to draw a Fritz with it.

"First and last, I tried a goodly variety of 'fire' experiments," D—— continued, snuggling down for a moment with both arms under the blankets, "and I don't mind admitting that I'd like to have a few of 'em, smoke and all, flaming up all over this refrigerator right now. The thing I finally decided to try consisted of nothing more than a light, shallow tank of ordinary kerosene—paraffin oil, I believe they call it here—made fast to a small, roughly built raft. The *modus operandi* was as simple as the contrivance itself. As soon as a U-boat was sighted, the raft was to be launched on the *opposite* side, and kept about thirty feet out by means of a light boom. The next move was to be up to Fritz, and it was fairly certain he would do one of two things—submerge and make off, or re-

main on the surface and begin to shell us. In the latter case we were to start firing in reply, of course; but that was only incidental to the main plan. This was to wait until we were hit, or, preferably, until he fired an 'over,' the fall of which, on account of his low platform, he could not spot accurately, and then to fire the tank of kerosene. A line to a trigger, rigged to explode a percussion-cap, made it possible to do this from the rail. As the flames, besides giving off a lot of smoke, would themselves leap high enough to be seen from the other side, it was reasonable to suppose that Fritz would be deluded into thinking we were burning up, and make his approach a good deal more carelessly than otherwise. If he persisted in closing us on the surface, there would be nothing to it but to make what fight we could with our fo'c'sl' gun, and try to make it so hot for him that he would have to go down before his heavier shells had done for us. But if, following his usual procedure, he made his approach submerged, then there were two or three other little optical and aural illusions prepared for his benefit. I will tell you of these in describing how we actually used them."

D—— lay quiet for a minute, the wrinkles of a baleful grin of reminiscence showing on both sides of the aperture of the Balaclava. "The first chance we had to try the thing out it nearly did us in," he chuckled presently. "No, Fritz had nothing to do with it. *He*, luckily for us, submerged and beat it

off after firing three or four shots—probably through mistaking the smoke of a couple of trawlers just under the horizon for that of destroyers. It was all due to bad luck and bad judgment—principally the latter, I'm afraid. It was bad luck to the extent that the U-boat was sighted down to leeward, so that there was no alternative but to put over my 'fire-raft' on the windward side. The bad judgment came in through my underestimating the force of the wind and the fierceness with which the kerosene would burn when fanned by it. Scarcely had it been touched off before there was a veritable *Flammen-werfer* playing against thirty or forty feet of the windward side, and in a way which made it impossible for a man to venture there to cast off the wire cables which moored the raft. As this class of M.L.s have wooden hulls, you will readily see that this was no joke.

“The splash of the beam seas proved an efficacious antidote, so far as the hull was concerned, however; but how some other highly inflammable material I was carrying 'midships escaped being fired in the minute or more that I was swinging her through sixteen points to bring the raft to the leeward of her—— Well, I can only chalk that up to the credit of the special Providence that is supposed to intervene especially to save drunks and fools. You can bet your life I never let myself be tempted into making that break again, though it involved a trying exercise of self-restraint when it

chanced that the very next Fritz I sighted also bore down the wind.

“The two or three U-boats which were sighted in the course of the next five or six weeks ducked under without firing a shot, and I was beginning to think that perhaps they had somehow got wind of my little plan and were taking no chances in playing up to it. Then, one fine clear morning, up bobs a Fritz about six thousand yards to windward, and begins going through his part of the show almost as though he was one of our own submarines with which I had been rehearsing. His firing at us was about as bad as mine at him; but he finally lobbed one over that was close enough, so I knew he couldn't tell whether it was a hit or not, and on that I touched off the fire-raft, which was soon spouting up a fine pillar of flame and smoke. To discourage his approach on the surface, I kept up a brisk firing to give him the impression that we were going to live up to British Navy traditions by going down fighting, and to convince him that it would be much safer to close under water. This came off quite according to plan, and presently I saw the loom of his conning-tower dissolve and disappear behind the spout of one of our shells, which looked to have been a very close thing.

“I stood on at a speed of five or six knots, but on a course which I reckoned he would anticipate and allow for. When I figured that he was not

over a mile away, I dropped a float over the stern with a time-bomb attached to it, the detonation of which in this way I had found by experiment to furnish a much more life-like imitation of an internal explosion in a ship—when heard in hydrophones, I mean—than that of a depth-charge. The periscope which was shortly poked cautiously up for a tentative ‘look-see’ could not, I am pretty nearly dead certain, have revealed anything to belie the impression I had laid myself out to convey—that M.L. ——— was an explosion-riven, burning, and even already, probably a sinking ship. Besides the gay gush of flames from the fire-raft, which must have appeared to be roaring amidships, lurid tongues of fire were also spouting out of the forrard and after hatches, and from several of the ports; while a thirty-degree list to starboard might well have indicated that she was about to heel over and go down. I had looked at her that way from a periscope myself, while I was studying the effect of some ‘stage property’ flares in comparison with ordinary gasoline ‘blow-torches,’ and knew how much she looked like the real thing even when you knew she wasn’t. The list? Oh, that was a very simple matter. This class of M.L.s is never on an even keel for long, anyhow, and the installation of a couple of tanks made it possible to pump water back-and forth and give her any heel we wanted. We put her almost on her beam ends when we were experimenting on the thing, and without upsetting

things much outside of the galley, which we had neglected to warn of what devilry was afoot.

“ If we didn't look helpless and harmless enough for any Fritz to run right up alongside and ‘gloat over,’ I'll eat my hat; and that was what I was counting on this fellow doing. Indeed, I'll always think that was just what he *did* intend to do eventually; only it was the way he went about doing it that was near to upsetting the apple-cart. It seemed reasonable to suppose that he would come up and do his gloating on the side he approached from, and so that was the side I had prepared to receive him on. The heavy list she was under to starboard would have made it possible to bring the gun to bear on him until he was almost under the rail, and then there would be a chance for a lance-bomb. If he came up on the other side by any chance, I had figured that the game would be all up; for there was the fire-raft to give it away, while the list would be on the wrong slant to give the gun a show. Well, whether it was accident or intent, that is just what he did—broached abeam to port, about half a cable's length off the sizzling tank of flaming kerosene.

“ That next minute or two ” (D—— sat up in bed in the excitement of the memory of that stirring interval, and I felt one of his gesticulating fists come with a thump against the bottom of my mattress) “ called for some of the quickest thinking and acting I was ever responsible for pulling off.

If he stayed up, it flashed to my mind, there was just the chance I might ram him; while if he ducked down, there would probably be a good opening for a depth-charge. I rang up full speed at the same time I was shouting orders to cast off the fire-raft, and to bash in one end of the starboard 'tilting-tank' with an axe. We had considered the possibility of this emergency arising, as much as we hoped it wouldn't, so that no time was lost in meeting it. The fire-raft, boom and all, was cast off clean, and quickly left astern. In scarcely less time was the tank emptied, though the sudden flood from it—it was on the upper deck, understand—came very near to carrying overboard the man who broached it. With motors, of course, we were running all out in 'two jerks,' and she was doing several knots over twenty when, with helm hard-a-starboard, she began rounding on the startled Fritz.

“There was no doubt about the fact that he *was* startled, let me tell you. And, when you think of it, it must have been a trifle disconcerting to see the blown-up and burning boat he had come up to gloat over, and perhaps loot before she went down, suddenly settle back on an even keel and come charging down on him at twenty-five knots. The 'moony' fat phizes that showed above the rail of the bridge were pop-eyed with surprise—yes—and indecision, too, for there were several valuable seconds lost in deciding whether to come on up—she

had risen to the surface with only an 'awash' trim—and make a fight with her gun, or to dive.

“ I don't think it would have made a great deal of difference in his own fate which he did, but you can bet it made a lot of difference to me. I don't mind telling you that I was never gladder about anything in my life—at least anything since the rain that came at the end of a three-months' drought to save my corn-crop a few years back—than when those moon-faces went into eclipse and I saw him begin to submerge. Although it had never formed a part of any plan I had ever worked out, I give you my word that I fully intended to ram him, and that would have meant—well, about the same thing as one airplane charging into another. I should almost certainly have finished him, while at the same operation—but I don't need to tell you that a match-box like this was never made for bull-at-a-gate tactics. I've never heard of one of this class of M.L.s getting home with a good square butt at a U-boat, and I'm very happy to say that it didn't happen on this occasion. I don't think that we even so much as grazed his 'jump-string'; but the whole length of him was in plain sight sloping away from his surface swirl, and it was easy as picking ripe pippins to plant an 'ash-can' just where it was needed. The only aggravating thing about it was that, although oil came boiling up in floods for three days, there was never a Hun, nor even an unmistakable fragment of U-boat

wreckage, picked up as a souvenir. There was never any doubt about the sinking, however, for the trawlers located the wreck on the bottom with a sweep, and gave it a few more 'cans' for luck.

"But the best evidence in my own mind," concluded D——, pulling the blankets up higher over his shoulders as he settled back into the bunk, "is the fact that, six weeks later, the identical stunt I had tried this time actually lured another Fritz up to eat out of my hand almost exactly as I had been planning for. Now, if that first one had really survived and been able to return to base, it is certain that its skipper would have told what he saw, and that there would have been a general order (such as came out some months later when they finally did twig the game) warning all U-boats against coming up to gloat at close range over burning M.L.s. The fact that this second one was such easy picking proves beyond a doubt that the other never got back."

"That last was the one you 'threw the hammer' at, wasn't it?" I asked, leaning far out to make my words carry down to D——'s now blanket-muffled ears.

"Yes," came the wool-dulled answer. "Tell you some other night. Gotta get warm now. Toddy can's empty. Make a tent of the blankets with your knees, and take the electric heater to bed in it, if you can't stop shivering any other way. Good night."

CHAPTER IX

“ Q ”

AT three miles, as seen from the bridge of the battleship, the small craft which was steering a course that would bring her across our bows in the course of the next few minutes was absolutely nondescript, completely defying classification. A mile closer, however, it appeared to be as plain as day that she was some ancient fishing boat, but bluffer of bow and broader of beam than the oldest of trawlers or drifters in the service. It was only when she was right ahead, and but six or eight cables' lengths distant, that a vagrant sun-patch came dancing along the leaden waters beyond her to form a scintillant background against which she stood out as what she was—the sweetest-lined little steam yacht that ever split a wave. The fishing-boat effect had been obtained by a simple arrangement of colours which effectually clipped the clippiness from her clipper bows and equally effectually discounted the graceful overhang of her counter.

In plain words, they had blocked in the lines of a bluff, squatty tug on her hull with some kind of paint that was very easy to see, and covered the

rest of her with a paint that was very hard to see. A few changes in rig, and the alteration was complete.

“Quite the cleverest and simplest bit of camouflage I ever saw,” said the captain, lowering his binoculars. “It’s only the fact that we’re looking down on her from a considerable height against that bright sheet of water that gives a chance to follow her real lines at all. From the deck—and even more so from the bridge of a submarine, or through its periscope—it would be a lot easier to tell what she *isn’t* than what she *is*. As a matter of fact, I can’t say that I know what she is even now. It is evident that she *was* a yacht, and no end of a beauty at that. But now, in that guise—probably some sort of patrol or anti-U-boat worker, for a guess, perhaps a ‘Q.’”

The officer of the watch turned aside for a moment from the gyro across which he had been sighting. “I think she must be the ‘——,’ sir,” he said. “Some American millionaire had her in the Mediterranean, and, wanting to do his bit, brought her up to Portsmouth and turned her over to the Admiralty to do what they wanted with her so long as it would help to lick the Hun. She’s been mixed up in several kinds of stunts, and is supposed to have a U-boat or two to her credit. Her present skipper’s a Yank who came to her from a M.L. They say he’s no end of a character, but right as rain on his job and with a natural nose for trouble.

One of his hobbies is making his ship look what she isn't, and, in order to see her as she would appear to a U-boat, he goes out and studies her through the periscope of one of our own submarines. When one of these isn't handy, he sometimes goes out in a whaler and studies her through a stubby periscope poked over its gunwale. He got blown right out to sea one night when he was making some experiment from a whaler in 'moonlight visibility,' and didn't get back till the next morning. It had no effect on his enthusiasm, though, for he was out on the same stunt the next night. No question about his nerve, nor his luck, nor his skill, for that matter. Smart seamanship probably has as much to do with the fact that he has never been torpedoed as has his fancy camouflage."

I made up my mind at once that here was a man worth meeting and hearing the story of, but as the only base he seemed to have was not easy to reach, and as his ship was reported at sea on the only occasions I was free to go there, some weeks went by before I was able to carry out my plan of paying him a visit. Then, one morning, a nondescript craft, which might have been anything from a wood-pile to a Chinese junk half a mile away, came nosing inconsequentially through the lines of the Grand Fleet and moored alongside the very battleship in which I happened to be at that time.

“ K—— has come in with the ‘ —— ’ to ‘ swing

compasses,'” the navigating officer announced to the ward-room. “He’s a ‘converted side-wheel river ferry-boat’ this morning, or something of the kind; and he’s going to get blown to sea in a ‘sudden gale,’ or something of the kind; and he says that, if anyone doesn’t believe it, to come aboard and he’ll give ‘em something to stimulate their ‘stolid British imaginations.’”

As certain lockers of the “——” had not been entirely looted of their age-mellowed treasure when the yacht was dismantled for sterner service than lounging about limpid Mediterranean harbours, the doubters were, naturally, many; but it is pleasant to be able to record that those who came to scoff remained—to tea. Indeed, it was not until after tea that I had a chance for a half-hour’s yarn alone with K—— in the “banquet-hall-deserted” splendour of the stripped saloon. It was then that he told me how it was he chanced to “come across and get into the game.”

He used the latter expression several times, I remember, and to no one that I can recall having met, either on land or sea, was the grim work he was doing more of a “game” than to this brave, resourceful, devil-may-care Middle Westerner.

“I had had a fair bit of experience in yachting and boating during the last six or eight years before the outbreak of the war,” he said, settling back at ease in one of the two remaining lounging-chairs, “and most of it has stood me in good stead at one

time or another since I have been on the job over here. I sailed a single sticker on Lake Michigan for a number of seasons, and I used to run down from my home in Lake Forest to business in Chicago in my own motor-boat on and off during the summer. It was what I knew of the latter which got me on a 'M.L.' without any preliminary hanging about when I first came over early in the war. What I knew about sailing has been all to the good almost every day I have been at sea, from the time I lured on a U-boat by ringing up my 'M.L.' as a disabled fishing-smack to the time when I had to bring this poor little old girl into port under canvas after I had knocked out her propellers with one of her own depth-charges." It was a fantastically amusing tale, that last. "It was the culmination of my experiments in scientific camouflage," said K——, with a baleful smile. "Up to that time any contrivances to deceive the Hun were getting more and more intricate right along; since then they have tended more and more toward extreme simplicity. It was this way, you see, that I happened to work up to that depth-charge crescendo. From the first I had been striving to give the U-boat mixed impressions of me, especially on the score of which way I was going. This, as I soon found out from studying the thing in the proper way, is much easier to do in the case of a man whose observation is limited to a few feet above the water than in the case of one who has a more lofty

coign of vantage to con from. That is to say, it's much easier to convey false impressions, especially regarding your direction, to a man with his eye to a periscope than to one in the foretop of a battleship, to take the two extremes. Trying now one thing and now another as I had more experience, I found that where at first every shot fired at me was directed ahead with a more or less approximate allowance for the ship's progress in that direction, after a while they began to go oftener and oftener astern, indicating they were confused as to my rate of change. It was just as I was about to put the crowning touch on my efforts in 'mixing direction' that the trouble occurred. As the experiments with this particular contrivance never went any further, there will hardly be any harm in my telling you what it was and how it worked.

"I had already, with the aid of a couple of slanting fins, attached something after the fashion of bilge-keels, only just below the water-line on either quarter, worked up a fairly satisfactory 'bow wave' aft, and I was endeavouring to supplement this by a scheme for making it appear as though the sky was moving past her funnel in the direction it wasn't. You see, I was working on the same principle which deceives you when you think the standing train you are in is in motion when you see the one on the next track start up.

"As the U-boat skipper's 'look-see' is often

limited to a hurried sort of a peep, I figured that if I could contrive to keep a rather conspicuous imitation sky of canvas running past the masts and funnels in the same direction she was going, only faster, it might create the illusion—in the distorted ‘worm’s eye’ vision of the man at the periscope—that she was going in the opposite direction. I studied some make-shift rigs from water-level through a periscope, and made up my mind the scheme was worth trying.”

K—— relighted his cigar and resumed with a sad smile.

