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Title: The Submarine Hunters: A Story of the Naval Patrol Work in the Great War

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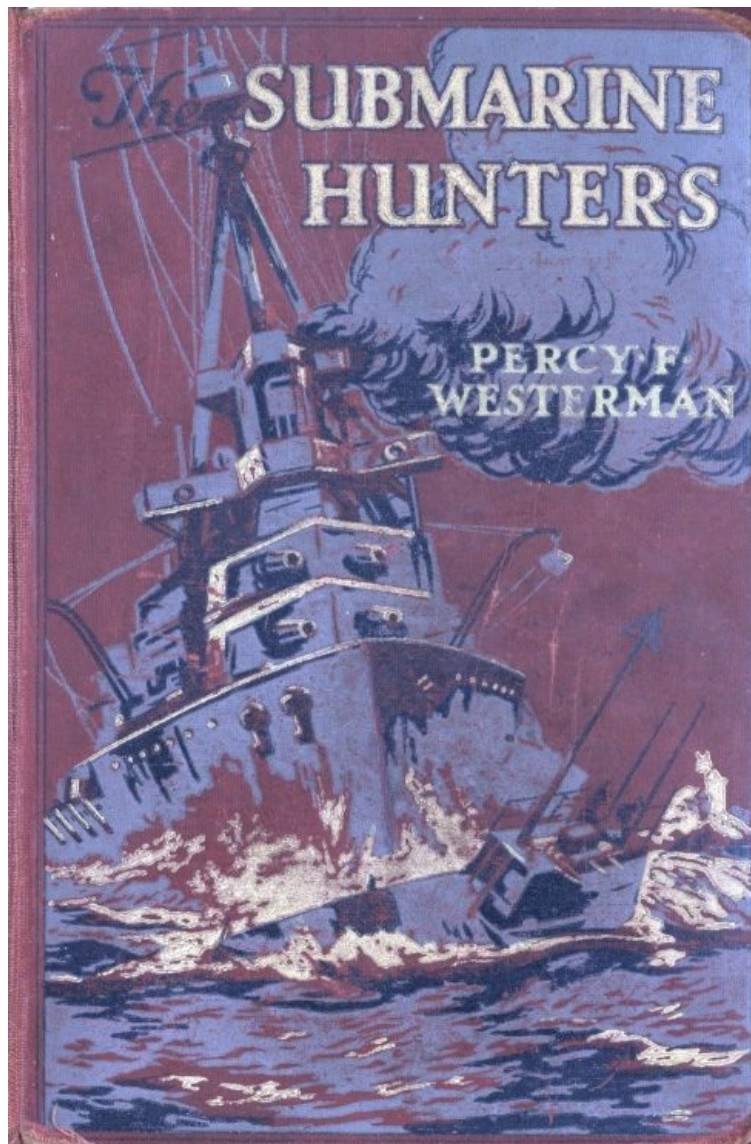
Release date: September 16, 2008 [eBook #26641]

Most recently updated: March 17, 2013

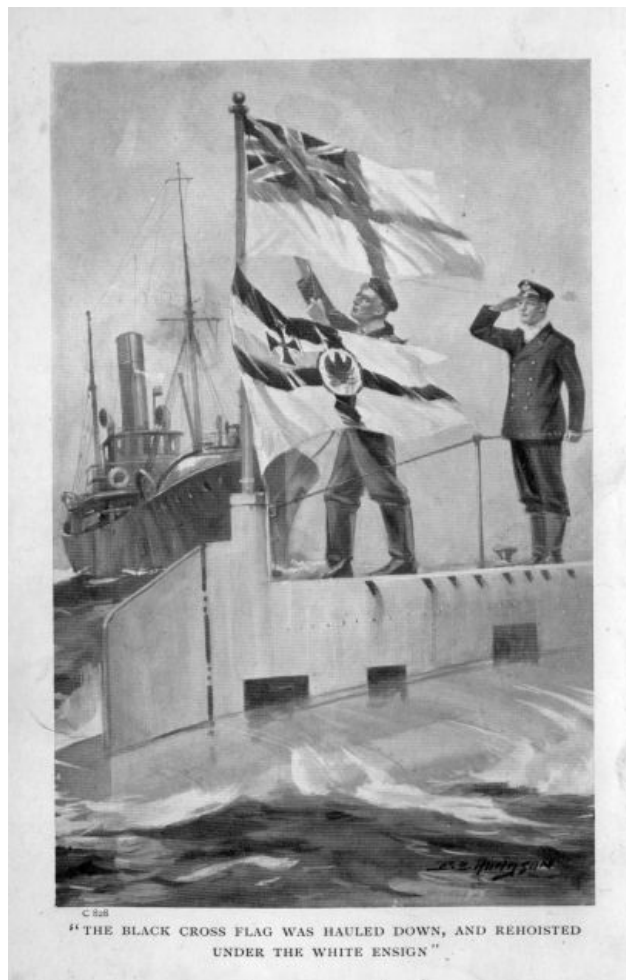
Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SUBMARINE HUNTERS: A STORY OF THE NAVAL PATROL WORK IN THE GREAT WAR \*\*\*



Cover art



**"THE BLACK CROSS FLAG WAS HAULED  
DOWN, AND REHOISTED UNDER THE  
WHITE ENSIGN"**

## **The Submarine Hunters**

**A Story of Naval Patrol  
Work in the Great War**

**BY**

**PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

**Author of**

**"Rounding Up the Raider"  
"The Dispatch-Riders"  
"The Fight for Constantinople"  
&c. &c.**

***Illustrated by E. S. Hodgson***

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# THE SUBMARINE HUNTERS

## CHAPTER I

### The Mysterious Meeting on St. Mena's Island

"We've made a proper mess of things this time!" ejaculated Ross Trefusis—"or rather I have."

"It can't be helped," rejoined his chum, Vernon Haye. "We've done our level best to get her off. How long is it before the tide floats her?"

"A matter of seven or eight hours, worse luck. You see, it was only half ebb when we landed."

Ross bent down to remove a streak of bluish-grey mud from his ankle.

"I wish we'd taken the rowing-boat instead of this heavy old tub," he continued. "We'll be pretty peckish before we get back to the Hall, and dinner's at seven-thirty."

Vernon laughed.

"It wouldn't be the first time I've had to go without grub," he remarked. "If you don't mind, I don't."

"Then it's no use standing here," said Ross. "Let's get on our shoes and go for a stroll."

Vernon Haye was a broad-shouldered lad of fifteen, with clear-cut features and dark hair. His companion was of about the same age, but a good two inches taller. His complexion was florid, his hair of an auburn tint that narrowly escaped coming within the category of red or ginger. His features were full and rounded. In short, he was a typical Cornish youth.

Ross's father, Admiral Paul Trefusis, lived at Killigwent Hall, a large, rambling, sixteenth-century house, standing within a mile of the sea on the North Cornish coast.

Both lads went to the same public school, but owing to the fact that Vernon's father, Captain Haye, was on active service with the Grand Fleet, young Haye was spending the summer holidays with his chum at Killigwent Hall.

That afternoon the lads had taken a small sailing-boat and had made for St. Mena's Island, a small rocky piece of land lying about a mile off shore, and nearly five miles from Killigwent Cove. The island was roughly three-quarters of a mile in length, and four hundred yards wide in the broadest part. The north and west sides were precipitous, but on the side nearest to the mainland the ground sloped gradually, and was indented by several narrow tidal coves.

The glamour of romance lay thickly around that rocky pile. Centuries ago it was the abode of a hermit, who, amongst his various self-imposed tasks, had built a chapel on the summit, from the tower of which a wood fire was kindled nightly to warn mariners of the treacherous reefs in the vicinity of the island.

In course of time, St. Mena's Island became the haunt of wreckers and smugglers. The chapel, in spite of its massive construction, fell a victim to the ravages of wind and weather, but still served as a convenient shelter for the lawless Cornishmen who profited by the misfortunes of honest seamen. Immune from interference, by reason of the superstitious awe in which the island was held by the country-folk, the smugglers and wreckers thrived exceedingly until late in the eighteenth century, when stern measures were taken to suppress their misdeeds. From that time St. Mena's Island was deserted, except for the casual visits of tourists and summer visitors from the neighbouring towns of Padstow and Newquay, and countless numbers of sea-birds that take up their abode in crannies in the almost inaccessible cliffs.

Ross Trefusis was right in taking the blame of their misfortunes upon himself. He knew better, but, neglecting to take ordinary precautions, he had allowed the boat to be left high and dry by the falling tide. Upon returning to the cove the lads had found the heavy craft lying on its bilge in the stiff bluish clay, with a ridge of jagged rocks cutting her off from the sea.

"Perhaps," suggested Vernon, "some other boat will put off to the island, and we can get them to put us ashore."

"Hardly likely," was the reply. "Anyway, we'll keep a look-out. Which would you prefer to do—explore the Smugglers' Cave and Dead Man's Cave, or climb up to the ruins?"

"The ruins," decided young Hays eagerly. "I like fooling about old ruins, and I've already seen the caves. Besides, we can see if there are any boats about. It's almost like being shipwrecked on a desert island."

"Hard lines if we were," commented Ross. "Suppose we take an inventory of our possessions? Let the see: one pocket-knife, a silver watch that has refused duty, a notebook and pencil, and five shillings and three halfpence. What have you to add to the common stock?"

"A knife, a pocket compass, my watch—which does go; it's now five-and-twenty to four—and sixteen shillings and eightpence in paper money and hard coin."

"Not a morsel of grub between the pair of us, then," declared Ross. "Outlook beastly unpromising. Faced with starvation unless we make up our minds to knock over some gulls. They are horribly fishy to eat, I believe, and we've nothing to make a fire."

"It makes you pine for the flesh-pots of Killigwent Hall, old man," exclaimed Vernon laughingly. "Never mind, let's make a move. I vote we get rid of these sweaters. It is frightfully hot."

Stripping off their woollen garments, and placing them for safety under a gorse bush, the two lads made their way up the steep ascent to the ruins, till, hot and well-nigh breathless in spite of being "in training", they reached the summit of the island.