“I still think the idea was good,” he said, “but it took too complicated an installation to carry it out, especially on a small craft with a low free-board. There were gearings and transmissions and rollers, and heavens knows what not, needed to make the endless strip of canvas ‘sky’ run smoothly, and there were also many wires and ropes. It was one or the other of the latter which was responsible for the disaster, for while the thing was still in the ‘advanced experimental’ stage a U-boat popped up close by one day—probably a bold attempt on its skipper’s part to see if he really saw what he thought he had seen—and I spun the ‘——’ around on her tail (one of the nice things about her is that she will turn in a smaller circle than most destroyers) and tried, first choice, to ram him, and, second choice, to drop a depth-charge down the hole he had ducked into. I was too

late to ram by a few seconds, and there must have been a good fathom or two of clearance between my keel and the conning-tower I had driven for. The bridge and the two periscopes he had 'turtle-necked' in showed clean and sharp in the clear water as I leaned over the port side of the bridge—the easiest chance a man ever had for kicking off a 'can' just where it ought to go. As I turned to the depth-charge release I already had visions of him falling apart like a cracked egg, with bobbing bubbles and howling Huns coming up to the surface together. It was only a couple of days before that I had picked up several British fishermen—all that were left alive after a U-boat skipper had vented his morning hate by shelling the boat in which they were leaving their sinking trawler—and I was still mad enough to want to ram Heligoland if a chance had offered. I felt a kind of savage joy in the chance to put that tin of T.N.T. where it would wipe out a bit of the score I had been checking up against the Hun, and I seemed to see a sort of a Hand of Fate in the fist I was reaching up to the handle of the release. It couldn't miss, I told myself, and—well, it didn't.

"The explosion 'jolted' at the proper interval all right, but not in the proper place, nor in the proper way. I was watching for the up-boil squarely in the middle of the right-angling propeller swirl of the submarine, but that was receding, smooth and unbroken, when the crash came. The

fact is, I never did see the spout from that charge—for the very good reason that it was tossed up almost under the ‘——’s’ counter, where it knocked off the blades of both propellers and all but blew in her stern. The depth-charge had fouled a trailing wire from some of my ‘stage scenery sky’ and been dragged along to detonate close astern. I saw her taffrail shiver and kick upwards, and the shock was strong enough to upset my balance even on the bridge. That last was the first thing that made me sure something had slipped up, for, ordinarily, the jolt from a properly set ‘can’ is no more than that from a sharp bump against the side of a quay. I mean the jolt as felt on the bridge, of course; below, and especially in the engine-room or stokehold, it is a good deal more severe. It was the shattering jar of this one that told me it had gone wrong, and then, when she began to lose way and refuse to answer her helm—the rudder had been knocked out, too, but not enough so that it couldn’t be tinkered up to serve temporarily—I knew it was something serious.

“It was a good deal of a relief to find that, badly buckled as some of the plates were, she wasn’t making any more water aft than the pumps could easily take care of. That was the first thing I looked after, and the next was the U-boat; or rather, we were looking out for both at the same time. If there was one thing more than another that helped to reconcile me to the double disappointment of

missing my crack at the Hun and knocking my own ship out, it was the fact which soon became apparent, that Fritz never knew about the latter. If he *had* known the shape I was in, he could have finished me off a dozen times over during the hour or more the '——' was lying helpless, and before the first armed trawler showed up in answer to my S.O.S. Just why he didn't, I could never make quite sure, but the chances are it was one or both of two things. It is quite possible that the biff from the depth-charge—which must still have been almost as near to him as it was to me when it exploded—may have done the submarine really serious injury, perhaps even sinking it. We never found any evidence, however, that this had been the case. Whether he was damaged or not, there is no doubt that his close call gave him a bad scare. There could have been nothing in the explosion to tell him that it did any harm to his enemy, and, since he did not have his periscope up, there was no way he could see what had happened. Doubtless expecting another 'can' any moment, and knowing well that it would be only a matter of an hour or two until there would be a lot more craft joining in the chase, it is probable that he followed the tactics which you can always count on a U-boat following when it knows a hunt is on—that is, to submerge deeply and lose no time in making itself just as scarce as possible in the neighbourhood where the hue-and-cry has started. That's the only

way I can account for the fact that this particular pirate didn't have a revenge after his own Hunnish heart. We were about evenly matched for guns probably, and doubtless I would have had rather better than an even break on that score, because a surface craft can stand more holing than a submarine. But there was nothing to prevent his taking a sneaking sight through his periscope from a safe distance and then slipping a mouldie at us, which, helpless as we were for a while, there would have been no way of avoiding. A moving ship of almost any class, provided it has a gun to make him keep his distance, has a good fighting chance of saving herself from being torpedoed by the proper use of her helm; a disabled ship, though she has all the guns in the world, has no show if the Fritz really thinks she's worth wasting two or three torpedoes on. If he has his nerve, and any luck at all, he ought to finish the job with one.

“So I think you'll have to admit,” said K—— with a whimsical smile, “that, under the circumstances and considering what might have happened, I felt that I had no legitimate kick coming in having to take her home under sail. Fact is, I considered myself in luck to have a ship to take home at all. The rudder, luckily, though a good deal bent and twisted, had not been blown away. It took a lot of nursing to turn it, and, when we finally got her off under mainsail, forestaysail and jib, the eccentricities it developed took a lot of getting

used to. Although it was quite fortuitous on our part, the course we steered during the thirty hours we put in returning to base was the most complex and baffling lot of zigzagging I ever had anything to do with. If a U-boat skipper lying in wait for us could have told what she was going to do next, I can only say that he would have known a lot more than I did.

“At the end of an hour or two a couple of trawlers hove in sight and closed us to be of what help they could in screening. They made a very brave show of it until we got under weigh, and then they were led just about the wooziest dance you ever heard tell of. By a lucky chance, for me, not for the trawlers, there was a spanking breeze on the port quarter (for the mean course to base, I mean); and it wasn't long before the little old girl, even under the comparatively light spread of sail on her, was slipping away at close to nine miles an hour. That won't surprise you if you noticed the lines of her. I've turned back in her log and found where she's run for thirty-six hours at fourteen miles, even with the drag of her screws, which always knock a knot or two off the sailing speed of a yacht with auxiliary power.

“Well, that nine miles an hour was a good bit better than those trawlers could do under forced draught, and after falling astern for a while, they started to catch up by shortening their courses by cutting my zigzags. That was where the fun came

in. It would have been easy enough if I had been zigzagging according to Hoyle. But where I didn't know myself just what she was going to do next, how was I going to signal it to them, will you tell me? About every other time that they tried to anticipate my course they guessed wrong, and were worse off than before as a consequence. They must have been a very thankful pair when one of the two destroyers which finally came up took them off to hunt the submarine. The other destroyer stood by to escort me in. Her skipper offered me a tow, but I was anxious to save face as much as possible by returning on my own, and so declined. In case of an attack it would have been better to have him screening than towing anyhow. In the end, when we got in to where the sea room was restricted, I was glad to take a hawser from a tug they sent to meet me to keep from putting her on the mud.

“ You may well believe that effectually put an end to my experiments with ‘movable sky,’ and other similar mechanical complexities,” K—— continued with a laugh. “ Indeed, from that time on I have been inclining more and more to simpler things, rig outs that are sufficiently free from wheels within wheels to leave the mind clear for the real work in hand, which, after all, is putting down the Hun, not merely deceiving him as to what you are. You see how simple a setting our present one is; yet it is very complete in its way, and I

have reasonable hopes of success with it. No, I can hardly tell you just what I am driving at with it, or just how I am going to go about it. In a month or two, when its possibilities have been exhausted and it has become a wash-out perhaps I shall be a bit freer to talk about it.

“Come and spend a day or two with me at the end of about six weeks, when my present round of stunting will probably be over, and I’ll tell you all the ‘Q’ yarns that the law allows. The Hun is dead wise to the game on principle, so there can’t be any point in keeping mum any longer on stunts that he’s twiggged a year or so ago, and which you’d have about as much chance of taking him in with as you’d have in trying to sell a gold brick on Broadway.”

Three months went by before I was able to take advantage of K——’s invitation to pay him a visit at what he had called his “business headquarters,” and as I had naturally expected that she would have played many and diverse parts in the interim, it was with some surprise that I found the “——” still “dressed” as she had been when I last saw her.

“We’ve never quite been able to pull it off,” K—— explained, “and the waiting, and the not-quotes and the might-have-beens have given me no end of a dose of that kind of hope deferred which maketh the heart sick. But we’ve at least been

lucky enough not to queer the game by showing our hand, so that there's still as good a chance as ever to make good with it under favourable circumstances. For that reason, the less we say about it for the present the better. That's in regard to this particular stunt, I mean. As for the rest of the 'Q' stuff that we've brought off, or tried to bring off, during the last three years—I'm at your service to-night after dinner. The Germans have been publishing accounts of some of the stunts, under the title of 'British Atrocities,' for some months now, but as there are slight variations from the truth here and there, you may still be interested in getting some of the details a bit nearer the original fount.

“ They claimed, for instance, that when one of their 'heroic' U-boats ran alongside an armed British patrol boat, which had surrendered to it, to transfer a boarding-party, an officer of the M.L. rushed on deck and threw down on the deck of the submarine what the skipper of the latter took to be a packet of secret books, and that this 'packet,' exploding, eventually resulted in the sinking of the guileless German craft. Now, about the only thing which is correct about that account is the statement that a U-boat was sunk. It wasn't an armed M.L. that surrendered to Herr Ober-Lootenant—armed M.L.'s don't do that sort of thing, take my word for it—but an unarmed, or practically unarmed, pleasure yacht, which had

apparently become disabled and blown to sea. And the trusting U-boat did not come alongside to put aboard a prize crew to navigate its captive to a German port as they'd try to make you believe, but only to sink it with bombs placed in the hold, so as to save shells or a torpedo. And it wasn't a packet of secret books that put the pirate down, but a 'baby,' and *my* baby at that. No, I don't mean that I threw a real child of mine to Moloch—I haven't any to throw—but only that the idea of this literal *enfant terrible*, with a percussion cap on the top of his head and a can of T.N.T. for a body, originated under my hat.

"It's not surprising that the Huns didn't get the thing straight at first, though I believe one of their later versions does have a child in the cast, for none of the Germans present have yet returned to tell just what happened. About half of them never will see their beloved 'Vodderland' again, and I don't mind telling you that I'm not wearing any crepe on my sleeve on that account, either. Do you know"—K——'s face flushed red and his brow contracted in the anger the thought aroused—"that those——pirates were going right ahead to sink what they thought was nothing but a pleasure yacht, with a number of women and children in it, although it was plain as day to them that the one boat carried would founder under a quarter of our number? That's your Hun every time, and it was just that insensate lust of his to murder

anything helpless that I reckoned on in baiting my trap. I felt dead certain—— But I'll tell you the whole yarn this evening.”

Several bits of salvage from the “ ——’s ” pleasure-yacht days figured in the little feast K—— had spread that evening, and I remember particularly that the Angostura was from a bottle Commodore P—— had himself secured at the time when that incomparable bitter was distilled in a little ramshackle pile-built factory at Ciudad Bolivar, on the upper Orinoco. And the coffee that same genial *bon vivant* had had blended and sealed in glass by an old Arab merchant at Aden, while the Benedictine had cost him a climb on foot through an infernally hot August afternoon to an ancient monastery inland of Naples. It was between sips of Benedictine—from a priceless little Morning Glory-shaped curl of Phœnician glass, picked up in Antioch one winter by the owner, and overlooked in the “ stripping ” operations—that K—— told me the story of the first of what he called his “ Q-rious ” operations.

“ There was a story attached to just about every little package of food and drink P—— left in the yacht,” said K——, unrolling the gold foil from a cigar whose band bore the name of a Piñar del Rio factory which is famed as accepting no order save from its small but highly select list of private customers in various parts of the world; “ and in the several letters he has written begging me to make

free with them he has told me most of the yarns. The consequence was that, while the good things lasted—they're most of them finished now—I was getting in the way of enjoying eating and drinking them, telling where they came from and how they were come by, just about as much as good old P—— himself must have done. In fact, I think that their possible loss was about my worst worry when I tried my first 'Q' stunt on.

“The success of any kind of stunt for harrying the U-boat is very largely a matter of psychology, and this is especially so in the 'Q' department. The main point of it is to make the enemy think you are more harmless than you really are. There is nothing new in the idea, for it is precisely the same stunt the old pirate of the Caribbean was on when he concealed his gun-ports with strips of canvas and approached his victims as a peaceful merchantman. As a matter of fact, I think it was the Hun himself who started the game in this war, for I'm almost dead sure that we had tried nothing of the kind on—in a systematic way, at any rate—up to the time one of his U-boats rigged up a mast and sails and lured on victims by posing as a fisherman in distress.

“Obviously, it's a game you can't use any kind of craft that is plainly a warship in, and the burning question always is as to how far you will sacrifice punishing power to harmlessness of appearance. A light gun or two is about as far as you

can go in the way of shooting-irons, and even these are very difficult to conceal on a small boat. Likewise a torpedo tube. I tried that first stunt of mine without either, and that's where the psychology came in.

“ Most of the ‘ Q-boats ’ they were figuring on at that time were of the slower freighter type, with a rather powerful gun mounted for'ard and concealed as well as possible by something rigged up to look like deck cargo.

“ That was, however, all well and good as far as it went, I figured, but, from such study of the Hun's little ways as I had been able to make, I had my doubts as to whether an old cargo boat would prove tempting enough bait to put a Fritz in the proper mental state for a real ‘ rise ’—one in which he'd deliver himself up to you bound and gagged, so to speak. *That* was the kind of a thing I wanted to make a bid for, and, by cracky, I pulled it off.

“ From all I could pick up, from the inside and outside, about the ships that had already been torpedoed, I came to the conclusion that the Hun would go to a lot more trouble, and take a deal bigger chance, to put down a vessel with a number of passengers than he would with a freighter. And even that early in the War a U-boat had exposed itself to being rammed by a destroyer, when it could have avoided the attack entirely by foregoing the pleasure of a Parthian shot at a lifeboat which was already half-swamped in the heavy seas. *That*

was the little trait of the Hun's that I reckoned on playing up to when I began to figure on taking the '——' out U-boat strafing without any gun larger than a Maxim aboard her. I'd have been glad enough of a good four-incher, understand, if there had been any way in the world it could have been concealed. But there wasn't, and rather than miss getting into the game at all, I was quite content to tackle it with such weapons as were available. That was where my 'che-ild' came in.

"On the score of weapons available, there were only two—the lance-bomb and the depth-charge. For the kind of game I had in mind, it was to the former that I pinned my faith. It was powerful enough to do all the damage needful to the shell of a submarine if only a chance to get home with it could be contrived. 'Getting it home' has always been the great difficulty with the lance-bomb, and up to that time the only chap to have any luck with it was the skipper of a M.L.—another Yank, by the way, who came over and got into the game in the same way, and about the same time, that I did. He had been the champion sixteen-pound hammer-thrower in some Middle Western college only a year or two before, and, by taking a double turn on his heeling deck, managed to chuck the bomb (which is on the end of a wooden handle, much like the old throwing hammer) about three times as far as anyone ever dreamed of, and cracked in the nose of a lurking U-boat with it.

“Unluckily, I was not a hammer-thrower, and so had to try to bring about an easier shot. It was with this purpose in view that I submitted a proposal to reconvert the ‘——’ temporarily to the outward seeming of a pleasure yacht; to make her appear so tempting a bait that the Hun’s lust for *schrecklichkeit*, or whatever they call it, would lure him close enough to give me a chance at him. They were rather inclined to scoff at the plan at first, principally on the ground that the enemy, knowing that there was no pleasure yachting going on in the North Sea, would instantly be suspicious of a craft of that character. I pointed out that there was still a bit of yachting going on in the Norfolk Broads, which the Hun, with his comprehensive knowledge of the East Coast, might well know of, and that there would be nothing strange in a craft from there being blown to sea in a spell of nor’west weather. Of course, the ‘——’ isn’t a Broads type by a long way, but I didn’t expect the Hun to linger over fine distinctions any more than the trout coming up for a fly does. The sequel fully proved that I was right.

“It was largely because the stunt I had in mind promised to cost little more than a new coat of paint and a few rehearsals, which could easily be carried on in the course of our ordinary patrol duties, that I finally received somewhat grudging authorisation to go ahead with it. It was not till the whole show was over that I learned from the

laughing admission of the officer who helped secure that authorization, that the fact that the output of real M.L.'s was becoming large enough so that they were about independent of the use of yachts and other pleasure craft for patrol work, also had a good deal to do with the granting of it.

"I already had several well-trained machine-gunners in the crew, so that about the only addition I had to make to the ship's company was a half-dozen boys to masquerade as ladies. As they were not meant to stand inspection at close range, nothing elaborate in the way of costume or make-up was necessary. They wore middy jackets, with short duck skirts, which gave them plenty of liberty of action. Most of them (as there was nothing much below the waist going to show anyway) simply rolled up their sailor breeches and went bare-legged, and one who went in for white stockings and tennis shoes was considered rather a swanker. Their millinery was somewhat variegated, the only thing in common to the motley units of head-gear being conspicuousness. There was a much beribboned broad-brimmed straw, a droopy Panama, a green and a purple motor veil, and a very chic yachting effect in a converted cap of a lieutenant of Marines with a red band round it. Less in keeping, if more striking, was a Gainsborough, with magenta ostrich plumes, a remnant from some 'ship' theatricals.

“ Hair wasn't a very important item, but they all seemed to take so much pleasure in 'coiffeuring' that I took good care not to discourage their efforts in that direction. The spirit that you enter that kind of a game in makes all the difference in the world in its success, and these lads—and, indeed, the whole lot of us—were like children playing house. All of them were blondes—even a boy born in Durban, who had more than a touch of the 'tar brush,' and one—a roly-poly young Scot, who had made himself a pair of tawny braids from rope ravellings—looked like a cross between 'Brunnhilde' and 'The Viking's Daughter.'

“ It was only during rehearsals, of course, that these lads were 'ladies of leisure.' The rest of the time I kept them on brass polishing and deck-scrubbing, with the result that the little old '——' regained, outwardly at least, much of her pristine ship-shapiness. The 'gentlemen friends' of the 'ladies' were even more of a 'make-ship' product than the latter.

“ Indeed, they were really costumes rather than individuals. I don't mean that we used dummies, but only that there were eight or ten flannel jackets and boater hats laid ready, and these were to be worn more or less indiscriminately by any of the regular crew not on watch. Their rôle was simply to loll on the quarterdeck with the 'ladies' while the U-boat was sizing us up, then to join for a few minutes in the 'panic' following the hoped-for

attack, and finally to beat it to their action stations.

“That a ‘baby’ was by far the most effective disguise for the first lance-bomb we hoped to chuck home was obvious at the outset. Both of them had heads, their general shapes (when dressed) were not dissimilar, while the ‘long clothes’ of the infant was found to have a real steadying effect on the missile, on the same principle that ‘streamers’ act to bring an air-bomb down nose-first. Of course, a child in arms, like this one was to be, wasn’t just the kind of thing one would take pleasure yachting; but I knew the Huns took their nurslings to beer gardens, and thought that that might make them think that the Englanders—who were incomprehensible folk anyhow—might take this strange way of accustoming their young to the waves which they sang so loudly of ruling.

“The decisive consideration, however, was the fact a baby was the only thing except a jewel-case that a panicky woman in fear of being torpedoed would stick to. As you can’t get a lance-bomb in a jewel-case, it was plainly ‘baby’ or nothing.

“In the end, because I was afraid that none of the feminine make-ups was quite good enough not to awaken suspicion at close range—I decided that the heaving over of the ‘baby’ should be done by a ‘gentleman’ instead of by a ‘lady.’ As one of the seamen put it, it was only ‘nateral that the

nipper's daddy 'ud be lookin' arter 'im in time of danger,' and I had read of sailors being entrusted with children on sinking ships. The man I picked for the job—the 'father of the che-ild,' as he soon came to be called—was not the one who had proved the best in distance throwing in the trials, but rather one on whose cold-blooded nerve I knew I could count in any extremity.

“ He was a Seaman Gunner, named R——, and was lost a year ago when a rather desperate 'Q' stunt he had volunteered for miscarried. He had just the touch of the histrionic desirable for the intimate little affair in question, and the way he played his part fully justified my selecting him.”

K—— leaned back in his chair and blew smoke rings for a minute before resuming his story. “ There are some kind of stunts, like this one I've been trying to bring off for the last two or three months,” he said, “ that always seem to hang fire; and there are others where, from first to last, everything comes up to the scratch on time, just like a film drama. That first one I'm telling you about was like that, everybody—even to the U-boat—coming on to its cue. Indeed, when I think of it now, the whole show seems more like a big movie than anything else.

“ By the time we were letter perfect in our parts, there came two or three days of just the kind of a storm I wanted to make a good excuse for a dinky little pleasure boat being out in the middle of the North Sea. I took care, of course, to be 'blown'

to the last position at which an enemy submarine had been reported.

“Then, where a destroyer or a M.L. might have cruised round for a month without sighting anything but fog and the smoke of some of our own ships on the horizon, we picked up a Fritz running brazenly on the surface the first morning. That was first blood for my harmless appearance right there, for he must have seen us some time previously of course, and had we looked in the least warlike, would have submerged before even our lookout spotted his conning-tower.

“As it was, he simply began closing us at full speed, firing as he came. It was rotten shooting at first, as shooting from the very poor platform a submarine affords usually is, but, at about three thousand yards, he put a shell through the fo’c’sl’, luckily above the water-line. The next minute or two was the most anxious time I had, for, if he made up his mind to do it that way, there was nothing to prevent his sticking off there and putting us down with shell-fire.

“Perhaps if the two or three shots which followed had been hits, that is what he would have done. It was probably his disgust at the fact that they were all ‘overs’ that determined him to close in and finish the job with bombs. Possibly, also, the fact that I appeared to be starting to abandon ship at this juncture convinced him finally that the yacht had no fight in her, and it may well be that

the temptation to loot had something to do with his decision. I could never make quite sure on those points, for Herr Skipper never confided what was in his mind to the one officer who survived him. At any rate, he came nosing nonchalantly in and did just what I had been praying for the last month he would do—poked right up alongside. The heavy sea that had been running for the last two or three days had gone down during the night, so that he was able to stand in pretty close without running much danger of bumping.

“The extent of my abandoning ship had been to follow the old sea rule of saving the women and children first. Or rather, we put the women off in our only boat; the baby, I won't need to tell you, was somehow 'overlooked.' The boat was lowered in full view of the Hun, who was about fifteen hundred yards distant at the moment, and there was a little unrehearsed incident in connection with it that must have done its part in convincing him that what he was witnessing was a genuine piece of 'abandon.' One of the girls—it was the blonde 'Brunnhilde,' I believe—not wanting to miss any of the fun, started to hang back and tried to bluff them into letting her stay by swearing that she'd rather face the Hun than desert her child. As a matter of fact, the 'Gainsborough' had more claim on the kid than 'Brunnhilde,' for she—I mean he—had cadged its clothes from a sweetheart who worked in a draper's shop. If I had been there

personally, I'm afraid 'Brunnhilde's' little bluff would have won through, for a man whose wits are keen enough to spring a joke at a crisis has always made an especial appeal to me. To the bo'sun, however, orders were orders, and his answer to the recalcitrant blonde's insubordination was to rush her to the rail by the slack of her middy jacket, and to help her over it with the toe of his boot.

"The 'K——'s' low freeboard made the drop a short one, and, luckily, 'Brunnhilde' missed the gun'nel' of the whaler and landed gently in the water, from where she was dragged by the ready hands of her sisters a few moments later. They do say, though, that she turned a complete flip-flop in the air, and that there was a display of—well, if a Goerz prism binocular won't reveal the difference between a pair of blue sailor's breeches and French lingerie at under a mile, all I can say is that we've much overrated German optical glass. As I learned later, however, the Huns, observing only the fall and missing the revealing details, merely concluded that the Englanders were jumping overboard in panic, and dismissed their last lingering doubts and suspicions.

"The girls were already instructed that they were to lie low and keep their peroxide curls out of sight as long as they were within a mile or so of the submarine, so as not to tempt the latter to follow them up for a look-see at closer range. The

boat had orders to pull astern for a while, and then, if the Hun was observed to come alongside the ‘ —— ’ as hoped, to turn eight or ten points to port and head up in the direction from which he had appeared. The reason for this manœuvre, which was carried out precisely as planned, you will understand in a moment.

“ On came Fritz, coolly contemptuous, and on went the show, like the unrolling of a movie scenario. For a while I was fearful that he might order back my boat to use in boarding me with, but as soon as he was close enough to be sure that I had no gun he must have decided so much trouble was superfluous. He had only one gun, it was evident—the gunners kept sweeping it back and forth to cover from about the bridge to the engine-room as they drew nearer—and presently I saw men, armed with short rifles, coming up through both fore and after hatches. Far from exhibiting any signs of belligerency, I still kept three or four of my ‘ flannelled fools ’ mildly panicking. Or, rather, I *ordered* them to panic mildly. As a matter of fact, they did it rather violently—a good deal more like movie rough stuff than the real thing.

“ Little difference it made to Fritz, though, who seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that the British yachtsman should show his terror like a Wild West film drama heroine. On he stood, and when he came within hailing distance, a burly ruffian on the bridge—doubtless the skipper—

shouted something in guttural German-English which I never quite made out, but which was probably some kind of warning or other. I don't think I saw any of my crew exactly 'Kamerading', but I needn't tell you that every man in sight was doing his best to register 'troubled passivity', or something like that. I had anticipated that I might not be in a position to signal his cue to R——, and so had arranged that he should keep watch from a cabin port, and to use his own judgment about the time of his 'entrance.' I was afraid to have him on deck all the time for fear the 'che-ild' might be subjected to too careful a scrutiny. R—— was just in flannels, understand, so there was nothing suspicious in his own appearance. He did both his play-acting and his real acting to perfection, neither overdoing nor underdoing one or the other.

"The U-boat was close alongside, rapidly easing down under reversed propellers, before R—— appeared, just as natural an anguished father with a child as you could possibly ask for. Two or three of the Huns covered him with their carbines as he dashed out of the port door of the saloon—that one just behind you—but lowered the muzzles again when they saw it was apparently only a half-distracted parent trying to signal for the boat to come back for him and his babe. I have no doubt that there were some very sarcastic remarks passed on that U-boat at this juncture about the courage of the English male. *If* there were, the next act of

the coolest and bravest boy I ever knew literally forced the words down their throats.

“ The whaler which, following its instructions, had been pulling easterly for some minutes, now bore about four points on the port quarter, so that R——, in his apparent endeavour to call its attention to the deserted babe, could not have seemed to have been doing anything suspicious when he swung the bundle above his head and rushed to the rail almost opposite the U-boat’s conning-tower. That rotary upward and backward swing was absolutely necessary for getting distance with, and without it there was no way that forty or fifty pound infant could have been hurled the fifteen feet or more which still intervened. As it was, it landed, fair and square, in the angle formed by the after end of the conning-tower and the deck. At the same instant our machine-guns opened up through several of the port scuttles, which had been specially enlarged and masked with that end in view, and in a few seconds there was not an unwounded Hun in sight. The gunners had been the first ones sprayed, with the result that they were copped before firing a shot. Their torpedoes, or course, were too close, and not bearing properly enough to launch.

“ Immediately following the explosion of the bomb and the opening of the machine-gun fire a strange thing happened. I saw the U-boat’s bow-rudders begin to slant, saw her begin to gather way,

heard the hum of motors as the rattle of the Maxims (their work completed) died out, and—down she went, and with three hatches open, and a ragged hole abaft the conning-tower where the ‘baby’ had exploded in its final tantrum. I could never get any sure explanation of this from any of the survivors we fished up out of the water, but everything points to the probability that the skipper—perhaps inadvertently, as the up-kick of the bomb blew him overboard—pulled the diving klaxon, and the officer in the central control room, not knowing just how things stood above, proceeded to submerge as usual. Doubtless the men who should have been standing by to close the hatches in such an emergency had been caught by the machine-gun fire. With every man below tied down with his duties in connection with submerging her, it is quite conceivable that nothing could be done, once she was below the surface, to stop the inrush of water, and that she was quickly beyond all hope of bringing up again. I didn’t have a fair chance to size up the hole ripped open by the bomb, but rather think that also was large enough to have admitted a good deal of water.

“It was rather disappointing in a way, having her go down like that, for as things had turned out, it was a hundred to one we should otherwise have captured her almost unharmed. There was a good deal of solace, however, in the fact that none of the Huns were getting back to tell what happened to

them, so that this identical stunt was left open for use again. As a matter of fact, variations of it were used a number of times, by one kind of craft or another, before an unlucky slip-up—the one which finished poor R——, by the way—gave the game away and started us veering off on other tacks. I have had a number of successes since that time,” concluded K——, pouring me a glass of the yacht’s 1835 Cognac as a night cap, “but never a one which was quite so much like taking candy from a child as that ‘opener.’”

CHAPTER X

THE WHACK AND THE SMACK

THERE was always a strange and distinctive fascination to me in standing on the bridge of one ship and watching other ships—and especially lines of ships—push up and sharpen to shape above the edge of the sea.

This feeling, strong enough in ordinary times—when it was but a peaceful merchantman one watched from and but peaceful merchantmen that one saw—is intensified manifold when it is a warship's bridge one paces, and only the silhouettes of ships of war that notch the far horizon. Battleship, battle cruiser, light cruiser, destroyer, sloop, trawler, and all the other kinds and classes of patrol craft—each has its own distinctive smudge of smoke, its own peculiar way of revealing its identity by a blurred foretop, funnel, or superstructure long before its hull has lifted its amorphous mass above the sky-line.

And now to the sky-line riddles one was given to read, and to be thrilled by as the puzzle revealed itself, had been added the great troop convoy from America, my first sight of one of which was just unfolding. H.M.S. *Buzz*, in which I chanced to be

out at the time, was not one of the escorting destroyers, and it was only by accident that the course she was steering to join up with a couple of other ships of her flotilla on some kind of "hunting" stunt took her across that of the convoy, and passed it in inspiring panoramic review before our eyes. From dusky blurs of smoke trailing low along the horizon, ship after ship—from ex-floating palaces with famous names to angular craft of strange design which were evidently the latest word in standardised construction—they rose out of the sea (as our quartering course brought us nearer) until a wide angle of our seaward view was blocked by an almost solid wall of steadily steaming steel.

There was a lot to stir the imagination in that sight—aye, fairly to grip you by the throat as a dawning sense of what it portended sank home. In the abstract it was the living, breathing symbol of the relentless progress of America's mighty effort, a tangible sign of the fact that her aid to the Allies would not arrive too late. What it stood for concretely is best expressed in the words of the young R.N.R. sub-lieutenant who was officer of the watch at the time.

"It looks to me," he said, with a pleased smile, as he lowered his glass after a long scrutiny of the advancing lines of ships, "as though there'd be jolly near forty thousand new Yanks to be catered for in Liverpool by to-morrow evening."

“Yes,” I said somewhat dubiously, my mind suddenly assailed by a misgiving awakened by the thousands of yards of torpedo target presented by the sides of those placidly ploughing ships, “that is, assuming that they get there safely. But they’re only just entering the danger zone now, and there’s a lot of water got to stream under their keels before they berth in the Mersey.

“I don’t know anything about convoys, or the ways of protecting them; but all the same, it looks to me as though that bunch of troopers would offer a mark like the map of Ireland to a U-boat, and a lot more vulnerable one.”

Young P—— laughed as he bent, squint-eyed, to take a bearing on a destroyer zigzagging jauntily with high-flung wake in the van of the approaching fleet.

“That’s what everyone—even an old sailor—says the first time he sights one of the big transatlantic convoys,” he said; “and if there are any skippers new to the job in that lot there, that’s just what *they’re* saying. It’s all through failure to appreciate—indeed, no one who has not seen the ins and outs of it would be in a position to appreciate—the effectiveness of the whole anti-submarine scheme, and, especially, what almost complete protection thoroughly up-to-the-minute screening—with adequate destroyers and other light craft—really affords. As a matter of fact, every soldier in that convoy is probably a good deal safer now—

and right on in through this so-called danger zone to harbour—than he was marching down Broadway to the pier—at least, if Broadway is like it was when I used to put in to New York as a kid in the *Baltic*.”

“But will you tell me,” I protested, “how a U-boat, firing two or three torpedoes from, say, just about where we are now, could possibly miss a mark like that?”

“Well, it would take a bit of missing from hereabouts, I admit,” was the reply; “only, if there is any Fritz still in the game with the nerve to try it, he would also be missing himself.”

“What would happen to him?” I asked.

“One or all of two or three things might happen,— P— answered, after ordering a point or two alteration in course to give safe berth to the nearing destroyer.

“He might get his hide holed by gunfire, he might get split open by a depth-charge, he might get rammed, and he might get several other things. With all the luck in his favour, he might even get a transport. But there’s one thing I can assure you he wouldn’t get—and that’s back to his base. There may be two or three bearings from which one of these big convoys appears to present a mark as wide and unbroken as the map of Ireland; but there’s nothing in heaven or earth to save the Fritz who hasn’t learned by the sad example of no

small number of his mates that it is quick suicide for him to slip a mouldie down one of them."