"What a jolly view!" exclaimed Vernon, turning and taking in the panorama of rocky coastline, an expanse of jagged, frowning, brownish cliffs topped by the brilliant green of the Cornish moorland.

"Not bad," agreed Ross complaisantly, for the view was no stranger to him. "See that cliff shaped like the head and shoulders of a bearded man? That's Hidden Money Cove that I was speaking to you about last night. We'll go there next week, all being well. You see, there's not a sail in sight, so our chances of getting back to dinner are very remote. What's more, unless I'm very much mistaken, there's a rain-storm coming. See that dark cloud working up against the wind?"

"Yes," assented Hays. "What of it? A little rain won't hurt."

"It's the after effect," said Ross. "It's quite possible it may blow hard before night, in which case we're done for. I've known it impossible to approach Killigwent Cove for a week at a time."

Vernon whistled.

"Sounds lively," he remarked.

"Of course that is in the winter," his chum hastened to remind him. "These summer gales don't last very long, but we'll be feeling precious hungry by the time we get home, I guess."

"Look here," said Vernon after a while. "I vote we get those sweaters. We don't want to be soaked."

"Very well," assented Ross. "But there's no great hurry."

Having retrieved the sweaters, the chums leisurely retraced their way to the ruins. For half an hour or more they wandered around the remains, descending into the dark crypt, and running considerable risk in climbing to the summit of the tower. Since the spiral stone steps had vanished long ago, the only means of getting to the top was by climbing the gnarled stem of the ivy which grew profusely on the face of the building. The tower was roofless, a low, partly demolished parapet encircling it on three sides, while a couple of weather-worn oak-beams supporting a few planks formed a kind of platform where the roof formerly existed.

"Think it's safe?" asked Vernon anxiously, as his chum, having got astride the parapet, was about to lower himself upon the decrepit woodwork.

"I've done it scores of times," said Ross confidently. "That's right, I'll guide your foot. Now let go."

"By Jove!" suddenly exclaimed Hays; "there's a fellow coming towards the ruin. How on earth did he get here?"

"Goodness only knows," said Trefusis inconsequently. "He may have landed in Main Beach Cove. Anyhow, he's at perfect liberty to do so. I suppose he's interested in ruins."

"Let's drop a bit of stone and give him a shock when he gets here," suggested Vernon. "We'll

apologize afterwards. Ten to one he'll give us a passage back."

"I'm not so keen on dropping chunks of stone," objected Ross. "I vote we lie low for a bit at any rate, and see what he's up to."

"Why, do you think he's a spy?" asked his companion. Trefusis grunted scoffingly.

"Spy?" he repeated. "What object would a spy have on St. Mena's Island? This part of Cornwall is well outside the military area. There's nothing in the fortification line for miles. No, it's not that. But *cave*, here he comes."

The lads crouched behind the crumbling parapet, and by means of conveniently placed gaps in the masonry watched the stranger's approach.

There was nothing about the man's appearance to suggest that he was anything but an ordinary holiday-maker. He was slightly above average height, rather heavily built, and inclined to flabbiness. His complexion was undoubtedly florid, although his face and hands were tanned a deep brown.

He was dressed in a light-grey lounge suit, with a straw hat and brown shoes, while in his right hand he carried a thick Malacca cane.

The exertion of climbing up the hill on which the ruined chapel stood apparently told upon him, for he was considerably out of breath when he passed under the ivy-clad arch. Here he stopped to wipe his face with a handkerchief, and while doing so dropped his cane.

It fell upon the stones with a dull thud.

At the same time the stranger gave vent to an exclamation that certainly was not English.

The lads exchanged glances. Here was the beginning of a mystery. The heaviest Malacca cane would not have made that dull metallic sound in falling, while it was evident by the careful examination the stranger made of the retrieved article that he was more than considerate for its appearance.

The man made no attempt to explore the ruins. The weather-worn fane had no attractions for him. It was apparently only a rendezvous, as far as he was concerned, for at frequent intervals he would walk stealthily through the archway, and look attentively down the hill leading to the coves on the side facing the mainland.

It had now begun to rain—big drops that were the precursors of a heavy shower. The lads, in their exposed position on the tower, paid scant heed. Their interest and attention were centred upon the anxiously awaiting stranger fifty feet beneath them.

Presently Ross happened to glance towards the stretch of water that separated St. Mena's Island from the mainland. A boat was approaching. Already it was more than half-way across. It was a rowing-boat, containing only one person. What object would anyone have in rowing across on a wet afternoon like this? wondered the lad.

Just then the stranger began rubbing his hands with ill-concealed satisfaction. Although he had been frequently on the look-out, he had evidently only just caught sight of the approaching boat.

The lads watched the little craft till it was hidden by the intervening high ground, but already Ross felt certain that it was making for Main Beach Cove.

There were three landing-places on St. Mena's Island—Half Tide Cove, where the lads had left their stranded boat; Main Beach Cove, a little to the north-east; and Deadman's Cove, farther away. Of these, only Main Beach was available between one hour on either side of low water. The fact that the boat was making for it, and had already successfully skirted the submerged reef lying off it, proved that its occupant had local knowledge.

Some considerable time elapsed between the temporary disappearance of the boat and the appearance of the new-comer; but at length he came into view, walking rapidly up the steep incline without showing anything of the physical strain that the first stranger had betrayed.

Suddenly Ross Trefusis recognized the man. He almost felt inclined to laugh at his suspicions. It was Dr. Ramblethorne, the medical practitioner at St. Bedal—a town of considerable importance about seven miles from Killigwent Hall. The doctor was a frequent guest of Admiral Trefusis, and was generally considered a good, all-round sportsman. He was about thirty years of age, over six feet in height, of sinewy frame and of great muscular power. He was the wildest motorist in that part of Cornwall, as the endorsements on his driver's licence testified. A keen golfer, good shot, and fisherman, he was also a botanist; and that, perhaps, thought Ross, might account for his presence on St. Mena's Island, although it was difficult to reconcile the fact that Ramblethorne had an appointment with a stranger at this desolate spot. If a joint botanic expedition had been fixed up, why had not the two men met on the mainland?

The unknown made no attempt to advance to meet the doctor. Instead, he remained within

the ruins until Ramblethorne entered.

Their greeting was a surprise even to the lads, for the doctor, holding out his hand, exclaimed in German:

"Well met, von Ruhle! Let us hope that your arrangements will prove satisfactory."

## CHAPTER II

### The Tables Turned

Both Ross Trefusis and Vernon Hays understood and could speak German. Ross was especially good in his knowledge of the language of the modern Hun, for in his early youth he had been inflicted with a German governess. Since German is one of the subjects for Sandhurst—for which both lads were preparing—their knowledge had been considerably improved under the cast-iron rule of a native professor.

"Eminently satisfactory," replied von Ruhle. "We will go into details later. You had no difficulty in coming here, I hope?"

"None whatever."

"No suspicions?" asked von Ruhle anxiously.

Ramblethorne smiled.

"My dear von Ruhle," he replied. "A medical practitioner is above suspicion. He is free to go anywhere at any hour of the day or night without question. No man would suspect——"

"You are clever, von Hauptwald——"

"Ssh!" interrupted the doctor. "Call me Ramblethorne, if you please. Of course there is no danger here, but at other times and in other places you might incautiously give the show away. You had a good passage?"

"Excellent," replied von Ruhle. "I am getting well-known to the strafed English custom-house officers at Queenboro' and Harwich. They recognize me by my stick, I believe, but they little know that it is a new one every time. What do you think of this? I have brought it as a specimen for you to see. Just fancy! every time I cross to Holland twenty kilogrammes of good copper are on their way to the Fatherland. By this time Herr Stabb of Essen is well acquainted with my Malacca canes."

"A good weight to carry about," remarked Ramblethorne, wielding the disguised bar of copper. "I wonder you troubled."

"Mein Gott! I could not leave it," declared von Ruhle. "Someone might take a fancy to it, and then the secret would be out. But tell me: have you succeeded in getting that commission you spoke of?"

"I am still living in hopes," replied Ramblethorne. "Of course I could have obtained a post of temporary surgeon in the British Navy, but it wasn't good enough. It's no fun running the risk of being torpedoed by our own Submarines. The English Army offers a wider scope. Believe me, I am worth more than a division to the Emperor. I'll get a commission, never you fear, for I have heaps of influence. Then, of course, I will do my utmost to fight against a terrible epidemic that will mysteriously break out amongst the troops."

Ramblethorne, otherwise von Hauptwald, threw back his shoulders and laughed uproariously.

"Careful!" hissed his companion. "You will be heard over the whole island."

"What matters? There is not another soul in sight besides ourselves. How much petrol have you?"

"Fifty two-gallon tins. I expect some more by boat to-morrow. It's safely stored in a cave on the side of the creek. It is a nuisance it is raining. I do not fancy a night's work in weather like this. Himmel, what's that?"

Accidentally Vernon's foot had dislodged a small piece of stone.

"Nerves, my dear von Ruhle," said Ramblethorne, with his usual good-natured smile. "A bit of masonry has fallen from the tower. See, the floor is covered with similar pieces."

"If anyone should be up there——" suggested von Ruhle, pointing to the top of the tower.

The lads could feel their hearts thumping against their ribs. Through a small crack in the planking they could see the eyes of the two Germans directed upwards.

"Impossible; there are no steps," declared Ramblethorne. "Besides, what object would anyone have in ascending a tower on a day like this? I fully appreciate the danger of being overheard, of course. We've said enough to find ourselves faced by a firing-party in the Tower of London, my friend."

"Don't!" expostulated von Ruhle, closing his eyes as if to shut out the unpleasant mental vision. Then: "You have the signalling apparatus, I hope?"

"Trust me for that, von Ruhle," replied his companion, tapping his breast-pocket. "All we have to do is to wait until yonder lighthouse exposes its light. Really the ways of these English pass understanding. They rigorously forbid the showing of lights in private houses on shore, imagining that our agents would be so foolish as to start blinking with a lamp; yet they allow these lighthouses to work as usual, and obligingly enable us to communicate to our hearts' content."

Von Hauptwald was not far wrong in his remarks, for the instrument he had enabled him to flash a message to a confederate without having to be in possession of a lamp. The flash was obtained from any distant and visible light by means of a complicated system of mirrors. The reflected rays could then be projected in any desired direction so as to be quite invisible except on a certain bearing. It was one of the carefully-thought-out plans adopted by the German Government to permit its spies to communicate with their submarines without running any great risk of detection.

"It's two hours to sunset," remarked the doctor; "three before we commence operations. I would suggest that we adjourn to the cave and partake of refreshment. You see, I have not omitted to make suitable provision."

"Very good!" agreed von Ruhle; "but I only wish I had a waterproof. The rain is most annoying."

Arm-in-arm the two men left the building, and presently disappeared from view behind a slight rise in the ground.

"I say!" exclaimed Ross; "we've tumbled on something this time. Fancy Ramblethorne a rotten German spy. I always thought he was a rattling good chap."

"Evidently he isn't," rejoined Vernon. "But the point is: what do you propose to do? It's beastly wet here."

"It is, now I come to think of it," agreed his chum. "The fact is, that until you mentioned it I was hardly aware that it was raining. We'll discuss this knotty point."

"I vote we make tracks for the boat," suggested Hays. "The tide must be rising by this time. We can then slip off and raise the alarm."

Ross shook his head.

"No go," he decided. "We might get nabbed ourselves. Besides, who would be able to lay these chaps by the heels? There's only that motor-boat chap at Penydwick Cove, and he's precious little use. There are no soldiers nearer than at St. Bedal. I propose we hang on here. There's a snug, sheltered hole in these ruins, just big enough for us to lie hidden. Then we stand a good chance of hearing more of the conversation between those beggars."

"Three hours more, remember."

"Yes, I know. In the meanwhile we might slip down to Main Beach Cove. There's plenty of cover amongst the rocks."

"What for?" asked Vernon.

"To see what these fellows are up to. I'm rather anxious to renew my slight acquaintance with friend Copperstick. By Jove, what a cute move to get contraband metal into Germany!"

"Not much at a time. It shows how hard up the Germans must be for copper when it pays a fellow to carry over about half a hundredweight at a time."

"Well, let's get a move on," said Ross. "Be careful how you descend. The ivy will be fairly slippery with the wet."

Cautiously the two lads descended, reaching the ground without mishap.

"Our sweaters!" exclaimed Vernon.

"Dash it all! Yes," agreed his companion. "I had forgotten all about them."



The sweaters, carefully rolled up, had been placed for security in one corner of the chapel. Unless anyone actually came close to the spot, they were hidden from sight.

"Neither of those fellows stood about here, I think," remarked Ross as the chums retrieved and donned the additional clothing. "It's jolly lucky, or they would have smelt a rat."

Trefusis and his companion went out into the rain, walking rapidly towards a slight mound capped by a few irregularly shaped stones. It was behind this rise of ground that the two spies had gone. Up to this point, Ross argued, there was little need for caution; beyond, it would be necessary to keep well under cover until they reached Main Beach.

"Ware the skyline," cautioned Ross as the chums approached the hillock.

"Ay; 'ware the skyline," said a deep voice mockingly, "It's bad strategy."

Turning, the lads made the disconcerting discovery that Ramblethorne and von Ruhle were within five yards of their would-be trackers.

Ross realized that he and his chum had been badly outmanoeuvred. Evidently the Germans suspected that they had been overheard, and ostentatiously leaving the ruins for Main Beach Cove, they had made a detour from the hillock, and had waited until Ross and Vernon had emerged from the chapel. Then, taking advantage of the wet grass that effectually deadened the sound of their footsteps, they had turned the tables on their shadowers.

So completely taken aback were the two lads that they stood stock-still as if rooted to the earth.

"Not a nice evening to be out, Trefusis," continued the doctor. "What brings you on St. Mena's Island at this late hour of the day?"

"Our boat was left high and dry by the tide, so we had to wait and take shelter," replied Ross.

"And so you chose a place where there was no shelter," remarked Ramblethorne. "Idiotic thing to do—very idiotic. Now tell me: what were you doing on the top of the tower?"

Ross did not hesitate in his reply. Perhaps it would have been better had he done so, for he had never betrayed his knowledge of German to the doctor on any of their previous meetings, and it would have been judicious to keep up the deception.

"What were we doing? Listening to your precious schemes," he retorted boldly. "Now we know all about you, and it will be our duty to report you as spies to the authorities. We are expecting a search-party from Killigwent Hall at any moment, you see."

"So that's the line of defence you propose to adopt, eh?" sneered Ramblethorne. "Well, look out!"

With a sudden spring the athletic man flung himself upon Ross, while von Ruhle with equal promptitude made a rush to secure Vernon.

Strong and active though he was, Ross was no match for his huge and powerful antagonist. Knowing that flight was impossible, the lad fainted, and aimed a blow with his left straight for the doctor's chin. This Ramblethorne parried easily, and grasping the lad's wrist, held it as in a vice, and in such a manner that rendered fruitless any attempt on Trefusis' part to make use of his right arm.

Having thus secured his opponent, Ramblethorne watched the result of the encounter between his fellow-spy and young Hays.

Von Ruhle had opened the attack by brandishing his heavy stick, and calling upon Vernon to surrender.

Hays returned the compliment by closing, and dealing the German such a terrific blow upon the chest that von Ruhle recoiled quite a couple of yards. The lad's onslaught had only missed the German's solar plexus by a few inches; had it not, the chances were that von Ruhle would have lost all interest in life for the next quarter of an hour.

But instead of following up his initial success Vernon, seeing Ross helpless in the doctor's grip, rushed to his chum's aid. For a few seconds he fainted, striving to find an opening, while Ramblethorne, dragging his captive with him, pivoted in order to keep his front towards his new antagonist.

Those few seconds were Vernon's undoing.

Quickly recovering himself, von Ruhle sprang forward with the agility of a panther. The imitation Malacca cane descended with a dull thud upon the lad's head, and like a felled ox Vernon fell inertly upon the sodden grass.

"Hold him—so," exclaimed Ramblethorne, handing Ross over to the custody of von Ruhle.

Then drawing a small hypodermic syringe from a case, the former inserted the needle into the lad's forearm.

Five seconds later Ross Trefusis lay unconscious beside his companion in misfortune.

## CHAPTER III

### Kidnapped

"I thought you had killed him, von Ruhle," said the doctor, bending over Vernon and making a cursory examination of the unconscious lad.

"I thought I had," was the unconcerned reply. "Dead men tell no tales."

"There I beg to differ," protested Ramblethorne. "Corpses have a nasty way of turning up at inopportune moments. These youngsters are worth more to us alive than dead."

"How so?"

"One is a son of Admiral Trefusis; his companion is, I believe, also a son of a distinguished English naval officer."

"Well, and what of it?" asked von Ruhle.

"Hostages," replied the doctor briefly. "Later I will explain. Meanwhile we'll carry them to the cave. It's farther than back to the ruins; but perhaps, as young Trefusis said, there may be a search-party, and the ruins would be one of the first objects of investigation."

Although, with the exception of periodical visits abroad, Dr. Ramblethorne had lived in England all his life and was a fully qualified medical man, he was a highly trusted and talented agent of the German Secret Service. Months before the outbreak of war, he had been ordered to report upon the defences of Devonport, and in order to do this he had bought a practice on the outskirts of Plymouth. Upon the commencement of hostilities, he was detailed to keep under observation the military preparations of the Duchy of Cornwall, and also to take necessary steps for communicating with German submarines that, under von Tirpitz's prearranged scheme, were to operate in the Bristol Channel. Von Ruhle was one of the few subordinates he actually knew. There were others with whom he communicated only through an intermediary, and who knew him only by a number.

Von Ruhle was almost as mentally clever as his superior. Ostentatiously he was an Englishman. Sometimes he posed as a mining engineer; at others as a commercial traveller; as an accredited representative of the British Red Cross Society he was in the habit of making frequent journeys to Holland, presumably in connection with work at Groningen Internment Camp. At the present time, his activities were centred upon the formation of a secret petrol depot for the supply of fuel to unterseebooten operating in the Bristol Channel and off the south coast of Ireland.

A couple of slight incidents had served to put the cautious Ramblethorne on his guard during his interview with von Ruhle in the ruined chapel.

Although he verbally deprecated his subordinate's alarm when the lads accidentally dislodged a stone from the tower, it was merely to disarm possible eavesdroppers of any suspicion that their presence was suspected.

The ability to control his feelings was one of the super-spy's chief assets. Suspicion once aroused, he proceeded without the faintest sign to investigate his surroundings. His keen eye soon lighted upon the lads' sweaters. Then it was that an adjournment was suggested to Main Beach Cove.

This was simply and solely a "blind", for on gaining the cover of the boulder-strewn hillock the doctor communicated his suspicions to his companion. The pair then crouched behind the rocks, whence they were able to command a view of the tower.

It was not long before their enterprise met with success. They saw Trefusis and his chum cautiously descend by means of the ivy; then, directly the lads set out upon their ill-starred tracking expedition, the Germans, as before related, succeeded in outflanking them and effecting their capture.

"Time!" announced Ramblethorne, consulting his watch.

"Are these safe?" asked von Ruhle, stirring Vernon's unconscious form with his foot.

"Quite; though, perhaps, to make sure I will give this youngster a slight injection. Pity you hadn't held him with the double arm-lock instead of cracking him over the head. Herr Kapitan Schwalbe won't want to be troubled with a passenger with a swollen head."

Leaving their senseless victims in the cave, the two Germans again ascended the hill to St. Mena's Chapel. As they breasted the summit, they could see the fixed white light of Black Bull Head showing momentarily brighter and brighter against the rapidly failing daylight.

Setting a prismatic compass in position upon the sill of one of the glazeless windows, Ramblethorne took a careful bearing in a seaward direction. This done, he pointed the projector of the signalling apparatus in precisely the same direction, and threw a waterproofed cloth over the instrument.