"You mean that he doesn't try it? that he's afraid to take the chance?" I asked somewhat incredulously, for I had somehow come to regard Fritz, though a pirate, as a dashing and daring one when the stake was high enough.

"Except under very favourable circumstances, yes," was the reply; "and now that, with the coming of the American destroyers and patrol boats, we are able to do the thing the way we want to, what Fritz might reckon as 'very favourable circumstances' are becoming increasingly fewer and farther between. Now a few months ago, when we were just getting the convoy system under weigh, and when there was a shortage of every kind of screening craft, things were different. Fritz's *moral* was better then than it is now, and we didn't have the means of shaking it that we have piled up since. At our first convoys, straggling and little schooled in looking after themselves, he used to take a chance as often as not, if he happened to sight them; but even then he rarely got back to tell what happened to him. There was the one that tried to celebrate the advent of 'Peace-on-Earth-Good-Will-to-Men' last Christmas Day by sinking the *Amperi*, which was one of a convoy the *Whack* (in which I was Number Two at the time) was helping to escort. Well, I couldn't say much for his 'Good-Will-toward-Men,' but he certainly found a short

cut to 'Peace-on-Earth,' or at least the bottom of the sea.

"Now that chap took a real sporting chance, and got his reward for it—both ways. I mean to say, that he sunk the ship he went after all right—which was his reward one way; and that we then sunk him—which was his reward the other way. There was a funny coincidence in connection with that little episode which might amuse you. We were——"

He paused for a moment while he spelled out for himself the "Visual" which one of the escorting destroyers was flashing to the convoy leader, but presently, with a smile of pleased reminiscence, took up the thread of his yarn. This is the story that young Sub-Lieutenant P——, R.N.R., told me the while we leaned on the lee rail of the bridge and watched the passing of those miles-long lines of packed troopers as, silently sure of purpose, superbly contemptuous of danger, they steamed steadily on to deliver their cargoes of human freight one step further towards the fulfilment of its destiny.

"It was Christmas Day, as I told you," he said, bracing comfortable against the roll, "and a cold, blustering, windy day it was. Several days previously we had picked up a small slow convoy off a West African port, and were escorting it to a port on the West Coast of England. The escort consisted only of the *Whack* and the *Smack*, the skipper of the latter, as the senior officer, being in command. None of the ships—they were mostly slow

freighters—had had much convoy experience to speak of at the time, and we were having our hands full all the way keeping them in any kind of formation. They seemed to be getting worse rather than better in this respect as we got into the waters where U-boat attacks might be expected, but this may have been largely due to the weather, which was—well, about the usual mid-winter brand in those latitudes. In fact, we were just becoming hopeful that the rising wind and sea, both were about ‘Force 6,’ might make it impossible for submarines to operate during the day or so that still must elapse before reaching port, when trouble began.

“All the morning the *Plato*, which had been a bad straggler throughout, had been falling astern, and finally the *Smack* ordered *Whack* back to prod her on and do what could be done in the way of screening her. She still continued to lose distance, however, so that, at noon, we were nearly out of sight of the main convoy, of which little more than smoke and topmasts could be seen on the northern horizon.

“At that hour the *Smack*, doubtless because he had received some report of the presence of U-boats in his vicinity, ordered us to rejoin the convoy. We left an armed trawler to do what it could for the loitering *Plato*, and started off at the best rate the weather would allow to make up the distance lost. It was at this juncture that the

amusing little coincidence I mentioned a while ago occurred.

“A patrol-boat, of course, does not carry a padre, any more than it does a number of the other comforts and luxuries provided in cruisers and battleships, and for that reason we hadn't been able to do very much in the way of a Christmas service. Several of the ship's company were somewhat religiously inclined, however, and these, in lieu of anything better, had asked for and received permission to hold a bit of a song service, in case there was opportunity for it, during the day. As the morning had been a rather full one, no suitable interval offered until their rather poor apology for a Christmas dinner was out of the way, and we were headed back to join the convoy. Then they went to it with a will, and for the next hour or more fragments of Yuletide songs came drifting back to my cabin to mingle with a number of other things conspiring to disturb the forty winks I was trying to snatch while the going was good. After a while, it appears, having run through their repertoire of Christmas songs, they started in on Easter ones, ‘Bein’ that they was mo’ or less on the same subject,’ as one of them explained to me later. They had just boomed the last line of a chorus which concluded with ‘We shall seek our risen Lord,’ when a signal was received stating that a periscope had been sighted by some ship of the convoy, and, sure enough, off they had to go to

seek—well, I wouldn't take the Hun quite so near his own valuation of himself to put it as the song does, but all the same that quick new kick of the screws told me as plain as any words, even before I read the signal, that the old *Whack* was jumping away to seek *something* that had risen.

“The convoy was dead ahead of us at a distance of about seven miles when I reached the bridge, and, the visibility being unusually good for that time of year, I could see all of the ships distinctly, as they steamed in two columns of three abreast. I was even able to recognise the *Amperi* in the centre of the leading line. We were just comforting each other with the assurance that it was getting too rough for a U-boat to run a torpedo with any chance of finding its mark, when a huge spout of water jumped skyward right in the middle of the convoy. When it subsided, the *Amperi*, with a heavy list to port, could be seen heading westward, evidently with her engines and steering gear disabled, while the rest of the convoy, smoke rolling from their funnels, were ‘starring’ on northerly courses.

“The alarm was rung, and as the men rushed to action stations a signal was made to the *Smack* asking what was wrong. She replied, ‘*Amperi* torpedoed; join me with all dispatch.’ This, of course, we had already started to do, though the wind and sea were knocking a good many knots off our best speed. It was evident enough that the

Amperi had received a death-blow, so that we were not surprised to find them abandoning ship as we began to close her.

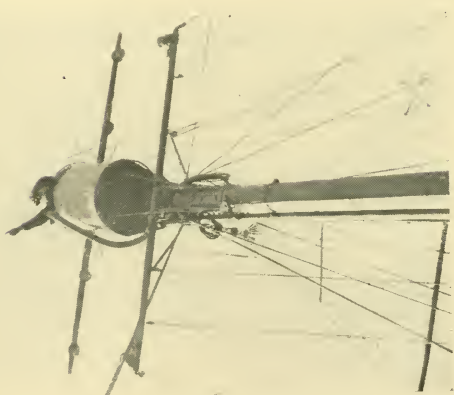
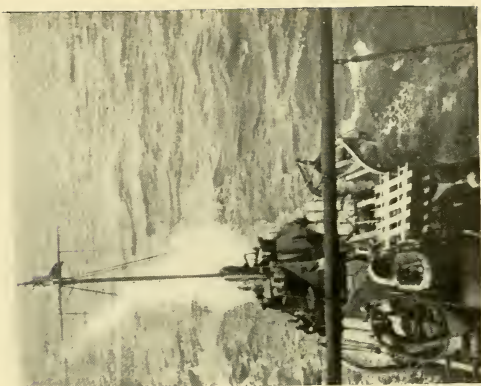
“Rotten as the weather was for it, this was being conducted most coolly and skilfully, and three boats had already left her before we came driving down to her assistance. *Smack* had signalled us to pick up survivors, and we had stood in, at reduced speed, to 250 yards of the now heavily heeling ship, with the intention of proceeding on down, to the leeward of her to the aid of two of her boats, when we sighted three or four feet of periscope sticking out of the water, one point on the star-board bow and at a distance of about a couple of hundred yards. To see anything at all in rough water like that, you understand, a periscope has to be poked well above the slap of the waves, and that about equalizes the greater difficulty there is in picking up the ‘feather’ when it’s choppy.

“I was at my action station with the 12-pounder batteries at this juncture, but as it looked like a better chance for the depth-charges than the guns, no order to open fire was given just yet. The captain ordered the helm to be steadied, and rang up ‘Full speed ahead’ to the engine-room. We passed the periscope ten yards on the port side, and when the stern was just coming abreast it, two charges were released together. As they were both set for the same depth it is probable that the one staggeringly powerful explosion we felt was caused by

their detonating simultaneously. The shock was as solid as though we had struck a rock, and I could feel a distinct lift to the ship before the impact of it. There was something so substantially satisfying about that muffled jar that it seemed only in the natural course of things that it effected what it was intended to. The bow of the U-boat broke surface almost immediately, the fact that it showed before the conning-tower proving at once that she was hard hit and heavily down by the stern. Indeed, the deck of her from the conning-tower aft was fated never again to feel the rush of sea air.

“She was now less than a hundred yards right astern of us, and heading, in a wobbly sort of way, like a half-stunned porpoise floundering away from the ‘boil’ of a depth-charge, on just about the course the *Whack* had been on when she kicked loose her ‘cans.’

“The skipper put the helm hard-a-starboard, with the idea of turning to ram, at the same time ordering me to open fire with the port twelve-pounder. That was what I had been waiting for. The gun-crew was down to three—through the others having been detailed for boat work in connection with picking up the survivors from the *Amperi*—but that didn’t bother a good deal in a short and sweet practice like this one. The ship was bobbing like a cork from the seas, in addition to her heavy heel from the short turn and the vibration from the grind of the helm. But neither did



THE LOOK-OUT ON A DESTROYER AND PART OF HIS VIEW

any of these little things matter materially, for we'd always made a point of carrying out our target practice under the worst conditions.

“The first round, fired at three hundred yards, was an ‘over’ by a narrow margin, but the second, at two hundred yards, was a clean hit on the conning-tower, carrying away the periscope and the stays supporting it. The explosion of this shell appeared to split the whole superstructure of the conning-tower, from the bridge to the deck. I did not see anyone on the bridge at this moment, and if there had been he must certainly have been killed. The fact that the submarine seemed to have been blown to the surface by the force of our exploding depth-charges rather than to have come up voluntarily, may account for the fact that no head was poked above the bridge rail as she emerged. If she had come up deliberately it would have been the duty of the skipper and a signalman to pop out on to the bridge at once to be ready for eventualities. Evidently they had no chance to do so on this occasion, and as a consequence spun out their thread o’ life by anywhere from twenty to thirty seconds—whatever that was worth to them.

“My third shot plumped into her abaft the conning-tower, and the explosion which followed it had a good deal more behind it than the charge of a twelve-pounder shell. Before I had a chance to see what had blown up, however, we had rammed her, and whatever damage that shot had caused dis-

solved in the chaos of what proved the real *coup de grâce*. That ramming was undoubtedly one of the prettiest little jobs of its kind, one of the most neatly finessed, ever brought off.

“ Since running over the submarine and dropping the depth-charges the captain had turned the *Whack* through thirty-two points, a complete circle. This brought her back to a course just at right angles to the beam of the now helpless enemy, toward which she was driven to the limit of the last kick of the engines. Just before the moment of impact the screws were stopped dead, so as to sink the bow and reduce the chance of riding over the U-boat and rolling it under her stem, as has occasionally happened, instead of cutting it straight in two. The jar, when it came, was terrific, throwing from his feet every man not holding to something; yet there was that in the clean, sweet crunch of it that told me that it had accomplished all the heart could desire, even before the next second furnished graphic ocular evidence of it.

“ The sharp, fine bows of the *Whack* drove home well abaft the conning-tower, and—though the staggering jar told of the resistance met—for all the eye could see, cut through like a knife in soft butter. Indeed, the amazing cleanness of the cut has always seemed to me the most remarkable feature of the whole show. The bow end of the U-boat, with the conning-tower, was the section which was cut off on my side—port—and the even cross-sec-

tion of it that gaped up at me was very little different from that I once saw when one of our own submarines was being sawed through amidships in connection with some repairs. Even the plating did not appear to be bent or buckled. The impression that ring of shining clean-cloven steel left on my mind was of a cut as true and even as could have been done in dock with an acetylene flame. This was largely imagination, of course; and yet how photographic my mind-picture is you may judge from the fact that I have distinct recollection of seeing the thin circle of red lead where it showed all the way round beneath the grey of the outer paint.

“The heavily tilted main deck of the interior of this section of the U-boat did not appear to be flooded at this juncture, though any water that had been shipped, of course, would have been in the now submerged bows. I have a jumbled recollection of wheels and levers and switchboards, fittings of brass and steel, and what I took to be three torpedoes—one on the port side, and two, one above the other, on the starboard. The most arresting thing of all, however, was the figure of a solitary man, the only one, strange to say, that anybody reports having seen. He was scrambling upward toward the opening, and I have never been quite sure whether he was ‘Kamerad-ing’ with his uplifted hands, or whether they were raised preparatory to the dive it is quite probable he intended to make into the sea.

“Whichever the attitude was, it had no chance to serve its purpose. The stern section of the U-boat—the one most heavily damaged by the depth-charges—was seen to sink abreast the starboard 12-pounder battery by the crew of that gun, but the forward part—the one with the conning-tower, which I had seen into the interior of—buoyed up by the water-tight compartments in the bows, continued to float. Observing this, the Captain ordered the helm put a-starboard, and as we turned, the 4-inch gun and my 12-pounder opened up together. My very first round, fired over the port quarter, hit and exploded fairly inside the gaping end of the section, right where I had last seen the man with upraised hands. That, and the two or three smashing hits by the 4-inch gun, finished the job. A whirlpool in the sea marked the rush of water into the severed end, and this section—for all the world as though it had been a complete submarine—tossed its bows, with their elephant-ear-like rudders, skyward, and planed off on an easy angle toward the bottom. Its disappearance was complete. There were no survivors, and practically no floating wreckage. Only a spreading film of oil and a tangle of torn wakes slowly dissolving in the wash of the driving seas marked the scene of the action. It had lasted something over ten minutes.

“The *Whack* suffered considerable damage from the impact with the submarine, though not enough

to give us serious worry, even in so heavy a sea. The stem was bent over to port, like a broken nose, and the buckling plates caused her to make quite a bit of water. We had no trouble coping with this, however, and made port, with the survivors of the *Amperi* aboard, without difficulty. There we soon had the—well, not unmixedly unpleasant—news that the *Whack's* wounds were of a nature somewhat comparable to what the Tommy in France calls a 'Blighty.' Without having any real permanent harm done her, she was still enough banged up to need a special refit, the period of which, of course, the most of us would be able to spend at home on leave. Yes, indeed," he concluded, grinning pleasedly, "that was a ripping piece of ramming in more ways than one."

P—— went over and bent above the shivering "Gyro," for a moment, took a long look through his glasses at the last of the now receding convoy, and then came back and rejoined me by the rail.

"There was one little thing I neglected to tell you about," he said presently, "and that was the part the *Smack* played in that show. Although the *Whack* got all the *kudos* for the sinking, there is a decided possibility that a bit of a stunt the *Smack* brought off before ever we came up may have been largely if not entirely responsible for us getting the chance we did.

"*Smack*, you see, was near at hand when the *Amperi* was torpedoed, and the instant her Captain

saw the spout of water shoot up in the air, he altered course and drove at full speed for the point he reckoned the submarine would be most likely to be encountered. He reports that he had the good fortune to hit it, while it was still submerged, and that the shock was severe enough to throw men off their balance. Shortly after that a periscope appeared, and it was this that gave the *Whack* her chance to drop her depth-charges.

“Now, not unnaturally, the Captain of the *Smack* had good reason to believe that his striking the U-boat, even if he only grazed her, had something to do with her reappearance on the surface at a moment when she must have known a strenuous hunt for her was in progress. Unluckily, for his claim, however, the bows of the *Smack*, when she came to be docked, did not show sufficient evidences of having been in heavy collision to warrant the conclusion that the U-boat had been enough damaged to have gone to the surface from that cause alone. Under the circumstances, therefore, there wasn't anything else to do but give the credit for bringing her up to *Whack's* depth-charges, while of course, the fact that it was also the *Whack* that rammed her was obvious enough. The consequence was, as I said, that *we* got all the *kudos*.”

He gazed for a few moments at the back-curling bow-wave, before resuming. “Yes, *we* got all the *kudos*,” he said slowly; “but, all the same, I've never been able to figure why Fritz didn't douse his

periscope and try to dive deeper when he saw the *Whack* rounding toward him, if it wasn't because there was something pretty radically wrong with him already. I can't help thinking that the old *Smack* had a lot to do with starting that Fritz on his downward path, even if it was the *Whack* that gave him the final shove."

It was very characteristic, that last little explanation of P——'s. If there is one thing more than another that has impressed me in hearing these young British destroyer officers tell the "little games they have played with Fritz," it is the fine sporting spirit in which they invariably insist in sharing the credit of an achievement with every other officer, and man, and ship that has in any way figured in the action. It was the fault of the Hun that we could no longer treat the enemy as we would an opponent in sport; but that only makes it all the more inspiring to see the fellow-players still keeping alive the old spirit among themselves.