"Too early yet, von Ruhle," he remarked. "Nevertheless it is advisable to fix our bearings while twilight lasts. A light might spell disaster."

"A deucedly unpleasant night for such a task," grumbled von Ruhle.

"On the contrary, it is just the very thing," replied the doctor. "It is not thick enough to be dangerous, but the rain is just sufficient to assist in the screening of U75. Do not think of your personal comfort, my dear von Ruhle, when urgent work for the Fatherland has to be undertaken."

For another half-hour the two men paced the grass-grown stones. Their choice of St. Mena's Island as a secret signalling station was an excellent one. It was isolated, and, being slightly greater in elevation than the cliffs of the mainland in the immediate vicinity, would effectually screen any ray of light sent landwards from the expected German submarine. Thus all danger of the narrow gleam of reflected light being detected by the none too smart members of the coast patrol was entirely obviated.

"Time!" exclaimed the doctor, consulting the luminous face of his watch.

Dexterously, and without disturbing the position of the instrument, von Ruhle whipped off the covering. Although there were no visible signs that anything was taking place, both men knew that a beam of light, reflected from the distant lighthouse on Black Bull Head, was being directed seawards.

In silence the two men peered through the driving rain, von Ruhle making use of a pair of powerful night-glasses.

Suddenly, after an interval of almost five minutes, a faint pin-prick of light flickered from the surface of the sea.

Instantly Ramblethorne stepped a dozen paces to the right.

"I can see nothing from here," he announced in a low voice. "Can you?"

"Yes," replied his companion.

"Good: that's friend Schwalbe."

The doctor was right. From the deck of the unterseeboot a signalling apparatus similar to that employed by the spies was in use. By an ingenious automatic arrangement it projected a beam of light, derived from the same sources as that on St. Mena's Island, rigidly in a fixed direction, regardless of the "lift" of the submarine under the action of the waves.

For several minutes a rapid exchange of signals was maintained; then the two spies, folding up their apparatus, walked rapidly towards Main Beach Cove.

They had not long to wait before the faint sound of oars was borne to their ears.

"Himmel! They have arrived already," exclaimed von Ruhle.

"So it appears," replied Ramblethorne dryly. "I pride myself that I have exceptionally good eyesight, but I fail to see her. The neutral colour of the submarine is indeed excellent for night work."

They descended the sandy and shingly beach until further progress was barred by the lapping wavelets of the rising tide.

Through the mirk loomed up the outlines of a canvas collapsible boat crowded with men. At two lengths from the shore the rowers laid on their oars. One of the men gave vent to a low whistle resembling the call of a curlew.

"All clear," replied Ramblethorne.

The boat's keel rasped on the shingle. A cloaked figure in the stern-sheets made his way for'ard and leapt ashore.

"Herr von Hauptwald?" he asked.

"The same," replied the doctor. "And Kapitan Schwalbe?"

"The captain is still on board," replied the officer. "It is hard to resist the opportunity of getting ashore after being cooped up there for more than a fortnight. But the petrol?"

"We have not so much as we hoped to obtain," replied von Ruhle.

The Leutnant muttered an oath.

"And how is business?" asked Ramblethorne, with a view of distracting the officer's thoughts from the shortage of fuel.

The Leutnant muttered another oath.

"Bad!" he replied savagely. "Only one wretched little tramp steamer, which we fell in with about twenty miles from the Stacks. She gave us a run for our money, but we had her at last. Even then she tried to ram us. One has to be most cautious also. These accursed English have been far too active with their new-fangled contrivances. We called up U71 early this morning. She replied. Again at noon we called her, but there was no reply. U70 we have lost all touch with since Monday, yet she was under orders to assist in the blockade of the Bristol Channel until we, as senior unterseeboot, gave instructions to return to Wilhelmshaven."

"Lost, I suppose," remarked Ramblethorne.

The Leutnant had walked to a distance of nearly ten yards from his men, who were drawn up in military order awaiting their officer's commands.

He lowered his voice.

"Although I am sorry to say it," he declared, "I am afraid she has gone too. Our losses are not only serious—they are appalling. Submarine work is now a continual nightmare. We do our duty, but before long, if we are sufficiently fortunate to escape the toils that these English cast about us, we shall all be physical wrecks."

The man's agitation increased as he spoke. Obviously he was labouring under a severe strain.

"And this petrol?" he asked anxiously. "What quantity?"

Ramblethorne told him.

"Not enough," declared the Leutnant. "Himmel, it is not enough to get us round Cape Wrath. On board we have only sufficient for six hours' surface running, while our batteries are not far short of running down. You had better see the captain and explain."

Leaving von Ruhle to direct the seamen to the secret petrol store in the cave, Ramblethorne accompanied the Leutnant to the submarine.

The U75 was one of the latest type of Germany's submarines. Over three hundred feet in length, there was little about her in common with the accepted idea of under-water craft. Her deck ran in one continuous sweep for almost her entire length, and rose nearly six feet above the surface. The visible part of her sides was perpendicular, the bulging sections being entirely beneath the surface. Her conning-tower was surrounded by a platform as long as the navigation-bridge of a modern destroyer. The two periscopes were "housed", but two slender "wireless" masts gave the boat the appearance of a swift torpedo craft.

Acknowledging a salute from a burly quartermaster, Ramblethorne gained the deck, and was escorted aft by the Leutnant. Pacing the tapering platform was a broad-shouldered, fair-haired man of about thirty, although a carefully trimmed blonde beard made him look much older.

He lacked the natural elastic stride of the British naval officer. His movements resembled those of a thoroughly drilled soldier, yet ever and anon he would glance furtively in the direction of the open sea as if in constant dread of sudden and unknown peril.

"Greetings, Herr von Hauptwald!" he exclaimed, when the Leutnant had formally introduced his visitor. "You are well known to me by repute, but I doubt whether we have met before."

"I fancy so," rejoined the doctor. "Do you not remember that little affair in the Strauer Platz? Ah, I thought you would! But to come to the point. We have been unable to obtain the requisite quantity of petrol."

"Somehow I thought it," replied Kapitan Schwalbe. "How much have you?"

Ramblethorne told him.

"Enough, with what we have left on board, for only eight hundred miles run. It will not take us home, and we are under orders not to leave these waters before Friday next. We have been let

down badly."

"I know that it is useless to express regrets," said Ramblethorne boldly. "I can only hope that other means of supplying the requisite fuel will be forthcoming. But here is another matter. We have had to secure two English lads, both sons of distinguished naval officers. Unfortunately they overheard a conversation between von Ruhle and myself. In the interests of the Secret Service it is absolutely necessary that they are kept out of the way for at least a couple of months. I am averse to doing them personal injury."

"Then what do you wish?" asked Kapitan Schwalbe.

"Take them on board with you. If possible, land them at a German port. If this be possible, you will realize that we have a strong tool to work with."

"I fail to understand," said the Kapitan of U75.

"They could be made good use of as hostages," resumed Ramblethorne. "If these English persist in talking about reprisals, we can hint that—well, it is unnecessary to go into details."

"I see," remarked Kapitan Schwalbe. "But if it is impossible to land them?"

"Then you must put them on board the first outward-bound tramp steamer you fall in with—provided she is bound for South American ports, or anywhere that will mean a long voyage."

"Very well," assented the submarine officer. "I quite understand your anxiety to get them out of the way."

"Temporarily, mind," added Ramblethorne.

"Precisely. Herr Rix," he exclaimed, addressing the Leutnant. "Take four men and go ashore. Von Ruhle will tell you where these English boys are; have them brought on board."

"One moment," interrupted Ramblethorne. "They came to the island in a boat. There is nothing unusual in that, I admit, but the fact remains that the boat is still lying in the cove next to this. You might order the men to set the boat adrift."

"Water-logged, and with sails set and the main-sheet made fast. Another deplorable accident. Ach! It shall be so."

Half an hour later Ross Trefusis and Vernon Haye, still unconscious under the action of the anaesthetic injection, were brought on board U75 and passed below. Their boat, lying on its beam-ends, was drifting slowly in the direction of Black Bull Head. Ramblethorne and von Ruhle, their work for the present done, were already on the way to the mainland.

Meanwhile, alarmed at the non-appearance of the young heir to Killigwent Hall and his guest, a party had set off to search St. Mena's Island.

Just as the boat's keel grounded on the beach of Half Tide Cove, the German submarine slipped quietly through the blurr of misty rain, and under cover of darkness headed towards the mouth of Bristol Channel.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Awakening

"Dash it all! What am I doing here?" muttered Ross Trevor drowsily, as he opened his eyes.

For the moment he quite imagined that he was in his dormitory at school, and that by an oversight the rest of his chums had left him in bed. The suggestion was strengthened by the sound of gurgling water, as if the bathroom tap were running. Then he became aware that everything was pitching up and down. Once before he had experienced a similar sensation—when he had had a violent headache following a slight touch of sunstroke.

It puzzled him, too, that he was almost in darkness. Somewhere without, and partly screened by some projection, an electric light was burning. The reflected rays were just sufficient to enable him to take stock of his surroundings.

No, he was not back in the school dormitory. True, he had a headache, but that would not account for the actual motion. He fumbled, his fingers came in contact with a curved board that served to prevent the occupant of the bed—or, rather, bunk—from falling on the floor.

Almost mechanically he rolled out, and stood supporting himself by grasping the ledge of the

bunk. The swaying, due partly to dizziness and partly to an unaccountable see-saw motion, would have thrown him to the floor but for the assistance afforded by the side of the bunk.

Gradually he became aware that there was a similar sleeping-place immediately beneath the one he had been occupying. Someone was lying there, breathing heavily. There was sufficient light for Ross to recognize him. It was his chum Vernon.

Just then a bell clanged noisily. The sound of running water was outvoiced by the loud din of machinery in motion. A wave of hot air that reminded the lad of the atmosphere of a Tube station wafted past him. The whole fabric trembled under the powerful pulsations of the mechanism.

With his legs trembling through sheer physical weakness, Ross hung on grimly. He wanted to shout, but no sound came from his parched tongue. He was bewildered. It seemed as if he were in the throes of a terrible nightmare, and that he would awake on finding himself falling into a bottomless abyss.

The reflected light was obscured as a broad-shouldered man made his way along the narrow corridor in which the bunks were placed. As he did so he caught sight of the lad. Without a word he seized Ross in his arms, not roughly, but nevertheless unceremoniously, and lifted him back into the bunk. There was something so peremptory in the action that Ross lay still and closed his eyes. All his will power seemed to have deserted him.

"Make a dash for it, old man!" exclaimed a muffled voice that Trefusis hardly recognized as his chum's. "Make a dash for it. Don't let them collar us."

It was Vernon rambling in his sleep. The words were sufficient to give Ross a key to the hitherto baffling problem.

Like a flash he recalled the episode of their adventure on St. Mena's Island. He remembered himself being held in the grasp of the powerful Ramblethorne until unconsciousness overcame him. He was still a prisoner, but with the qualifying knowledge that he was not alone. Vernon Haye was sharing his captivity, wherever it might be.

"We're afloat then," he muttered. "What has happened?"

Moistening his lips, Ross leant over the side of the bunk and called his chum by name. His voice sounded strangely unfamiliar. He could only just hear himself above the clamorous noise of the engines.

It was not long before another man appeared at the end of the corridor. As he did so he switched on a lamp almost above the lad's head. For a few seconds Ross was temporarily blinded by the sudden transition from artificial twilight to the intense brilliancy of electric light.

"So! You are now awake, hein?" asked a guttural voice. "How you vos feel?"

"Rotten!" replied Ross emphatically. His reply was brief and to the point. It summed up his sensations during the last ten minutes.

The man laughed.

"So you look. You better soon will be. You know where you now vos?"

"On board a ship," answered the lad. He was still hoping against hope that his questioner was anything but a German. There was a small chance that he had by some means been picked up at sea by a Dutch or a Swedish vessel.

The man's announcement "put the lid on" that possibility.

"Sheep—goot!" he chuckled. "German unterseeboot—vot you vos call submarine. No danger to you boys if you yourselves behave. Much to see—ach! plenty much."

The lad's eyes had now become more accustomed to the light. He could see that his visitor was a broad-shouldered, muscular man of average height, florid-featured, and with light-yellow hair and a fair moustache. He was dressed in a uniform that was apparently a bad copy of that worn by executive officers of the British Navy. On the breast of his coat he wore an Iron Cross.

"Me Hermann Rix, Ober-leutnant of unterseeboot," he announced. "Der Kapitan send me to see how you get better. Goot! I tell seaman to bring food quick. In one hour you go on deck. Den you feel all well."

The German Leutnant bent and peered into the lower cot.

"Fat head," he remarked seriously. "Bad knock, but he get well soon."

With that the officer went away, leaving the light switched on.

Scrambling out of his bunk, Ross approached his chum. Vernon was now sleeping quietly. His face, however, was flushed, while it was quite evident that he had received a fairly heavy blow

across the skull, for the top of his head was swollen to a considerable extent.

Before Ross had finished his examination a sailor entered, bearing a tray on which were three slices of rye bread, some tinned beef, and a bottle of Rhenish wine.

"Sprechen Sie deutsch?" he asked.

For an instant Trefusis hesitated before replying. To profess ignorance of the German language would be an immense advantage while on board the submarine, provided he could control his facial expressions and listen without betraying himself. Then, on the other hand, he reflected that Ramblethorne, the spy, might have been instrumental in getting him into this predicament. More than likely the Captain of the submarine had been informed of the fact that his unconscious passengers were well acquainted with the tongue-twisting language of the Fatherland.

"Here is food for you," said the man, placing the tray on the floor. "You had better take hold of the bottle before it upsets. We are rolling a bit. When your friend opens his eyes, call me. I am in yonder compartment. It would be well for you to dress. I will bring your clothes to you very soon."

Ross made a sorry meal. The food was not at all appetizing. His throat was in no condition to enable him to swallow easily. A feeling of nausea, due either to the motion, the hot, confined air, or the after effects of the stupefying injection—perhaps a little of all three—was still present.

He was actually on board a German submarine—one of Tirpitz's twentieth-century pirates. He racked his brains to find a reason. With its limited accommodation an unterseeboot seemed the last type of craft that would receive a pair of prisoners—and non-combatants—within its steel-clad hull. It must have been at Ramblethorne's instigation; yet why had not the spy knocked the pair of luckless eavesdroppers over the head and tumbled them into the sea? It seemed by far the easiest solution; yet, in spite of that, Ross and Vernon were being carried to an unknown destination in one of the "mystery-craft" of the Imperial German Navy.

The reappearance of the seaman bearing Ross's clothes cut short the latter's unsolved meditations. Without a word the man laid the neatly folded garments on the bunk—a pair of flannel trousers, cricket shirt, underclothes, and the sweater that had been the cause of the lads' undoing; but in place of his shoes a pair of half-boots, reeking with tallow, had been provided.

Ross proceeded to dress. As he did so a voice that he hardly recognized asked:

"Hulloa, Trefusis, where are we?"

It was Haye. His companion was now awake, but hardly conscious of his surroundings.

"Better?" asked Ross laconically. He could not at that moment bring himself to answer the question.

"Didn't know that I was ill," remonstrated Vernon. Then, after a vain attempt to raise his head—perhaps fortunately, since the bottom of Ross's cot was within a few inches of his face—he added:

"Dash it all! I remember. That beastly German gave me a crack over the head with his copper walking-stick. Where are we?"

"In a rotten hole, old man. We're in a German submarine, bound goodness knows where."

"Where are my clothes?" asked Haye, this time successfully getting out of his bunk. "Since you have yours, there seems to be no reason why I shouldn't have mine. Hang it! What's the matter with me? Everything's spinning round like a top."

Mindful of the seaman's words, and with a docility that would have surprised him in different circumstances, Ross staggered along the corridor. The passage was about thirty feet in length. On one side the metal wall was flat, on the other it had a pronounced curve. Against it were six bunks arranged in pairs. Four were used as stowing-places for baggage, the remaining ones had been given up to the two prisoners. The roof was almost hidden by numerous pipes, most of them running fore and aft, while a few branched off through the walls. The flat bulkhead evidently formed one of the walls of the engine-room, for, as the lad placed his hand against it to steady himself, he could feel a distinct tremor, quite different from the vibration under his feet. The floor was of steel, with a raised chequer pattern in order to give a better grip to one's feet. At frequent intervals there were circular places, similar to those covering the coal-shoots in the pavement of residential thoroughfares. Walls, ceiling, and floor were covered with beads of moisture, but whether from condensation or leakage Ross could not decide.

At the end of the corridor or alley-way was a steel water-tight door, running in gun-metal grooves packed with india-rubber. The door was closed.

Seizing the lever that served as a handle, Trefusis tried to turn it, but without success. Failing that, he kicked the steelwork with his heavy half-boots, yet no response came to his

appeal.

"The fellow told me to call," he muttered airily. "What did he want to play the fool for?"

Retracing his steps, Ross went to the other end of the alley-way. There was barely room to pass his companion as he did so. The place from which he had previously seen the reflected light was now shut off by a door similarly constructed to the one that he had vainly attempted to open. He was locked in a steel tomb that was itself a metal box within a metal box—a water-tight compartment of the submarine.

"They might just as well have switched off the light while they were about it," he exclaimed bitterly; then at the next instant he wildly regretted his words. The idea of being imprisoned in that cheerless compartment without a light of any description appalled him.

Almost frantically he returned to the door that had previously baffled him. As he did so he became aware that the submarine was tilting longitudinally. Since he was unaware of the direction of the craft, and which was the bow or stern, he was unable to judge whether the unterseeboot was diving, or ascending to the surface.

The incline became so great that he had to grasp the door-lever for support. Turning his head, he saw that Vernon was hanging on grimly to the partition between the tiers of bunks.

Then, as the vessel regained an even keel, silently and smoothly the door slid back in its grooves, revealing a small space barely six feet in length and five in breadth, and separated from the rest of the vessel by a closed water-tight panel. Part of the compartment was occupied by a bend, at which the seaman to whom he had previously spoken was busily engaged in mending a rent in an oilskin coat.

"My friend is now awake," announced Ross.

The man laid aside his work.

"Good!" he replied. "He is just in time. I will bring him his food and his clothes. After that you will both go on deck for fresh air before you are interviewed by Herr Kapitan Schwalbe. See that door? Beyond that you must not pass without permission. It is forbidden. If you do so, you will not have another opportunity in a hurry."

"What are they going to do with us?" asked Ross.

The sailor shook his head.

"It is forbidden to ask questions," he said sternly. "Whatever is necessary that you should know will be told you."

He turned his back upon his questioner, signifying in a plain manner that it was useless for Trefusis to say more. Taking the hint the lad returned to his chum, wondering deeply at the fate that had thrown them into the hands of the enemy.

## CHAPTER V

### Aboard U75

Like Ross, Vernon Haye made a poor meal. He had barely finished when a petty officer appeared and curtly ordered the lads to follow him. Since he did so in German it was fairly certain that Trefusis' admission had been communicated to both officers and crew.

Staggering, they passed along the alley-way into a broad subdivision that extended completely athwartships. It was one of the two broadside torpedo-rooms, and contained two tubes of slightly greater diameter than the British 21-inch. In "launching-trays" by the side of the tubes were eight torpedoes with their deadly war-heads attached. Both transverse bulkheads were almost hidden by indicators, voice-tubes, and pipes for transmitting the compressed air from the air-flasks to the torpedo-tubes.

Passing through another water-tight door the prisoners found themselves in yet another compartment. On one side was an "air-lock", with its complement of life-saving helmets; on the other was an oval-shaped door forming means of communication with the small room built against the curved sides of the submarine. Ross guessed, and rightly as it afterwards transpired, that the door led into a space that could be flooded at will, and which in turn enabled a diver to operate from the U-boat while submerged.