CHAPTER XI

BOMBED!

IT was generally admitted by flying-men, even before the failure of the attempts to destroy the *Goeben* while ashore in the Dardanelles early in '18, that the air-bomb was a most uncertain and ineffective weapon against a large ship of any class, but especially so against a warship with deck armour.

The principal reason for this is that the blunt-nosed air-bomb, no matter from how high it may be dropped, has neither the velocity nor the structure to penetrate the enclosed spaces of a ship where its explosive charge would find something to exert itself against.

This is why an 18-pounder shell, penetrating to a casemate or engine-room, for instance, may easily do more damage to a warship than an air-bomb of ten times that weight expending its force more or less harmlessly upon an upper deck.

Merchant ships, with their inflammable and comparatively flimsy upper works, are more vulnerable to air-bombs than are warships, but even of these

very few indeed have been completely destroyed as a consequence of aerial attack. Some of the gamest fights of the war on the sea have been those of merchant skippers who, in the days before their ships had guns of any description to keep aircraft at a distance, brought their vessels through by the exercise of the boundless resource which characterises their kind, usually by sheer skill in manœuvring. A very remarkable instance of this character I heard of a few days ago from a Royal Naval Reserve officer who figured in it.

“I was in a British ship temporarily in the Holland-South American service at the time,” he said, “and we were outward bound from Rotterdam after discharging a cargo of wheat from Montevideo. It was before the Huns had raised any objection to ships bound for Dutch ports using the direct route by the English Channel, and also before the U-boats had begun to sink neutrals on that run. Except for the comparatively slight risk of encountering a floating mine, we reckoned we were just about as safe in the North Sea as in the South Atlantic. Of course, we carried no gun of any kind—no heavy gun, I mean. We *did* have a rifle or two, as I will tell you of presently.

“Why the attack was made we never had any definite explanation. In fact, the Germans themselves probably never knew, for they tumbled over themselves to assure the Holland Government that there was some misunderstanding, and that they

would undertake that nothing of the kind should occur again.

“ My personal opinion has always been that it was a sheer case of running amuck on the part of the Hun aviator responsible for the outrage; for, as I have said, we were empty of cargo, our marks were unmistakable, and we were steering a course several points off the one usually followed by the Dutch boats to England. Anyway, he paid the full penalty for his descent to barbarism.

“ It was a clear afternoon, with a light wind and lighter sea, and we were steaming comfortably along at about nine knots, heading for the Straits of Dover, when the look-out at the mast-head reported a squadron of 'planes approaching from the south.

“ Presently we sighted them from the bridge— five seaplanes, three or four points off our starboard bow. There had been reports of noonday raids on Calais for several days, and I surmised that those were Hun machines returning from some such stunt.

“ Holding to an even course, the squadron passed over a mile or more to the starboard of us, and it was already some distance astern when I saw one of the machines—I think it was the one leading the ‘ V ’— detach itself from the others and head swiftly back in our direction. There was nothing out of the way in this action at a time when every ship was held in more or less suspicion by

both belligerents, and it seemed to me so right and proper that the chap should come and have a look at us, in case he had some doubts, that I did not even think it necessary to call the 'Old Man' to the bridge, or even send him word of what I took to be no more than a passing incident.

"Descending swiftly as he approached, the Hun passed over the ship diagonally—from port quarter to starboard bow—at a height of six or eight hundred feet.

"'That'll end it,' I thought. 'Our marks, and the fact that we're in ballast, ought to satisfy him.'

"But no. Back he came. This time he was a hundred feet or so lower, and flying on a line directly down our course, passing over us from bow to stern. Again he swung round and repeated the manœuvre in reverse, this time at a height of not more than four hundred feet. He had done this five or six times before it occurred to me that he was taking practice sights for bombing; but not even then, when I saw him with his eye glued to his dropping-instrument, did it occur to me that he was doing anything more than trying his sights. It was at the next 'run' or two that the thing began to get on my nerves, and I called up the skipper on the voice-pipe and told him I did not quite like the look of the circus.

"The Old Man was in the middle of his afternoon siesta, but he tumbled out and came puffing up to the bridge at the double. He was no more

inclined to take the thing seriously than I was, but, on the offchance—which your careful skipper is always thinking of in the back of his brain-box—he rang up ‘More steam’ on the engine-room telegraph, and ordered the quartermaster to start zig-zagging, a stunt we had already practised a bit in the event of a submarine attack.

“‘If he’s just trying his eye,’ said the Old Man, ‘it’ll give him all the better practice to follow us; while, if he’s up to mischief, it may fuss him a bit.’

“The Hun had just whirled about three or four cables’ length ahead of us, when the smoke rolling up from the funnel and the swinging bow must have told him that we were trying to give him a bit more of a run for his money. Circling on a wider turn, he came charging straight down the line of our new course, flying at what I should say was between two and three times the height of our masts. We were looking at the machine at an angle of about forty-five degrees—so that he must have been about as far ahead of us as he was high, say, a hundred yards—when I saw a small dark object detach itself from under the fuselage and begin to come directly towards us, almost as though shot from a gun.

“It was the only bomb I ever saw fall while I was in a sufficiently detached state of mind to mark what it looked like. ‘Fall’ hardly conveys a true picture of the way the thing seemed to approach, for the swift machine, speeding at perhaps

a hundred miles an hour, must have imparted, at the instant of releasing, a good deal of lateral velocity.

“At first it was coming almost head on to the way I was looking at it, and, greatly foreshortened, it had so much the appearance of a round sand-bag that it is not surprising that the skipper took it for some kind of practice dummy. ‘Probably a dud,’ I remember him saying; ‘but don’t let it hit you. Stand by to duck!’

“My next recollection is of the thing beginning to wobble a bit, probably as the nose began to tilt downward; but still it seemed to be coming straight toward us rather than simply falling. I seem to recall that the seaplane passed overhead an appreciable space before the bomb, but I must have heard it rather than seen it, for I never took my eye off the speeding missile.

“The latter seemed at the least from fifty to a hundred feet above my head as it hurtled over the starboard end of the bridge, and I saw it with startling distinctness silhouetted against a cloud that was bright with the light of the sun it had just obscured. It was still wobbling, but apparently tending to steady under the combined influence of the downward pull of the heavy head and the backward drag of the winged tail. It appeared to be revolving.

“I have since thought, however, that I may have got the latter impression from a ‘spinner’ that is

often attached to this type of bomb to unwind, with the resistance of the air, and expose the detonator.

“Down it came until it whanged against some of the standing rigging of the foremast—seeming to deflect inboard and downward slightly as a consequence—missed the mainmast by a few feet, and struck squarely against the side of the deckhouse on the poop.

“The scene immediately after the explosion of the bomb is photographed indelibly on my memory; the events which followed are more of a jumble. The detonation was a good deal less sharp than I had expected, and so was the shock from it. The latter was not nearly so heavy as that from many a wave that had crashed over her bows, but, coming from aft rather than for’ard, the jolt had a distinctly different feel, and by a man ’tween decks would hardly have been mistaken for that from a sea.

“It was the flash of the explosion—a huge spurt of hot, red flame—that was the really astonishing thing. It seemed to embrace the whole afterpart of the ship, and everything one of the forked tongues of fire was projected against burst into flame itself.

“The ramshackle deckhouse, which had been reduced to kindling wood by the explosion, roared like a furnace in the middle of the poop. Even the deck itself was blazing. I had once been near an

incendiary bomb in a London air raid, and knew that nothing else could have produced so sudden and so fierce a fire.

“But I also knew that the first burst of flame is the worst in such a case, and that most of the fire came from the inflammable stuff in the bomb itself.

“As I had always heard that sand was better than water in putting out a fire of this kind, and knowing we carried several barrels of it for scrubbing the decks, I ordered it to be brought up and thrown on the flames, but stood by on the bridge myself in case the skipper, who was bawling down the engine-room voice-pipe for more steam, needed me for anything else.

“Luckily the sand was close at hand, and they were scattering it from buckets over the blazing deck within a minute or two. Except for the débris of the deckhouse, the fire was put out almost as quickly as it was started, and, between sand and water, even that was being rapidly got under control, when suddenly the Hun, whom I had almost forgotten in the rush of undoing his dirty work, flashed into sight again.

“The skipper had our ship zigzagging so short and sharp by this time that her wake looked like the teeth of a big, crazy saw, and this the Hun was unable to follow closely enough to get a fore-and-aft sight down her as he had done the first time.

“Coming up astern, he kicked out a bomb just before he was over her port quarter, but it only shot across her diagonally, and struck the water on her starboard side, about a hundred feet away. It went off with, if anything, a sharper crack than the one which had struck the poop, and the foam geyser the explosion shot up flashed a bloody red for the instant the water took to chill the glow of the molten thermit.

“Vanishing even more quickly was a ragged red star which fluttered for a moment beneath the surface of the water itself as the flame stabs shot out in all directions from the central core of the explosion.

“No water was thrown aboard us, and, near as I was to the explosion on the bridge, the rush of air could hardly be felt. Something that came tinkling down after striking the side of the charthouse, however—I picked it up when the show was over—turned out to be a thin fragment of the steel casing of the bomb.

“A similar fragment, twisted into a peculiar shape, struck the chest of a man leaning over the rail in the waist of the ship, inflicting a slight flesh wound the exact shape of a ragged capital ‘C.’

“That any kind of a living man could really be trying to destroy a mere merchant ship in cold blood seemed to me so monstrous, so utterly impossible, that, until the second bomb was dropped, I was almost ready to believe that the first had been

launched by accident. From then on we knew it was a fight for life.

“The Hun took a broader swerve in bringing his machine round for the next charge, and, ten times quicker on his helm than we were, anticipated our next shift of course, and came darting down on an almost straight fore-and-aft line again. The sudden cloud of our foreblown smoke—there was a following wind on the ‘leg’ they had put her on at the moment—which engulfed him at the instant his third bomb was released was the one thing in the world that could have made him miss so easy a ‘sitter.’ The quick ‘side-flip’ the sharply-banked ‘plane gave to the dropped missile threw it wide by twice the distance the second had missed us. Though the detonation rang sharp and clear, and though a vicious spout of foam shot up, I could note no effect of the thing whatever on the ship. Whether that was his last bomb or not we could never be quite sure. At any rate, it was the last he tried to drop upon us, or upon any other ship for that matter.

“Just why he returned to the attack with his machine-gun we could only guess. It may have been, as is probable, that he was at the end of the small supply of bombs left from the raid he was doubtless returning from.

“Again, however, it is just possible that the fact that the fire was being got under control on the poop impelled him to adopt an attack calcu-

lated to drive the plucky chaps who were fighting it to cover.

“Anyhow, flying just high enough to clear the tops of the masts, he came swooping back, and it was upon the men trying to put out the fire—now confined to the wreckage—of the deckhouse—that he seemed to concentrate his attack. Two or three of these I saw fall under the rain of bullets, and among them was our freight clerk, who had also been knocked down by the explosion of the first bomb, but who, being hardly stunned by the shock, was soon on his feet again and leading the fire-fighters.

“He was a good deal of a character, this freight clerk. Although well educated, he had led a free and easy existence in various parts of the world. For a year previous to the war he had been a cowboy, and some queer trait in his character made him still cling to the *poncho*, or shoulder blanket, and baggy trousers, which are the main features of the Argentine cow-puncher's rigout. It was the Wild West rig that made me notice him when he was knocked down by the bomb and later by the machine-gun fire.

“He was scarcely more hurt the second time than the first, but the bullet which had grooved the outer covering of his brain-box seemed also to have put a new idea inside it. I saw him pull himself together in a dazed sort of way after the seaplane had passed, and then shake off the hand of a man

who tried to help him, and dash off down the ladder, tumbling to cover, I thought.

“It must have been a minute or two later that I saw him, legs wide apart to keep his balance, pumping back at the Hun (who had swung close again in the interim) with a rifle—a weapon which I later learned was an old Winchester, which had been rusting on the wall of the freight clerk’s cabin. He appeared to have had the worst of the exchange, for when I looked again he was sitting, with one leg crumpled crookedly under him, propped up against a bitt.

“He looked still full of fight, though, and seemed to be replenishing the magazine of the rifle from his bandoliers.

“The skipper sent me below to stir things up a bit in the engine-room at this juncture, and I did not see my cowboy friend until he had fought two or three more unequal rounds and was squaring away, groggy, but still unbeaten, for what proved the final one.

“I don’t know whether he ever got credit for it or not, but the Old Man’s plan of action at this juncture must pretty nearly have marked a mile-post in merchant ship defence against aerial attack. We had been instructed in, and had practised the zigzag before this, but that was about the limit of our resources in this line. ‘Squid’ tactics—smoke screening—had hardly been more than thought of for anything but destroyers. Yet the

wily old skipper, literally on a moment's notice, brought off a stunt that could not have been improved upon if it had been the result of a year's thought and experience.

"The instant the Hun 'stumbled' when he struck the cloud of smoke that was pouring ahead of us, the skipper's ready mind began evolving a plan still further to besmudge the atmosphere. To-day, with special instructions and special stuff ready to hand, a merchant captain, if he needed it, would simply tell the chief engineer to 'make smoke screen.'

"On this occasion the Old Man meant the same thing when I heard him yelling down the engine-room voice-pipe to 'Smoke up like hell!'

"About all the chief could do under the circumstances was to stoke faster and cut down the draught. This he did to the best of his ability, but the screen did not bear much resemblance to one of those almost solid streams of soot a modern destroyer can turn out by spraying oil freely and shutting off the air.

"Such as it was, however, the Old Man made the most of, and by steaming down the wind accomplished the double purpose of cutting down the draught fanning the fire on the poop and keeping a maximum of smoke floating above the ship.

"The smudge bothered the Hun, but by no means put an end to his machine-gun practice. Except for the freight clerk, who was still pumping back

at the seaplane every time it swooped over, every one on the poop had been killed, wounded, or driven to cover, and, with no one to fight it, the fire was beginning to gain new headway.

“ ‘Not good ’nuf by a mile,’ I heard the Old Man muttering to himself as he eyed the quickly thinning trail of smoke from the funnels. ‘Must do better’n that or ’taint no good.’ Then I saw his bronzed old face light up.

“ ‘X——!’ he shouted, beckoning me to his side, ‘duck below, clean out all the stuff in the paint lockers and chuck it in the furnaces, ’specially the oils and turps. Jump lively!’

“This was the job I went on when I said I saw the cowboy crumpled up against a bitt, but still full of fight.

“Linseed oil, turpentine, and some tins of fine lubricants—I had them all turned out of the forepeak and carried, rolled, dragged, or tossed down to the stokehold.

“Most of the stuff was in kegs or cans small enough to go through a furnace door, and these we threw in without broaching them. The Old Man called me up twice—the first time to say that there was no increase in smoke, and wanting to know why I was so slow; and the second time to say that he had just got a bullet through his shoulder, and ordering me to come up and take over, as he was beginning to feel groggy.

“There was an ominous crackling and sputtering

in the furnaces as I sprang for the ladder, and before my foot was on the lowermost rung, one of the doors jumped violently up on its top-swing hinges from the kick of an exploding tin or keg of oil. As it fell back with a clang the swish of sudden flame smote my ears, and then a regular salvo of muffled detonations. The last picture I had of the boiler-room was of the stokers trying to confine the infernos they had created by wedging shut the doors with their scoops.

“The whole ship was a-shiver with the roaring conflagration in her furnaces as I reached the upper deck, and, above a tufty, white frizzle of escaping steam, rolled a greasy jet of smoke that looked thick enough for a man to dance a hornpipe on it without sinking above his ankles. I found the Old Man, with a dazed sort of look in his eyes, and his jaw set like grim death, hanging on to the binnacle when I gained the bridge, and all he had the strength to say, before slithering down in a heap, was, ‘Damn good smoke! Carry on—zigzag down wind! Think blighter has finished. Look to—fire.’

“The fact that the Hun was now circling the ship at considerable distance had evidently made the skipper believe that he had come to the end of his cartridges, and in this I am inclined to think the Old Man was right.

“Which fire, however, he referred to I was not quite sure about, but, in my own mind, I was rather more concerned about the one I had started with

the ship's paint than the one the Hun's incendiary bomb had set going. Indeed, the 'fire brigade,' which had taken advantage of the lull to get a hose playing on the conflagration on the poop, was rapidly reducing the latter to a black mass of steaming embers. The cowboy was still snuggled up against the bitt, which he used to rest his right elbow on in the occasional shots he was lobbing over at the now distantly circling enemy. When I learned later what a crack shot the chap really was, I cannot say that I blamed the Hun for his discretion.