Confronting the lads was an almost perpendicular steel ladder communicating with the



conning-tower. Their guide was about to ascend when a stern voice exclaimed in German:

"Not that, you idiotic clodhopper! Have you lost your reason? The forward hatchway, don't you know?"

"Pardon, Herr Leutnant," said the petty officer, abjectly apologetic, and, backing down the ladder, he passed through another door entering into an alley-way between the officers' cabins. Here was the bowl of a supplementary periscope, so that a vision of what was taking place could be obtained without going into the conning-tower.

The alley-way terminated at another broadside torpedo-room, the pairs of tubes pointing in the opposite direction to those the lads had just seen.

Beyond were the living-quarters of the crew, kept spotlessly clean and tidy, yet Spartan-like in their simplicity. Two of the men were sound asleep in their bunks. Three more, who were playing cards at a plain deal table, glanced up from their game as the British lads passed by; but their interest was of brief duration, and stolidly they resumed their play.

Stooping down to avoid a large metal trough—the "house" for the forward 105-millimetre disappearing gun—Ross and his chum arrived at the ladder by which they were to gain the open air.

The hatch-cover was thrown back. For the first time during their captivity they made the discovery that it was night. Looking upwards, they could see a rectangle of dark sky twinkling with stars that, with the slight motion of the submarine, appeared to sway to and fro.

The cool night breeze fanned their heated foreheads as they gained the deck. For some time, coming suddenly from the glare of the electrically lighted interior, their eyes were blinded. They could see nothing but an indistinct blurr of star-lit, gently heaving water.

Gradually the sense of vision returned. They found themselves on the fore-deck of the unterseeboot. They had made up their minds to see a turtle-back deck with a narrow level platform in the centre; instead they found that the deck was almost flat and, in nautical parlance, flush, save where it was broken by the elongated conning-tower topped by the twin periscopes and slender wireless mast.

Lying on the deck in all conceivable attitudes were most of the U-boat's crew, taking advantage of a brief spell on the surface to breathe deeply of the ozone-laden atmosphere.

Not a light was visible on board. Even the hatchway by which the lads had gained the deck was constructed to trap any stray beam from the brilliant glare below.

Miles away, and low down upon the horizon, a white light blinked solemnly; then after a brief interval it was succeeded by a red gleam. This in turn was followed by white again.

Trefusis, with a sailor's inborn instinct, began to count the intervals. Although having no means of consulting the only time-recording watch in the possession of the two captives, he had a fair idea of counting seconds. At fourteen from the disappearance of the red light the white appeared. An almost identical space of time occurred before the red reappeared.

"It's the Wolf Light," mentally ejaculated the lad.

His next step was to fix the bearing of the lighthouse. This he did by looking for the Great Bear, and then, following the Pointers, the North Star.

"Phew!" he muttered softly. "Nor'-nor'-west. This brute of a submarine is right in the chops of the Channel—the main highway for vessels making for London and the south coast ports."

"What's that?" asked Vernon, who heard his chum speaking, but had failed to grasp the significance of his words.

"Nothing," replied Ross almost in a whisper. "I'll tell you later."

The cool air had revived both lads wonderfully. They had been left to their own devices, for the petty officer had gone aft. Those of the crew who were on deck seemed as apathetic as the men below concerning the presence of the kidnapped youths. They looked like men utterly worn out by fatigue and nervous strain.

Grasping the flexible wire hand-rail Ross continued his survey of the horizon, all of which was visible except a small portion obscured by the rise of the conning-tower. The air was remarkably clear. Taking into consideration the refraction of the atmosphere, the navigation lamps of a vessel shown at twenty feet above the sea would be visible from the low-lying deck of the submarine at a distance of six to seven miles.

But there were no signs of any vessels in the vicinity. The German submarine rolled lazily in complete isolation, waiting, like a snake in the grass, for its prey.

"Herr Kapitan would see you," exclaimed the guttural voice of the petty officer. "Come aft."

Remember, when you are addressed, to remove your caps."

The man led the way, making no attempt to avoid the recumbent limbs and bodies of the crew who impeded his passage. Treading with discretion Ross and Vernon followed till, after skirting the base of the conning-tower, they found themselves in the presence of Lieutenant-Commander Schwalbe, the Kapitan of U75.

Schwalbe was sitting in a small arm-chair which had been brought from his cabin. He was smoking a cigar. At his elbow stood his satellite, Hermann Rix, who was also smoking. This luxury was denied the crew, the officers being permitted to smoke only when the submarine was running awash or resting on the surface.

### **[Illustration: THE INTERVIEW WITH THE GERMAN CAPTAIN (missing from book)]**

"So you have recovered from your little involuntary rest," exclaimed Schwalbe in excellent English. He was a remarkably good linguist, for previous to the outbreak of the war he had been the skipper of a North-German-Lloyd boat. By sheer good luck he had reached a home port the day after the momentous declaration of hostilities, having narrowly escaped capture by a British destroyer.

Owing to the great expansion of the German submarine service, and its equally rapid reduction at the hands of the British Navy, the supply of specially trained officers of the Imperial Navy for this branch had run out. More had been transferred from the pent-up High Seas Fleet, while others had been absorbed from the now useless German Mercantile Marine, and hastily put through a course of instruction. Schwalbe was one of these, and after less than two months' hazardous work in the capacity of Unter-leutnant found himself in command of U75, one of the "last words" of von Tirpitz's piratical fleet.

Neither Ross nor Vernon replied. They could form no suitable answer. It was no doubt very considerate on the part of the Kapitan to enquire after their healths, but somehow the lads felt that the skipper of U75 was responsible for their presence on board.

"Come, come," continued Schwalbe. "Don't be sulky."

"We are not," expostulated Ross.

"I'm glad to hear it," rejoined the Kapitan, with a grin that had the effect of letting his cigar fall to the deck. He stooped to retrieve it, but, suddenly remembering that it was beneath his dignity, changed his mind and kicked the glowing stump on one side. Having taken another from a gun-metal case, he lit it with a device that merely smouldered instead of giving a bright light.

"It is as well we understand each other," he continued. "Do you know why you are on board U75?"

"No, sir," replied Ross.

"Neither do I," rejoined Schwalbe with astonishing candour. "I wish I had not been honoured with your company."

"The remedy is in your hands then, sir," said Trefusis. "You can land us the next time you put in at St. Mena's Island for petrol, or else put us on board the first fishing craft we fall in with."

"I beg to differ," was the rejoinder. "Unfortunately you are on board, and you must make the best of it, I understand from my friend—shall I say Dr. Ramblethorne—that you are both very inquisitive. Inquisitiveness is a bad trait in ones so young. You see, it has got you into trouble. The doctor has strong reasons for getting me to take care of you for some considerable time, so you will have an opportunity of seeing how we Germans make war. No half-measures, mark you. It is useless to make war with a velvet glove. You English people call us pirates, I believe?"

"It certainly looks like piracy when German submarines sink harmless merchantmen without warning," declared Vernon.

"For my part I have never sent a merchant vessel to the bottom without warning," said Schwalbe. "As a seaman I regret having to sink any ship of commerce. As an officer of the German Navy I have to obey orders unquestionably. Nevertheless I have always given the crews of British ships a chance of escape, and have never sunk any vessel until the men are safely in the boats, unless she attempts to show fight or to run away."

"Would you blame a skipper for trying to save his ship?" asked Ross.

"You do not understand," exclaimed Schwalbe. "We are at war. A blockade has been declared upon the British Islands. If, after full warning, merchantmen persist in taking the risk, it is their look-out, not mine. However, to return to a more personal matter: having been saddled with you, I must endure your presence. You will be well fed, as far as the resources at our command will allow. You will be free to go wherever you wish on board, with the exception of the conning-tower, motor- and torpedo-rooms. I am not ungrateful, for my brother, who had the misfortune to be in the *Ariadne*, was captured by your fleet. He is being well treated somewhere in England.

Hence I give privileges to the son of Admiral Trefusis and the son of Commander Haye so long as they are my compulsory guests. But bear in mind: you will be watched. Should you commit any fault, however slight, you will pay dearly for it. If you are foolish enough to attempt any act of treachery, death will be the penalty. Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

"Yes, sir," replied both lads.

"Very well. Is there anything you would like me to do within the bounds of reason?"

"Could we communicate with our parents?" asked Ross.

"No," replied Schwalbe decisively. "There are strong objections. And, while I am on the subject, should you fall in with the crews of destroyed ships you are strictly forbidden to communicate with them either by word or gesture. That will be a punishable offence of the second degree. Anything more?"

"My friend has had a nasty knock on the head," said Trefusis. "Have you a doctor on board?"

Again Kapitan Schwalbe smiled broadly.

"No," he replied. "There is no need. Cases of illness must wait till we return to port. The only injuries we are likely to sustain would put us beyond all medical aid. But several of the men are fairly skilled in rough surgery, so I will——"

"Vessel on the port bow, sir; she's showing no lights," announced a voice.

"All hands to stations!" ordered the skipper.

"Down below with you!" hissed the petty officer, who during the interview had stood rigidly at attention at two paces to the rear of his charges.

Already the hitherto recumbent men were alert. Quickly, yet in order, they disappeared down the fore hatchway, and amongst them were Ross and Vernon.

The officers had taken their places inside the shelter of the conning-tower. Everything was battened down from within, and with a gentle purr the electric motors were set in motion, while at the same time water ballast was admitted into the trimming-tanks.

Swift and stealthy had been their preparations, but the presence of the submarine was betrayed by the phosphorescent swirl of the water caused by the churning of the twin propellers as she slipped beneath the surface.

Twenty seconds later a swift vessel that looked suspiciously like a trawler, although her speed belied her, tore over the place where U75 had disappeared. Bare inches only separated the top of the latter's conning-tower from the massive keel plates of the craft that had all but accomplished its mission.

The watch-dogs of the British Navy were at work.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Tramp

Like a startled hare the unterseeboot fled for shelter. Not until she reached a depth of fifteen fathoms did she check her diagonally downward course. At intervals a dull booming, audible above the rattle of the motors, proclaimed the unpleasant fact that her antagonist was circling around the spot marked by the phosphorescent swirl and the iridescence of escaped oil, and was firing explosive grapnels in the hope of ripping open the U-boat's hull.