"What tempted him to make that fatal final swoop we never knew. It may have been sheer bravado, or he may have been trying to frighten off the fire-fighters again. Anyhow, back he came, allowing plenty of leeway to miss my smoke screen, and only high enough to clear the masts by forty or fifty feet.

"The cowboy saw him coming, and I can picture him yet as he lay there waiting, with his cheek against the stock of that old Winchester, and following the nearing 'plane through its sights. With the rare good sense of your real hunter, he didn't run any risk of frightening off his quarry with any premature shots. He just laid doggo, and held his fire.

"If the Hun had been content to sit tight and keep his head out of sight, the chances are nothing would have happened to him; but the temptation to have a closer look at his handiwork and to jeer at

his 'beaten enemy' was too much for him. Banking as sharply as his big 'plane would stand, he leaned out head and shoulders above the wrecked poop, gave a jaunty wave of the hand, and opened his mouth to shout what was probably some sort of Hunnish pleasantry.

"The crack of the old Winchester reached my ears above the roar of the seaplane's engine, and the next thing I was clearly conscious of was the machine's swerving—sidewise and downward—and plunging straight into the trailing column of black smoke. The tip of its left wing fouled the main truck, but it still kept enough balance and headway to carry past and clear of the ship.

"It then slammed down into the water two or three hundred feet off our starboard bow, and it only took a point or two of alteration to bring it under our forefoot.

"The old ship struck the mark so fair that she cut the wreckage into two parts, and I saw fragments of wings and fuselage boiling up on both sides of our wake astern. I gave the order in hot blood, but I would do the same thing again if I had a week to think it over in, just as I would go out of my way to kill a poisonous snake.

"Of course we never knew definitely who was responsible for polishing off the Hun. For a while I thought it probable that the cowboy had only wounded him, and that his swerve into the smoke had been responsible for the dive into the sea, where

the ship put the finishing touches on the job. But from the day that the cowboy showed me that he could hit tossed-up shillings with a target-rifle four times out of five I have been inclined to believe his assestion that he 'plunked the bloomin' blighter straight through the nut,' and that I and my smoke had nothing to do with it.

"Neither the skipper nor the cowboy were much hurt, and as for the ship, she probably suffered, in the long run, more from the loss of her paint and oil supply than from the Hun's bomb and the fire it started."

CHAPTER XII

AGAINST ODDS

THE news from all the Fronts had been discouraging for several days, and it only needed that staggering announcement of the destruction of practically a whole convoy and its escort, in the North Sea, to cap the climax of gloom. This is what I had read in the fog-hastened autumn twilight, by the feeble glow of a paint-masked street lamp, in the Stop Press column of the evening paper a Strand newsboy had shoved into my hand.

“Two very fast and heavily-armed German raiders attacked a convoy in the North Sea, about midway between the Shetland Islands and the Norwegian coast, on October 17th. Two British destroyers—H.M. ships *Mary Rose* (Lieutenant-Commander Charles L. Fox) and *Strongbow* (Lieutenant-Commander Edward Brooke)—which formed the anti-submarine escort, at once engaged the enemy vessels, and fought until sunk after a short and unequal engagement. Their gallant action held the German raiders sufficiently long to enable three of the merchant vessels to effect their escape. It is regretted, however, that five Nor-

wegian, one Danish, and three Swedish vessels—all unarmed—were thereafter sunk by gunfire without examination or warning of any kind and regardless of the lives of their crew or passengers. . . . Anxious to make good their escape before British forces could intercept them, no effort was made to rescue the crews of the sunk British destroyers or the doomed merchant ships, but British patrol craft which arrived shortly afterward rescued some thirty Norwegians and others of whom details are not yet known. . . . The enemy raiders succeeded in evading the British watching squadrons on the long dark nights, both in their hurried outward dash and homeward flight.

“It is regretted that all the eighty-eight officers and men of H.M.S. *Mary Rose* and forty-seven officers and men of H.M.S. *Strongbow* were lost. All the next-of-kin have been informed.”

A few days later a second Admiralty report announced that ten survivors of the *Mary Rose* had reached Norway in an open boat, and also gave a few further particulars of the action in which she had been lost. From this it appeared that she had been many miles ahead of the main convoy when the latter was attacked, and that, possessed of the speed, with many knots to spare, to have avoided an action in which the odds were a thousand to one against her, she had yet deliberately steamed back and thrown down the gage of battle to the heavily armed German cruisers. Just why her captain chose the course he did was not, and never will be, fully explained. He went down with his ship, and

to none of those who survived had he disclosed what was in his mind. It was certainly not "war," the critics said, but they also agreed that it was "magnificent" enough to furnish the one ray of brightness striking athwart the sombre gloom of the whole disheartening tragedy. "He held on unflinchingly," concluded an all-too-brief story of the action issued to the public through the Admiralty, some time later, "and he died, leaving to the annals of his service an episode not less glorious than that in which Sir Richard Grenville perished."

From the time I read these Admiralty announcements I had the feeling that some, if not all, of those ten survivors of the *Mary Rose* would surely be able to offer more of an explanation of why her captain took her into battle against such hopeless odds than any that had yet been suggested to the public, and in the months which followed I made what endeavour I could to locate and have a talk with one of them. It was not long before the ten were scattered in as many different ships, however, and though I had the names and official numbers of two or three, almost a year went by before I chanced upon the first of them. Indeed, it was but a day or two previous to the first anniversary of the loss of the *Mary Rose* and *Strongbow* and the destruction of the Norwegian convoy that, in the course of a visit to a Submarine Depot Ship at one of the East Coast bases, I sauntered forward one evening and fell into conversation with a sturdily

built, steady-eyed young seaman—some kind of torpedo rating, evidently, by the red worsted “mouldie” on his sleeve—who had just clambered up to the forecastle from the deck of a hulking “L” moored alongside.

“How do you like submarin-ing?” I had asked him, by way of getting acquainted.

“Not so bad, sir,” he replied with a smile, “though it’s a bit stuffy and rather slow after destroyers. With them there’s something doing all the time. I was in one of the ‘M’ class before I volunteered for submarines. P’raps you’ve heard of her—the *Mary Rose*, sunk a year this month, in——”

“Wait a moment,” I cut in, as the ribbon he was wearing caught my eye; “you’re one of the men I’ve been looking for for a number of months. Ten to one you’re Able Seaman Bailey, who received the D.S.M. for his part in the action, and who is specially mentioned in the Admiralty story” (refreshing my memory from a note-book) “for having, ‘despite severe shrapnel wounds in the leg, persisted in taking his turn at an oar’ of the Norwegian lifeboat which picked up the *Mary Rose* survivors, and for his ‘invincible light-heartedness throughout.’”

A flush spread under his “submarine pallor” at that broadside, but he admitted, with an embarrassed grin, that his name was Bailey, and that his decoration was awarded for something or other in

connection with the last fight of the *Mary Rose*, though for just what he had never quite been able to figure out. In the hour we leaned over the fore-castle rail and watched the North Sea fog-bank roll up the estuary with the incoming tide, this is the account he gave me of the things which he himself saw of what is perhaps the most gallantly tragic of all the naval actions of the war.

“They hadn’t got convoying at that time down to the system it is carried on under now,” he began, by way of explanation, “and the only fighting ships with this one were the *Mary Rose* and *Strongbow*. The *Mary* was of the same class as the ‘M . . .’ over there, very large and fast and well armed for a destroyer, but never, of course, built for anything like a give-and-take fight with any kind of a cruiser.

“There was also an armed trawler somewhere about, but it had no chance to do anything but pick up survivors. We were an anti-submarine escort, nothing more, and were not intended to stand off surface raiders. Of course provision was made against these, too, but—well, when you consider the size of the North Sea and the length and blackness of the winter nights, the only wonder is that the Huns can’t buck up their nerve to trying for a convoy twice a week instead of twice a year.

“We had escorted the north-bound convoy across to Bergen, and, on the afternoon of the 16th of

October, had picked up the south-bound and headed back for one of the home ports. Escorting even a squadron of warships which know how to keep station is no picnic for destroyers, but with merchantmen it is a dozen times worse. It is bad enough even now, but a year ago, before these little packets had had much experience, it was enough to drive a man crazy. Between the faster ships trying to push on, and the slower ones falling astern, and breakdowns, and the chance of trickery, it was one continual round of worry from the time we left Base to our return.

“This time was no exception to the rule, even before the big smash. One of the Swedes—there were Norwegian and Danish as well as Swedish ships in the convoy, but we called them all ‘Swedes,’ probably because it was shorter and easier to say than Scandinavian—well, one of the Swedes shifted cargo along about dark of the 16th, with the result that the slower ships, and this included most of the convoy, lagged back, while several of the faster ones kept on.

“I don’t know whether this was done by order, or whether it just happened. Anyhow, the *Strongbow* remained behind with the slower section, while the *Mary Rose* pushed on as an escort for the faster. It was the first lot—the main convoy—that the raiders attacked first, but just what happened I did not see, for we had drawn a long way ahead of them in the course of the night.

“When I came up to stand my watch as anti-submarine lookout, on the after searchlight platform, at four in the morning of the 17th, I remember that it was cloudy and thick overhead, but with very fair visibility on the water. We were steaming along comfortably with two boilers, which gave us a big margin of speed over everything needed to cut our zigzags round the comparatively slow packets we were escorting. The sea was rough but almost dead astern, so that it made little trouble—for the moment, that is. We had enough of it a little later.

“Along toward six o'clock the visibility began to extend as it grew lighter, but there was no sign of the main convoy when, at exactly five-fifty, I sighted flashes of light fluttering along the northern horizon. Although my ears caught no sound but the throb of the engines and the churning of the screws, I had no doubt they were from gun-fire, and reported them at once by voice-pipe to the Officer of the Watch—it was Gunner T., if I remember right—on the bridge. The captain was called, and must have concluded the same, for he at once ordered her put about and sounded ‘Action Stations.’ That took me to the foremost torpedo tubes, where my station was on the seat between the tubes, with the voice-pipe gear fitted to my ears. Most of what followed I saw from there.

“In some of the published accounts of the action it was stated that the captain of the *Mary Rose*

thought that the flashes he saw were from the gun of a submarine shelling the convoy, so that when he turned back it was with the expectation of meeting a U-boat rather than powerful raiding cruisers. I don't know anything definite on this score, of course, as I only heard the captain speak once or twice (and then to give orders) before he went down with his ship, but I don't think it could possibly have been true. There is a sort of fluttering ripple to the flash of a salvo that you can't possibly mistake for that of the discharge of a single gun, and the flashes which we continued to see for some time were plainly those of salvo answering salvo. The flashes from the mingled salvos of the heavy guns of the Hun raiders could not have been confused with those from the few light guns of the *Strongbow* any more than these could have been taken to come from the single gun of a U-boat. Everything pointed to just what we learned had taken place—a cruiser raid on the convoy. There was nothing in the flashes to suggest a submarine was firing, and I can't see how the captain could have had any such impression. It was enough for him—yes, and for all of us—to know that our consort was in trouble, and I shall always think that he turned back to help the *Strongbow* with the full knowledge that he would have to face hopeless odds. He was a proper gentleman, was Captain Fox, and so there was nothing else that he *could* have done; and, what's more, there's nothing else

that we men in the *Mary Rose*—or any other British sailors, for that matter—would have had him do. It would have been against all the traditions of the Navy to have done anything else but stick by a consort to the last.”

Able Seaman Bailey smote resoundingly the hollow palm of his left hand with the fist of his right as he spoke those last words, and then, in a quieter voice, took up the thread of the story again.

“That turn through sixteen points brought the seas, which we had been running before all night, right ahead, and all in a minute she was being swept fore-and-aft by every second or third of them. Anxious as the captain was to drive her full speed (which would have been a pretty terrific gait, let me tell you, for the ‘Ms’ are very fast), it was no use.

“Plates and rivets simply wouldn’t stand the strain of the green water that anything like full speed would have bored her into, and she was finally slowed down to about twenty knots as the best she could do without flooding the decks and making it impossible to serve the guns and torpedo tubes. As she was good for a lot more than this with two boilers, I doubt very much if the third was ever ‘flashed up.’

“The first I saw of the ships which turned out to be the enemy was some masts and funnels to the north’ard and about a couple of points on the starboard bow. They were making very little smoke,

probably because they were oil-burners. As we were steering on practically opposite courses, we closed each other very quickly, and they must have been about four miles off when the captain, evidently becoming suspicious of their appearance, challenged. As there was no reply, fire was opened immediately afterward by the foremost gun, the course at the same time being altered a point or two to starboard, so that the other two guns would bear. The rest of our firing was, I think, by salvos, or rather, it was until all but the after gun were knocked out by the Hun's shells.

“Our first shots, fired at about 7,000 yards, were short; but as the salvos which followed began to fall closer to their targets, I saw the Huns alter to a course more or less parallel to ours, but plainly veering away so as to open out the range. This gave me the first silhouette view I had, and I did not need a glass to recognize them at once as German, the three straight funnels and the ‘swan’ bows being quite unmistakable. Some of our shots fell close, but I saw nothing I could be certain of calling a hit.

“However, I knew that it was not the guns the captain was counting on, but that he was trying to close to a range and bearing that might offer a chance to get home with a torpedo.

“Why the Huns did not open fire before they did I have never quite been able to figure out, unless it was that they hoped to avoid an action and so be

free to pursue and sink the leading ships of the convoy—the faster ones the *Mary Rose* had been escorting—without interference. If that is so, Captain Fox's sacrifice was not in vain, for all of these ships escaped destruction and reached port in safety. Even as it was, they had no stomach for an action at any range close enough to give us any chance to damage them either with gun-fire or torpedoes. Their plan—proper enough in its way, I suppose—was simply to pound us to pieces with the shells of their powerful long-range guns, and not to close to finish us off until all our guns and torpedo tubes were out of action. As one good salvo from either of them was more than enough to do the job, there wasn't much hope of our getting in close enough to do them serious harm. It was a bold bid the captain made for it, though.

“The course we were now on brought the seas more abeam than ahead, so that we had been able to shake out several more knots of speed, and this the captain tried to use to shorten the range. We were actually closing them at a good rate (though I wouldn't go so far as to say they were putting on all their speed to avoid it), when the Huns began firing their ranging shots. By this time we had reached a position from which there was a very fair bearing to launch a mouldie, and we were busy getting one ready to slip while the fall of shot came bounding nearer and nearer to us. I remember, in a vague sort of way, that the first salvo was short by

a long way, that the second was much nearer, and that the third, closely bunched and exploding loudly on striking the sea, threw up smoke-stained spouts which fell back into each other to form a wall of water which completely blotted out the enemy for a second or two. Then we turned loose the torpedo, and at almost the same instant two or three shells from a 'straddling' salvo hit fair and square and just about lifted the poor little *Mary* out of the water.

"All in a second the ship seemed to disappear in clouds of smoke and escaping steam, and it is only natural that my recollections of the order in which things happened after that are a good deal confused.

"I seem to have some memory of receiving from the bridge the order to fire that torpedo, but if that was so, it was the last order I did receive from there, for the explosion of one of the shells carried the voice-pipe away (though I did not twig it at the time), and from then on it was mostly the sizzle of spurting steam that came to my ears.

"There are two reasons why I know that first salvo hit us *after* the torpedo was launched, though there could not have been more than a fraction of a second between one and the other. The first is that one of the shells carried away the lip of the tube before penetrating the deck and cutting a steam-pipe. If the mouldie had been in the tube it could not have missed being exploded; or, if by a miracle

that had not happened, the tube was so much buckled that it could not have been operated. The second reason was that fragments from that shell, besides wounding me in the leg, even killed or blew overboard the rest of the crew, so that there would have been no one to get a mouldie away even if the tubes had been in working order. I remember distinctly seeing the torpedo hit the water, but I have no recollection of seeing it steady to depth and begin to run. As that is the main thing you always watch for, I can only account for the fact I did not see it by supposing that first hit came before the torpedo began to run.

“The shock of the explosion did not knock me off my seat, and a wound from a jagged piece of shell casing, though it was serious enough to put me out of commission for five months, felt only like a sharp prick on my leg. My pal, Able Seaman French, collapsed in a limp heap under the tubes, and though I saw no blood or signs of a wound, and though I never saw a man killed before, I knew he was done for. I don't know to this day where he was hit. The man whose station was at the breech-blocks I never saw again, living or dead, so I think he must have caught the unbroken force of the explosion and been blown back right over the starboard side.

“This shell, in bursting the main steam-pipe, probably had the most to do with bringing us to stop, though another (I think of the same salvo)

exploded in Number Three boiler-room and started a big fire, probably from the oil. The clouds of black smoke and steam rising 'midships made it impossible to see what was going on there. I saw some of the crew of the 'midships gun struggling in the water, and took it that they must have been blown there.