Kapitan Schwalbe, looking very grey in the artificial light, was standing behind the quartermaster. His hands were clenched in momentary apprehension. Beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. He was experiencing a foretaste of the torment of the lost.

As a submarine officer of the Imperial German Navy he was a failure. Only sheer luck had hitherto saved him from the fate that had overtaken scores of his brother officers in that branch of the service. Skilled as he was in the handling of a huge liner, he lacked the iron nerve that is essential to the man who has to risk his life in a steel box that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, offers no means of escape in the event of a catastrophe.

Yet he had to do his duty, notwithstanding his utter distaste for submarine work. He had had no option. The officers of the British Navy volunteer for submarine duties; those of the German

Navy are simply told off whether they want to or not.

The nerve-racking work was beginning to tell upon him. His orders condemned him to a forlorn hope, for the English Channel was known to be a death-trap for the under-sea blockaders. The sight of a trawler filled him with feelings akin to terror. The possibility, nay probability, of a merchantman carrying guns made him approach his intended prey with the utmost caution; yet, as he had remarked to Ross Trefusis, he had never torpedoed any vessel flying the red ensign without giving her warning.

But it was not chivalry that prompted Schwalbe to act with consideration. Had he been untrammelled he would have sent his prey to the bottom without compunction, for he had all the brutal instincts of the cultured Hun. It was a superstitious fear that held his frightfulness in check—a presentiment based upon the Mosaic Law, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Having placed a considerable distance between him and his attacker, Kapitan Schwalbe ordered the electric motors to be stopped. The ballast tanks were "blown", and cautiously U75 rose to the surface.

It was the best course open to her. The depth of the water was much too great to allow her to rest on the bed of the sea. On the other hand, in order to keep submerged, the motors would have to be in motion. No one knew better than Schwalbe that the British patrol-boats would be in a position to locate with uncanny certitude the presence of their quarry, unless the strictest silence were maintained by the fugitive.

So, ready to dive at the first alarm, U75 floated awash until such times as were considered favourable for getting under way. Decidedly this part of the English Channel was, for the time being at least, unhealthy; and Kapitan Schwalbe resolved to make for the Bristol Channel, where the dangers of being destroyed by modern mosquitoes were more remote.

Meanwhile Ross and Vernon had been sent back to the quarters in the alley-way, by the side of the motor-room. Not knowing the reason for the U-boat's sudden submergence, and consequently unaware of the danger that threatened her, they formed the erroneous impression that the submarine was about to attack.

"The old fellow gave us a pretty straight tip," remarked Vernon, when the chums found themselves alone. "All the same, I vote we get out of it at the first opportunity, favourable or otherwise."

"Ssh," whispered Ross. "Someone might be listening. I don't see how you propose to clear out, though."

"We were on deck just now."

"We were," agreed Trefusis.

"It was fairly dark. All the men up for'ard were lying down. It would have been an easy matter to have dived overboard and swum for it, if we hadn't been twenty miles or more from land."

"There was a bright look-out kept, all the same," objected Ross. "And I wouldn't mind saying that if the submarine were closer inshore, getting a supply of petrol, for example, we should be closely watched. All the same, I'm with you if we get the ghost of a chance. But it's a rummy affair altogether. Fancy that chap knowing our names and the rank of our respective fathers."

"Ramblethorne must have told him that," said Vernon.

"I suppose so; but for what reason? By Jove, if we get out of this mess all right, we'll have something to talk about—having been prisoners on a German submarine!"

The lads were not allowed on deck again that night. Acting upon Hays's suggestion they "turned in", and slept fitfully until awakened by the noise of the watch being relieved.

The seaman, Hans Koppe, brought them their breakfast. The meal consisted of fish, coffee, and the usual black bread. By this time the captives had practically recovered from the effects of the injection. Hays's head was still painful, although the headache had left him.

They ate with avidity, owing possibly to the atmosphere of the confined space, which was highly charged with oxygen.

"What is the Captain's name?" asked Ross, when the man came to remove the breakfast things.

The sailor told him.

"Where are we now?" enquired Vernon.

The man winked solemnly.

"Afloat," he replied. "Be content with that."

Just then there were unmistakable signs of activity on the part of the submarine crew. Several men hurried along the alley-way, each with a set purpose. They paid little heed to the Englanders as they passed.

At their heels came Herr Rix, the Leutnant of the submarine. He was beaming affably.

"Goot mornings!" he exclaimed. "You come mit me, den I show you how we blockade."

He led the way to the compartment in which the bowl of the supplementary periscope was placed. It was now broad daylight, and consequently the bowl showed a distinct image. A junior officer was standing by, but on seeing Rix approach he saluted and moved aside.

"Look!" exclaimed the Leutnant.

Both lads peered into the bowl. On its dull sides, an expanse of sea and sky was portrayed. Beyond that they could see nothing, until Rix called their attention to a small dark object.

"Englische sheep!" he declared. "Now you vos watch."

He touched a metal stud. Instantly an arrangement of telescopic lenses came into play within the tube of the periscope, with the result that a small portion of the view was greatly magnified upon the object card. It revealed a tramp of about nine hundred tons. She had a single funnel painted black, with two broad red bands; two stumpy masts, with derricks, and a lofty bridge and chart-house abaft the funnel. She was wall-sided. Her rusty hull was originally painted black. Here and there were squares of red lead, showing that her crew had been engaged in trying to smarten her up before she reached port. Aft, frayed and dirty with the smoke that poured from her funnel, floated the red ensign.

The submarine began to rise. Although she tilted abruptly, the image of the tramp steamer still remained upon the object bowl. By an ingenious arrangement, the lenses were constructed to compensate for any deviation of the tube of the periscope from the vertical. The lads could see the bows of the U-boat shaking clear of the water, throwing cascades of foam off on either side as the passing craft forged ahead at at least eighteen knots.

Now, for the first time, the skipper of the tramp saw the danger. He was a short, thick-set man, with white hair and an iron-grey moustache, and a face the colour of mahogany. For an instant he grasped the bridge-rails and looked towards the submarine, then gesticulated violently to the man at the wheel.

The spikes ran through the helmsman's hands, as he rapidly revolved the wheel actuating the steam steering-gear. The tramp swung hard to port, with the idea of baffling the momentarily expected torpedo.

Kapitan Schwalbe acted up to his principles. In any case he was loath to use a torpedo upon a comparatively small vessel. In response to an order, half a dozen of the submarine's crew swarmed on deck, three going for'ard and three aft. Within forty-five seconds the two disappearing guns were raised from the water-tight "houses".

Ross, Vernon, and the German Leutnant remained gazing into the bowl of the periscope. The vision so absorbed the attention of the two lads that they hardly heeded the presence of Herr Rix, who occasionally emitted grunts of satisfaction or annoyance as the scene was enacted.

The bow gun spat viciously. The range was but three hundred yards. The missile passed a few feet in front of the tramp's bows, and, throwing up a shower of spray that burst inboard on the British vessel's fo'c'sle, ricocheted a mile or so away.

The tramp's skipper showed his mettle. Round swung the vessel, listing heavily as she did so. By this time the call for more steam had been responded to, and dense clouds of black smoke belched from her funnel, mingled with puffs of white vapour as the siren bleated loudly for aid.

Running awash, U75 had a great advantage of speed; overtaking her prey she was able to send half a dozen shells into the lofty target presented as she slid by.

Holes gaped in the thin plating close to the waterline. A shell, passing completely through the funnel, demolished the siren. Being without wireless, the tramp was now without means of long-distance signalling.

Another missile hit the chart-house and, exploding, swept the frail structure overboard in a thousand fragments. The old skipper, hit by a splinter of wood, fell inertly upon the bridge; but the next instant he staggered to his feet, bawling to the crew to get the hand-steering gear connected.

"He's down again!" exclaimed Ross breathlessly, as the brave old man dropped upon the shattered planking of the bridge. "Hurrah! He's still alive."

The skipper had deliberately taken cover behind the slender shelter afforded by the metal side-light boards. By the frantic movement of his arm, it was evident that he was exhorting his men to "stick it" like Britons.

The hail of shells continued. Already fire had broken out on board in several places. A sliver of metal sheered through the ensign staff. Without hesitation one of the crew rushed off, retrieved the weather-worn bunting, and made his way to the mainmast.

Slowly and deliberately he re-hoisted the ensign until it fluttered proudly from the truck, then with apparent unconcern the man disappeared below.

By this time the tramp was again under control, with a course shaped for land, which lay about ten miles to the S.S.E. It was, however, a foregone conclusion that unless help were speedily forthcoming the vessel was doomed.

The tramp began to heel, almost imperceptibly at first, then with increasing speed. She had received her *coup de grâce*.

Still the engines were kept going full speed ahead. The dauntless skipper remained on the bridge, with a look of grim resolution on his weather-beaten features.

Slowly the vessel's way diminished. Her bow-wave, owing to the gradually increasing draught, was greater, but less sharp than before. In a few minutes the water would be pouring over her fore-deck.

Seeing that their work was completed, the pirates ceased fire, the guns' crews standing with folded arms and stolidly watching the tramp as she struggled in her death-throes.

Presently a vast cloud of steam issued from her engine-room. The inrush of water had damped her furnaces. The engineer and firemen, their faces black with coal-dust and streaming with moisture, hurried on deck.

For another quarter of a mile the doomed vessel carried way, then came to a sudden stop. As she did so she gave a quick list to starboard, until only a few inches of bulwark amidships showed above the waves.

Then, and only then, did the skipper give orders for the boats to be lowered. In an orderly manner the crew manned the falls, and the task of abandoning the ship began.

Without undue haste, the crew dropped into the waiting boats, each man with a bundle containing his scanty personal effects wrapped up in a handkerchief. The Captain was the last to leave. He did so reluctantly, his left hand tightly grasping the ship's papers.

Having rowed a safe distance from the foundering vessel, the men rested on their oars, and waited in silence for the end. It was not long in coming.