“That gun was out of action, anyway, and, because I did not hear it firing, I assumed that the foremost one had also gone wrong. The after gun was firing for all it was worth, though, and continued to do so right up to the end.

“That one salvo pretty well finished the *Mary Rose* as a fighting ship, and as soon as the Huns saw the shape we were in, they began to close, firing as they came. But even then they were careful to choose a direction of approach on which the after gun could not be brought to bear. With the foremost tubes out of action, and no crew to serve them in any case, there was nothing for me to do but sit tight and wait for orders. So I just chucked my head-gear, which was no longer of use with the voice-pipes gone, and settled back in my seat to watch the show and wait till I was wanted. There was really nothing to stay there for, but it was my 'Action Station,' and I knew it was the place I would be looked for if I was needed. On the score of cover, one place is as good as another—in a destroyer, anyhow.

“It must have been the fact that the after gun

was the only one still in action that brought the captain back from the bridge. There was really nothing to keep him on the bridge, anyway. He seemed to be making a sort of general round, trying to see what shape things were in and bucking everybody up. He was as cool and cheery as if it was an ordinary target practice, with no Hun cruisers closing in to blow us out of the water. I saw him clapping some of the after gun's crew on the back, and when he came along to the foremost tubes, not noticing probably that I was the only one left there, he sung out: 'Stick it, lads; we're not done yet.' Those were his exact words. I remember grinning to myself at being called 'lads.'

"But we *were* done, even then. The Huns were inside of a mile by now, and firing for the water-line, evidently trying to put us down just as quickly as they could.

"All their misses were 'shorts.' I don't remember a single 'over.' They were still taking no unnecessary chances. As soon as they were close enough to see that our torpedo tubes were probably jammed to port, they altered course and crossed our bows and steamed past the other side, where there was no chance of our slipping over a mouldie at them.

"We were already settling rapidly, with a heavy list to port, and as soon as the captain saw she was finished, he gave the order: 'Abandon ship. Every man for himself!' Those were the last words I

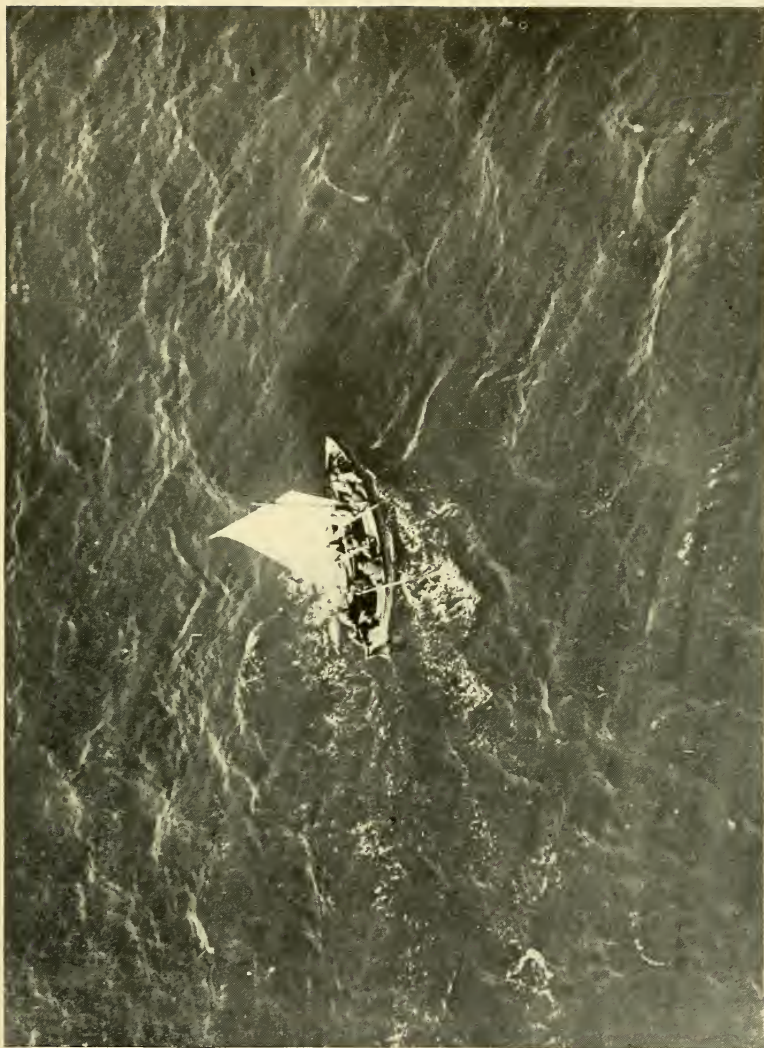
heard him speak. He went below just after that to see about ditching the secret books, I believe, and when I saw him again it was just before she sank, and he was pacing the quarterdeck and talking quietly with the First Lieutenant.

“As our only boat had been smashed to kindling-wood, there was nothing to it but to take to the Carley Floats, and the first thing I did after hearing the order to abandon ship was to see to cutting one of these loose. On account of our oilskins and life-preservers, neither myself nor any of the three or four lads from the after gun’s crew that ran to the float with me could get at our clasp-knives. Luckily, one of the Ward Room stewards came to the rescue with three silver-plated butter-knives from the pantry, and with these we finally managed to worry our way through the lashings. Then we pitched the little webbed ‘dough-nut’ (as the Carley Floats are called) over the settling stern and jumped after it. Four or five minutes later, after heeling slowly to port through fifty or sixty degrees, she gave a sudden lurch and went down, turning completely over as she sank, so that her bottom showed for a few seconds. The captain, who could have followed us just as well as not, seemed to make no effort to save himself, and must have gone down with her. I can’t help believing that was the way he wanted it to happen.

“We had clambered into the float as fast as we could, and I think some one must have said some-

thing about the danger of being caught over an exploding depth-charge, for we were paddling (all of these floats have short-handled paddles lashed to their webbing) away from the ship as fast as we could when she went down. Someone remembered that one of the 'ash cans' had been set on the 'ready' when we went to 'Action Stations,' and no one recalled seeing it thrown back to 'safe' before we went overboard. It was an anxious moment, waiting after she ducked under the sea, for we had not been able to paddle more than a hundred yards, and the detonation of a depth-charge had been known to paralyse men swimming in the water at twice that distance. Luckily, this particular charge must have been set for a considerable depth, and it is also possible that the hull of the ship absorbed or deflected some of its force. At any rate, the shock of it, when it came, though it knocked us violently against each other and left a tingling sensation on the skin of all the submerged part of one's body, did not do anyone serious injury.

"When we came to count noses, there turned out to be eight of us on the float—two sub-lieutenants, the captain's steward, myself, and the remnants of the crew of the after gun. A few minutes later we sighted a couple of men who looked to be struggling in the water, but turned out to be supporting themselves on a fragment of 'dough-nut,' which had broken loose when the ship sank. That, strange



SHE CAME BOWLING ALONG UNDER SAIL

to say, was the only bit of wreckage that came to the surface. We took these men aboard, and the ten of us weighted the overloaded float so that it submerged till the water reached our armpits. We were a good deal better off than it would seem, though, for the most of us were heavily dressed, and the animal heat of a man keeps him warm for a long time under oilskins and wool. The only ones that suffered much were a couple of lads who didn't have any more sense than to ditch most of their togs before they went over the side. They said it was so as not to be hampered in swimming—as if they expected to do the 'Australian crawl' to Norway or the Shetlands! These two *did* begin to get a bit down-hearted and 'shivery' when the cold struck into the marrow of their bones, and it was with the idea of bucking them up a peg or two that we started singing. No, I don't just remember all that we did warble, except, I'm glad to say, that 'Tipperary' wasn't on the programme, and that this did include two or three hymns. You're quite right. There's nothing very warming to a chilled man in hymns, and I'm not trying to account for why we sang them. The fact remains that we *did*, just the same, and that we all, including the chaps in their underclothes, lived to sing again.

“There was a bit of a disappointment when an armed trawler, which was evidently searching for survivors, passed within a mile without sighting us or hearing our shouts, but with the life-boat of one

of the sunk Norwegian steamers we had better luck. She came bowling along under sail about ten o'clock in the morning, and, on sighting the black silk handkerchief we hoisted at the end of a paddle-blade, eased off her sheet and stood over to pick us up. As there were only six men in her, we were not badly off for room, while the store of biscuit and potted stuff—to say nothing of smokes—they had managed to throw aboard before their ship sunk was more than enough for the two days that it took us to row and sail to Bergen.”

CHAPTER XIII

ROUNDING UP FRITZ

THERE are only two or three conditions under which a destroyer can hope to surprise a U-boat on the surface, and none of these is approximated at the end of a clear North Sea summer afternoon with the stalking craft trying to approach from a direction which silhouettes its leanly purposeful profile against the golden glimmer of the sunset clouds. This particular capsule of Kultur, rising with typical Hunnish effrontery for his evening constitutional in an especially well-watched area while it was yet broad daylight, still had the advantage of visibility sufficiently on his side to make the thing a good deal less risky than it looked. The skipper, doubtless coolly puffing his pipe as he lounged over the rail of the bridge and filled his lungs with fresh air, must have seen the masts and funnels of the speeding *Flash* for a good half hour before the latter's look-out sang out that he had picked up the conning-tower of what looked to be a U-boat two points off the starboard bow; so that all that was needed was the change of course which followed that report to give Fritz fair warning that it was

time to hide his head for a while. Indeed, he must have been going down even as he was sighted, for it was the matter of but a very few seconds more before the *Flash* found herself tearing at upwards of a thousand yards a minute into an empty sea.

Under the circumstances, it is probable we gave that Fritz a fairly good run for his money in showering the spot where he had disappeared with what depth-charges we could spare, and then, like a fox-terrier after a rat, standing by and "watching the hole." Unluckily, we had used a good part of our stock of "cans" the day before, when a rather more promising opportunity for attack had offered itself, while as for "watching the hole," this particular patch of the North Sea chanced to be one in which that way of playing the game was fraught with special difficulties because it was sufficiently shallow for a submarine to lie doggo on the bottom without danger of having its shell crushed in by the pressure of the water. This defeated the uncannily sure way of tracking the U-boat down by "listening," and demanded another form of special treatment, which we were not, however, at the moment prepared to administer.

Slim as the chance was, the captain was reluctant to leave while any hope remained, and it was only a signal ordering the *Flash* to join in some other work that had turned up (a destroyer is subject to as many kinds of summons as a country doctor) that took him off in the end. Mooring a

buoy to mark the spot for "future reference," the captain saw her headed off on the course she was to hold till daybreak, and then took me down to the Chart House for a bowl of ship's cocoa before turning in. It was some question I asked about the practice of placing buoys over possible U-boat graveyards, to make it easy to resume investigations if desired, that started him on a train of anti-submarine reminiscence that led back to one of the smartest achievements of its kind in the whole course of the sea war.

"There are times," he said, leaning back on the narrow couch that served as his "sea-bed," and bracing with outstretched legs against the twisting roll, "that a Fritz will do things that would lead a superficial observer to think that he had a sense of humour. Of course, we know that he hasn't anything of the kind (any more than he has honour, sportsmanship, decency, or any other of the attributes of a normal civilised human being). But the illusion is there just the same, especially when he tries on such little stunts as the one he incubated a couple of months ago in connection with a buoy I dropped to mark the spot where there was a chance that my depth-charges might have sent him to the bottom.

"It was just about such an 'indeterminate' sort of a strafe as the one we've just had—no chance for gun-fire, not much to go by for planting depth-charges, and, in the end, nothing definite to indicate

that any good has been done. So, in case it was decided that my report was of a nature to justify further looking into, I left a securely moored buoy to furnish a guide as to where to begin, quite as we have to-night. Well, it chanced that the S.N.O. at Base reckoned that there was just enough of a hope to warrant following up. Indeed, you may be sure there isn't much that isn't followed up these days, now that we've got our whole comprehensive plan into operation and adequate craft to support it with. So he sent out quite a little fleet of us—craft fitted to do all the various little odds and ends of things that help to make sure one way or the other what has really happened to Fritz. Luckily, *Flash* was able to return with them. If she had not—if someone who had not seen the lay of things after the strafe the night before had not been along to 'draw comparisons'—Fritz's little joke might have turned out a good deal more pointed than it did.

"We picked up the buoy without any difficulty, as the day was fine and the sea fairly smooth—just the weather one wanted for that kind of work. While we were still a mile or more distant, the look-out reported a broad patch of oil spreading out from the buoy for several hundred yards on all sides. This became visible from the bridge presently, and at almost the same time my glass showed fragments of what appeared to be wreckage floating both in and beyond the 'sleek' of oil. Now if there had

been any evidence whatever of either oil or wreckage the night before I should not have failed to hail this morning's exhibit with a glad whoop and nose right in to investigate. But as, when I gave up the fight, I had dropped that buoy into an extremely clean patch of water—even after the stirring my depth-charges had given it—the plenitude of flotsam did not fail to arouse a certain amount of suspicion.

“Ordering the sloops and trawlers to stand-off-and-on at a safe distance, I went with the *Flash* to have a look at a number of fragments that were floating a couple of cables' lengths away from the buoy. A piece of box—evidently a preserved fruit or condensed milk case—with German letters stencilled across one end was undoubtedly of enemy origin, as was also a biscuit tin with patches of its gaudy paper still adhering to it. I did not like the careful way the cover of the latter had been put on, however, and, besides, tins and cases are quite the sort of thing any submarine throws over just as fast as it is through with them. It was some real wreckage I was looking for, and this it presently appeared that I had found when the bow wave threw aside a deeply floating fragment of what—even before we picked it up—I recognised as newly split teak. Closer inspection revealed the fact that it was newly split all right, but also the fact that an axe or hatchet had had a good deal to do with the splitting. What had probably been a part of a

bunk or locker had apparently been prised off with a bar and then chopped up into jagged strips. Attempts to obliterate the marks of bar and axe by pounding them against some rough metal surface had been too hasty and crude to effect their purpose.

“ ‘That settles it,’ I said to myself. ‘Fritz is trying to play a little joke on us by making us think he is lying blown-up on the bottom, while, in fact, he is probably lying off somewhere waiting to slip a slug into one of the most likely looking of the salvage ships. Now that we’ve twigged the game, however, we’ll have to do what we can to defeat it.’ As senior officer, I ordered the three destroyers present to start screening in widening circles, while—on the off-chance that there really was a wreck on the bottom—a pair of trawlers were sent to drag about the bottom under the messy patch with an ‘explosive sweep.’

“My diagnosis was quite correct as far as it went, but it did not go quite far enough; still—by the special intervention of the sweet little cherubim who sits up aloft to keep watch o’er the life of poor Jack—my plan of operation was quite as sound as if I had all the facts of the case spread out before me. Had the U-boat really been lurking round waiting for a pot at some of the ships trying to save his supposed remains—something that we never gathered any definite evidence on—our screening tactics would probably have prevented his success;

while the trawlers, with their sweep, furnished the best antidote for the little surprise party that he already *had* prepared for us.

“ Scarcely had the trawlers entered the oily area than the jar of a heavy under-sea explosion jolted against the bottom of the *Flash*, which, a thousand yards distant, was just beginning to work up to full speed. Almost immediately three or four other explosions followed, coming so close together as to make one rippling detonation of tremendous violence. An instant later I saw several columns of grimy foam shoot skyward, two or three of them so close together that they seemed to ‘boil’ into each other as they spilled and spread in falling. Although neither of the trawlers appeared to be immediately over any of the explosions, both of them received terrific shocks. One of them I distinctly saw rear up till it seemed almost to be balanced on its rudder-post as a round hump of green water drove under it, while the scuppers of the other spurted white as they cleared the flood that a spreading foam geyser had thrown upon the deck. It seemed impossible that either of them could survive such shocks as I knew they must have received, and I fully expected to see nothing better than two foundering wrecks emerge from the smother which hovered above the scene of the explosions. Imagine my surprise, then, when two junk-like profiles (they were both of the marvellously sea-worthy ‘Iceland trawler’ type) came bobbing

serenely into sight again, and I noted with my glass that neither appeared to have suffered serious damage. On the score of lives, a tom-cat has nothing the best of a trawler. If it had been otherwise our whole fleet of them—and they, with the drifters, form the main strands of the finer meshes of our anti-U-boat net—would have been wiped out many times over.

“At the instant the jar of the first explosion made itself felt, the thought flashed through my mind that there actually was a U-boat lying on the bottom, and that the explosive charge on the sweep had been detonated against its hull. The ‘bunched’ explosions immediately following also lent themselves to this theory, and it was not till the distinct columns of blown water began rising in the air that I surmised the real cause of them—mines, probably laid so close together that the explosion of the first had set off the others. This fact we were shortly able to establish beyond a doubt.

“What had happened, as nearly as we could reconstruct it, was this: The U-boat had been a mine-layer, probably interrupted on its way to lay its eggs off one of our main fleet bases. The chances are that it had been sufficiently injured by my depth-charges to make it more of a risk than its skipper cared to take to proceed farther from his base; quite likely, indeed, he had to put back at once. Then the chance of preparing a little sur-

prise party for the ship responsible for his trouble must have occurred to him, and the result was that a snug little nest of mines was laid all the way around the marking buoy. Having more mines than he needed to barrage the buoy, he had scuttled several of those remaining after the first job was completed, and these had been the ones set off by the explosive charge on the trawlers' sweep. The spreading of wreckage as bait around the trap was probably an afterthought, for it was so hurriedly done that it really defeated the end it was intended to accomplish. I am inclined to think, in fact, that, if the mines had laid round the buoy, with no spread of oil or wreckage left to decoy us into them, they might have had a victim or two to their credit. They were laid shallow enough to have bumped both sloops and destroyers, and the exploding of a mine against the bows of one or the other of these may well have been the first warning we had of Fritz's little joke. As it was, that part of the show was so crudely done that it gave away that something was wrong.

"Yes, I have always thought of that as 'Fritz's little joke,'" continued the captain, bracing himself at a new angle to meet a rollicking cork-screw action that was working into the ship's wallowings. "It was just the sort of a plant I would like to have left for Fritz, if our rôles had been reversed, and for a while I felt rather more kindly toward all Fritzes on account of having knocked up

against it. That feeling persisted until three or four months later, when the fortunes of war—in the shape of a luckily-planted depth-charge—paved the way for an opportunity for me to tell the story to a certain Hun *Unterseeboot* officer during the hour or two he was my guest on the way to base. He spoke English fairly, and understood it well; so that I was able to run through the yarn just about as I have told it to you. He gave vent to his approval in guttural ‘Ya’s’ and grunts of satisfaction until I ended by asking him if he didn’t think it was a jolly clever little joke. And what do you think he said to that?

“‘Choke,’ he boomed explosively; ‘choke, vy, mein frent, dot vos not ein choke ad all. He vos dryin to zink your destroy’r. Dot ist no choke.’”

The captain stretched himself with a whimsical smile. “How unpleasant it would be to be shipmates with a chap like that who couldn’t see the funny side of being blown up,” he observed presently.

“Just as unpleasant,” I replied, “as it is pleasant to be shipmates with a man who *could*.”

After thus rising to the occasion, I was emboldened to ask the captain to tell me a little more about that “luckily-planted depth-charge” he had referred to so casually, and its train of consequences.

“Here is the result,” he said with a smile, handing me several small kodak prints from his pocket-

book. "What little yarn there is to tell I'll rattle off for you with pleasure after I've been up to the bridge for a bit of a 'look-see.' Seems as if she is banging into it harder than she ought for this course and speed."

The light went out as the automatic switch cut off the current with the opening of the door, and when it flashed on again, as the door was slammed shut, I found myself alone, with the prints lying in the middle of the chart of the North Sea. Two of these showed a thin sliver of a submarine that might have been of almost any type. A third, however, showed an unmistakable U-boat, heeling slightly, and with a whaler alongside, evidently in the act of taking off some of the men crowded upon the narrow forward deck. And in the background of this print was lying a long slender four-funneled destroyer that I recognised at once as either the *Flash* or another of the same class. On the back of this print was written "Quarter view of U.C.— at 14.10. *Flash's* whaler transferring prisoners; *Splash's* whaler's crew clearing decks of wounded."

A fourth print, similar to the third but much covered with arrows and writing, appeared to be a kind of key to the latter. An angling sort of bar, which appeared as a black line above the bows in the photograph, was labelled "Nut Cutter," and several other characteristic U-boat devices were similarly indicated. These all established points of great technical value, doubtless, but a keener

human interest attached to the legends penciled at the feather ends of arrows pointing to two figures on the deck of the submarine, just abaft the conning-tower. Opposite the one that appeared to be leaning over a light rail, with one arm extended as though he was in the act of giving a command, was written, "Deceased captain of submarine." Against the other, a sprawling inert heap huddled up against the conning-tower, appeared, "Man with both legs shot off (alive)."

There was a lot of history crowded into that scrawled-over print, and I was still gazing at it with awed fascination when the opening door winked off the light, and then closed again to reveal the captain, dripping with the blown brine of the wave that the *Flash* had put her nose into at the moment he was coming down the ladder.

"Rather more of a sea than I expected to-night," he said as he pulled his duffel-coat over his head and sat down to kick off his sea-boots; "so I've slowed her down a few knots and we'll jog along easy till daylight." Then, as he recognised the photo in my hand, "Rather a grim story that little kodak tells, isn't it? You'll find just about all of the yarn you were asking for down there in black and white."

"Not quite," I replied hastily, recognising from long experience the forerunning signs of a modest man trying to side-step going into details respecting some episode in which he happens to have

played a leading part. "Not quite. It chances that I've heard something of the bagging of U.C.— from Admiral —— not long after it occurred, and he said it was one of the cleverest bits of work of the kind that anyone has pulled off. I didn't connect you and the *Flash* with it, though. But now that you're caught with the goods, the chance to hear several of the details the Admiral had failed to learn is too good to miss. How did you manage to slip up on her in the first place, and did you wing her skipper at the outset, and——?"

Evidently figuring it would be best not to let me pile up too big a lead of questions for him to answer, the captain sat down resignedly and took up the thread of the story at somewhere near the beginning.

"How did we manage to slip up on her?" he repeated. "Well, principally, I should say, because she was 'preoccupied.' I told you last night that I used to get away for a bit of tiger shooting while I was on Eastern stations, and you mentioned that you'd had a go at it yourself now and then. So we both have probably picked up a smattering of the ways of tigers. Now I've always maintained that the fact that I had given a bit of study to the ways of man-eaters was a big help to me in understanding the ways of Huns. A hungry tiger, on the prowl for something to devour, is about the hardest brute in the world to stalk successfully; while, on the other hand, one that has made its

kill and is sating its bloody lust upon it is just about the easiest. It's just the same with a U-boat. The one best chance we have of surprising one on the surface is while it is in the act of sinking a merchantman by bombs or shell-fire, or just after the victim has been torpedoed and the pirate is standing-by to fire on the boats and pick up any officers it may think worth while to take prisoner. That was what was responsible for the luck that befell me in the instance in question. The U.C.— a day or two previously to the one on which she was slated to meet her finish, had sunk the British merchantman *Hilda Bronson*, and carried off as prisoners the captain and mate. These men, after we rescued them, were able to give us some account of how their hosts spent the morning of the day on which they encountered the *Flash*. Their general practice, of course, was to submerge in the daytime and run on the surface, charging batteries, during the night. Emboldened by two or three recent successes in sinking small merchantmen by gun-fire and bombs, they appeared to have become very contemptuous of our anti-submarine measures, and declared that they were just as safe on the surface in the daytime as at night. Bearing out the probability that these words were by no means spoken in jest, is the fact that they did not dive at day-break, but continued to cruise on the surface on the look out for unarmed ships which could be safely sunk without risking the loss of a torpedo or

damage to themselves by gun-fire. This class of ships—fortunately, there are few of them left save under neutral flags—was the U-boat's favourite prey.

“About eight o'clock their search was rewarded. The two British sailors heard a number of shots, and presently understood the U-boat skipper to declare that he had just put down a small Norwegian steamer with shell-fire. As they were still full up with the stores looted from the *Hilda Bronson*, no attempt was made to take off anything from the sinking Norwegian. All morning the pirate continued cruising on the surface, diving only once. Great attention was given to surroundings, stops being made about once an hour to heave the lead. In this they displayed good sense beyond a doubt, for it is worth a lot to a submarine to know whether it can dive straight on to the bottom without encountering a pressure strong enough to crush it in.

“About noon another helpless victim—this time a British merchant steamer—was sighted, and the imprisoned sailors counted nine shots before tremendous consternation and confusion spread through the submarine as fire was opened on her by some ship coming up from the same direction as the merchantman bore, and she dived with all possible dispatch. This was where the *Flash* began to take a hand in the game.

“Now the fact that this particular Fritz ought easily to have sighted us at twice the distance at

which we opened with our foremost 12-pounder bears out exactly what I said about the traits the Hun and the tiger have in common. They are both 'foul-feeders,' and begin to see so red, once the blood-lust of prospective satiation is upon them, that they are half blinded to everything else. If this fellow hadn't been so absorbed in doing that little steamer to death he need never have let us get within a range that would have permitted more than a swift shot or two at his disappearing conning-tower. It was his sheer 'blood-drunkenness' that gave us our chance.

"It was a day of very low visibility—not over a mile and a half, or two miles at the outside—and I was out on a bit of an escort stunt of small importance. The first intimation I had that anything out of the usual run was afoot came in the form of sharp gun-fire on my starboard beam. It sounded fairly close at hand, and though no ship was visible, there was just a hint of luminosity in the mist-curtain to indicate the direction of the gun-flashes. The helm was immediately put hard-a-port and the telegraphs at Full Speed, and off went the *Flash* to investigate. Scarcely had I turned than a wireless signal was brought to me on the bridge repeating the calls of assistance of a steamer that was being shelled by an enemy submarine. That little 'flying start' of mine, which involved leaving the ship I was escorting and jumping out without waiting for orders, gave me the minute or so to

the good which probably made all the difference between success and failure. But that is quite characteristic of destroyer work; more than in any other class of ship, you are called on to decide for yourself, to jump out on your own.

“The first thing I saw was the dim blur of a small merchantman taking shape in the mist, and as the image sharpened, the splash of falling projectiles became visible. She was throwing out a cloud of smoke and zigzagging in a panicky sort of way in an endeavour to avoid the shells which were exploding nearer and nearer at every shot. As she caught sight of the *Flash* she altered course and headed straight up for us, and, busy as my mind was at the moment, I could not help thinking how like her action was to that of an Aberdeen pup I used to own when he saw me coming to extricate him from his daily scrap with a neighbour's fox terrier.

“It was just at the moment that the merchantman turned up to get under our wing that the sharpening gun-flashes began revealing the conning-tower of a submarine. We had gone to Action Stations at once, of course, and I am practically certain that the opening shot of the fo'c'sl' gun was the first warning Fritz had that his little kultur course was about to be interrupted. Under the circumstances, the fact that he effected his disappearing act in from thirty to forty seconds indicates very smart handling; too smart, indeed, to

give us a fair chance to get in a hit with a shell, although the gunners made a very keen bid for it. Their turn came a few moments later, however.

“Once Fritz had passed from sight there was only one thing to do, the thing we *tried* to do to-night—depth-charge him. And there really was no difference in what we did on the one occasion and what we did on the other—nothing, I mean to say, except the result. Estimating his course from the point of submergence, I steered directly over where I judged he would be and let go one of those very useful type ‘——’ charges. Well,”—the captain smiled in a deprecatory sort of way—“the depth-charge isn’t exactly what you’d call a ‘weapon of precision,’ and so it follows that when you hit what you are after with one it must be largely a matter of luck. Judgment? Oh, yes, a certain amount of it, but I’d rather have luck than judgment any day. At any rate, this was my lucky day. Within fifteen seconds from the moment I felt the jolt of the detonating charge Fritz’s conning-tower was breaking surface on my starboard beam. Helm had been put hard-a-port as the charge was dropped, so that all the starboard guns were bearing on the conning-tower the instant it bobbed up. This was right on the outer rim of the ‘boil’ of the explosion—just where it would be expected—and, of course, it presented an easy target. To say it was riddled would be putting it mildly. One shot alone from the foremost six-pounder would

have made it out of the question for it to dive again, even had other complications which had already set in left it in shape to face submergence.

“A second or two more, and the whole length of our bag was showing, riding fairly level fore-and-aft, but with a slight list to starboard. We had now turned, and from our position on the submarine's port quarter could plainly see the crew come bobbing out of the hatch on to the deck. Each of them had his hands lifted in the approved ‘Kamerad’ fashion, and took good care to keep them there as long as they noticed any active movement around the business ends of our guns. As a matter of fact, as there had been no colours flying to strike, those lifted hands were the only tangible tokens of surrender we received. As we had her at our mercy, however, they looked conclusive enough for me, and I sent a boat away as quickly as it could be lowered and manned.

“It was not until this boat returned that I learned of the two British merchant marine officers who had been aboard her through it all. The Huns had crowded them out in their stampede for the hatches, so that they had been the very last to reach the deck. Mr. X——, who was in charge of the whaler, compensated as fully as he could for this by taking them off first. The experiences they had been through had been just about as terrible as men could ever be called upon to face; and yet, when they clambered aboard *Flash*, they were smil-

ing, clear of head and eye, and altogether quite unshaken. You've certainly got to take off your hat to these merchant marine chaps; they've fought half the battle for the Navy.

"The story they had to tell of what they had seen and heard during their enforced cruise in the U-boat was an interesting one, but on the final act—largely because the curtain had been rung down so quickly—there was little they could add to what had passed before my own eye. The shock from the depth-charge—which appears to have detonated just about right to have the maximum effect—was terrific. The whole submarine seemed to have been forced sideways through the water by the jolt, and just as all the lights went out one of them said that he saw the starboard side of the compartment he was in—it was what would correspond to the Ward Room, I believe, a space more or less reserved for the officers—bending inward before the pressure. Instantly the spurt of water was heard flooding in both fore and aft, and that alone was sufficient to make it imperative for her to rise at once. As it was only a minute or two since she submerged, everyone was at station for bringing her to the surface again, so that not a second was lost in spite of the inevitable confusion following the sudden dive and the explosion of the depth-charge.

"There had been a mad lot of rushes for the ladders and hatches, but the skipper, it appears, got up first, through the conning-tower to the bridge,

as the official leader of the 'Kamerad Parade.' He was just in time to connect with the first shell from our foremost six-pounder, and that, or one of the succeeding projectiles which were fired before it was evident they were trying to surrender, accounted for several others in the van of the opening rush. The officer in charge of the whaler reported seeing several dead bodies lying on the deck and floating in the water, among these being that of the captain, which was taken back to Base and given a naval funeral. There were also two or three wounded. Of unwounded there were fifteen men and two officers, out of something like twenty-four in the original crew. One of the officers claimed to be a relation of Prince Henry of Prussia, but why he didn't claim the Kaiser himself, who is full brother to Prince Henry, I could never quite make out. As this was the same officer I told you of as not being able to see a joke, I didn't think it worth while to try to follow the ramifications of his family tree any farther. The engineer asserted that he had already been in eight warships which had been destroyed, these including a battleship and two or three cruisers and motor launches. I did the best I could to comfort him by telling him that, in case the *Flash* wasn't put down by a U-boat in the three or four hours which would elapse before we made Base, he need have no further worries on the sinking score for some time to come. Just the same," he concluded, with a shake of the head,

"I was glad to see that chap safely over the side. No sailor likes to be shipmates with a 'Jonah,' especially in times like these.

"By the time we had finished transferring the prisoners the *Splash* had joined us, and her captain, being my senior, took charge of the rest of the show. On my reporting that I had several severely wounded Huns aboard, he ordered me to return to Base with them.

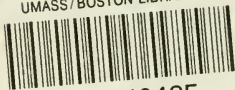
"I think that's about all there is to the yarn," said the captain, rising and starting to pull on his sea-togs preparatory to going up for another "look-see" before turning in. Then something flashed to his mind as an afterthought, and he relaxed for a moment, red of face and breathless, from a struggle with a refractory boot.

"There was one thing I shall always be glad about in connection with that little affair," he said thoughtfully, a really serious look in his eyes for almost the first time since I had seen him directing the dropping of the depth-charges early in the evening; "and that is that I didn't know in advance that those two British merchant marine officers were imprisoned in the U.C. '——' with the Huns when we came driving down to drop a 'can' on her. My duty would have been quite clear, of course, and, as you doubtless know, some of our chaps have faced harder alternatives than that without flinching or deviating an iota from the one thing that it was up to them to do; but, just the same, I'm not

half certain that the instinct, or whatever you want to call it, which seemed to jog my elbow at the psychological moment that charge had to be let go to do its best work—I'm not at all sure that instinct would have served me so well had I known that success might have to be purchased by sending two of my own countrymen—yes, more than that, two sailors like myself—to eternity with the pirates who held them as hostages. Yes, it was a mercy that I didn't have that on my mind at the moment when I needed all the wits and nerve I had to get that 'can' off in the right place."

Visibly embarrassed at having allowed his feelings to betray him—a British naval officer—into a display of something almost akin to emotion, the captain stamped noisily into the stuck sea-boot and disappeared, behind a slammed door, into the night.

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