The tramp was heeling more and more, and slightly down by the bows. Suddenly she almost righted; then, amid a smother of foam as the compressed air burst open her hatches, she flung her stern high in the air.

Even then she seemed in no hurry. The after part from the mainmast remained in view, the now motionless propeller being well clear of the water.

For quite a minute she remained thus, then with a quick yet almost gentle movement slid under the waves. The last seen of her was the weather-worn red ensign still fluttering from the truck.

The periscope's bowl showed nothing but an expanse of sea and sky, and the two boats rising buoyantly to the waves.

A grim chuckle brought Ross and Vernon back to their surroundings. Herr Rix was rubbing his hands and grunting with evident satisfaction.

"Goot!" he ejaculated. "Now, how you like dat? Now you see how we German make blockade, hein?"

"A brave deed," replied Ross scornfully, and, gripping Vernon by the arm, led him back to their uncomfortable quarters in the alley-way.

## CHAPTER VII

### On the Bed of the Sea

For the next twenty-four hours nothing exciting occurred. The U-boat kept to the surface as much as possible, running under her petrol motors at fifteen knots. To exceed that pace would

mean too great a consumption of fuel, and already the vessel was short of petrol.

Kapitan Schwalbe was prone to act on the side of extreme caution. Having sunk one vessel, he would not tackle another in the same vicinity. He invariably put at least a hundred miles between him and the scene of his latest ignominious exploit before attempting another act of kultur.

Three times during that twenty-four hours he dived: twice on sighting what were unquestionably Bristol Channel pilot-boats, and on the third occasion when a Penzance lugger under motor-power (for it was a dead calm) crossed his track.

All this time a regular stream of shipping was passing up and down the Bristol Channel, as unconcernedly as in the piping days of peace. To anyone but a bumptious German, the sight would have told its own tale; for the British Mercantile Marine, used to danger and difficulties, was not to be deterred by the "frightfulness" of von Tirpitz's blockade. On the contrary, the possibility of falling in with a hostile submarine gave an unwonted spice to the everyday routine of the toilers of the sea.

After breakfast on the following morning Ross and Vernon were told to go on deck. The sea was still calm, and the submarine, now running awash at full speed, was cleaving the water with practically dry decks.

The lads soon realized what was in progress. A couple of miles away was a large ocean cargo-boat, outward bound, and U75 was in pursuit.

Trefusis and his chum were not allowed for'ard, where the quick-firer was already in position for opening fire. They were ordered abaft the conning-tower, the hatch of which was open.

Kapitan Schwalbe's head and shoulders could be seen projecting above the opening. On the raised grating surrounding the conning-tower, stood a boyish-looking Unter-leutnant. Hermann Rix was nowhere to be seen. Apparently his duties compelled him to remain below.

Presently the quick-firer barked, and a projectile struck the water about a hundred yards from the starboard side of the pursued vessel. With the discharge of the gun, a sailor hoisted the black cross ensign of Germany from a small flagstaff aft, while a signal in the International Code ordering the British vessel to heave to instantly fluttered from the light mast immediately abaft the conning-tower.

The only response from the chase was the hoisting of the red ensign, for previously she had shown no colours. Slowly, defiantly, the bunting was hauled close up, and ironically "dipped" three times.

Again and again the submarine's bow-chaser fired. The shells were well aimed as regards direction, but all fell short. Imperceptibly the merchantman had increased distance.

"Look at the fools!" Ross heard the Kapitan remark, as he kept his binoculars focused on his intended prey. "They are trying to snapshot us. Are all Englishmen so blind to peril?"

"Are you sure they haven't a couple of quick-firers mounted aft, sir?" asked the Unter-leutnant. "There are several men gathered round something on the poop."

"Himmel, I hope not!" ejaculated Schwalbe. "But no; had they any guns they would have opened fire before now. What is the matter with our gun-layer? It is about time he got a shell home."

The Unter-leutnant lowered himself on the foredeck, and shouted angrily at the seaman whose duty it was to "lay" the bow-chasers. The man again bent over the sights.

This time the shell pitched ahead of the chase, but slightly to port. Some of the spray thrown up by the projectile fell on board.

"Is that the best you can do, you brainless idiot?" shouted Schwalbe wrathfully. Now that he was in pursuit he was loath to be baffled, but at the same time he realized that the submarine was using a lot of precious fuel and a prodigious amount of ammunition without any definite result.

In the midst of his torrent of abuse directed upon the luckless gun-layer, Kapitan Schwalbe suddenly stopped. Gripping the rim of the oval hatchway he gazed, horror-stricken, at two objects bobbing in the water directly in the path of the submarine. Then, recovering his voice, he shouted to the quartermaster to port helm.

The fellow obeyed promptly, but it was too late. Practically simultaneously, two barrels swung round and crashed alongside the submarine's hull.

Officers and men, expecting momentarily to find themselves blown into the air, stood stock-still. Then, as nothing so disastrous occurred, Schwalbe gave orders for easy astern.

The barrels, connected by a span of grass rope, had been thrown overboard from the pursued

vessel, in the hope that the submarine would foul her propellers in the tangle of line. Once a blade picked up that trailing rope, the latter would coil round the boss as tightly as a band of flexible steel.

The plan all but succeeded; only the metal guards protecting the propellers saved them from being hopelessly jammed. Yet the attempt was attended with good results as far as the British ship was concerned, for by the time U75 had lost way and had cautiously backed away from the obstruction, the swift cargo-vessel had gained a distance that put her beyond all chance of being overhauled.

Infuriated by his failure, Kapitan Schwalbe went aft and descended into his cabin. He was hardly conscious of the presence of his two involuntary guests as he passed. He was thinking of the fate that had consigned him to a perilous and uncongenial task. Without doubt the vessel he had been pursuing was equipped with wireless, and by this time a number of those dreaded hornets would be tearing towards the spot. To add to his discomfiture it was reported to him that the reserve of fuel on board had seriously dwindled. In order to remain effective it was necessary that U75 should replenish her tanks before another forty-eight hours had passed.

According to his customary tactics, Schwalbe ordered the submarine to dive to sixty feet. At that depth she would be safe from any possibility of being rammed. Provided she could avoid the under-water obstructions with which the British naval authorities had sown the bed of the sea at almost every point likely to be frequented by lurking hostile submarines, she was in no actual danger.

Gaining his diminutive cabin, Schwalbe by sheer force of habit consulted the aneroid. The mercury was falling rapidly. Since he last looked, barely two hours previously, it had dropped 764 to 734 millimetres, or an inch and two-tenths. That meant that the anti-cyclone was rapidly breaking up, and that a severe gale was approaching with considerable swiftness.

U75 must submerge and seek shelter. It was impossible for her to keep at a uniform depth unless she maintained steerage-way; that meant a great demand upon her storage batteries. She could not remain on the bottom of the sea in a heavy gale, owing to the constant "pumping" or up-and-down movements caused by the varying pressure of passing waves, unless she sought a sheltered roadstead—and sheltered roadsteads were generally mined, or guarded by some ingenious device that had already accounted for several of U75's consorts.

Producing a chart of the Bristol Channel, Schwalbe unfolded and spread it upon a table. Then, in conjunction with a translation of the latest British Admiralty guide to the west coast of England, he proceeded to select what he hoped would be a snug shelter during the coming storm.

"Herr Rix!" he shouted. "I'll make for this anchorage. There's every indication of a strong blow from the nor'-east."

"This" was Helwick Channel, a deep, almost blind passage between the Glamorgan coast and an outlying submerged reef known as the East and West Helwick. In fine weather it was a short cut for traders plying between Llanelly and Swansea. In bad weather it was a place to be avoided, as far as sailing vessels were concerned. Sheltered by the bold outlines of Worm's Head, it ought to prove an ideal lurking-place until the gale had blown itself out, for there was little danger of the place being used as an anchorage, since vessels preferred to give the rock-bound coast a wide berth. On this account, it was also highly probable that the Helwick channel had not been safe-guarded by the British naval authorities.

Just before sunset, U75, having made the passage unobserved, brought up in twelve fathoms of water, resting evenly on the firm, hard sands at the bottom.

Ross and his chum turned in early. There was nothing for them to do. They held aloof from the crew; there were no books to entertain them, no games to amuse them. The submarine was now motionless, sufficient water ballast having been taken in to allow her to settle firmly upon the bottom; but, in order to be prepared, the anchor was let go. Thus not the slightest movement of the hull was apparent. The rest, after hours of erratic movement on the oily swell, was a welcome one.

The lads had set their joint watch by the submarine's time, which, being mid-European standard, was one hour fast of Greenwich.

For several hours they slept soundly and undisturbed. Suddenly they were both awakened by the muffled tramp of men in heavy sea-boots. The solitary light in the alley-way was switched off; the water-tight doors were firmly closed. Already the air in the confined space was stifling.

"What has happened?" asked Vernon anxiously, for the vessel, instead of resting immovably upon the bed of the channel, was now rolling sluggishly. Yet she could not be under way, for the motors were silent.

Springing from his bunk, Ross felt for the switch of the electric light. It was already down, yet the flow of current was interrupted.

"Let's find out," he said. "Come along."



The lads, before turning in, had carefully laid out their clothes, so as to be ready to slip into them at a moment's notice, yet it was a matter of considerable difficulty to dress in the dark.

"The door's closed," announced Ross as the lads groped their way to the end of the alley-way.

"I believe the submarine's holed," suggested Hays.

"No; she wouldn't lift as she's doing. Besides, the crew are moving about. Let's bang on the door with our boots."

For several minutes they hammered, but without result. The air, never very fresh, was now almost unbearable, owing to lack of ventilation. The imprisoned youths began to get desperate.

Then, without warning, the door slid back. The alley-way was flooded with brilliant light.

"Make haste!" shouted a voice which the lads recognized as that of Hans Koppe. At the same time he grasped Ross by the shoulder and literally dragged him across the steel threshold. Vernon followed quickly, but barely had he gained the compartment beyond than the massive steel door shot back again.

"Didn't you hear the order all hands for'ard?" asked Hans, not unkindly, for the white faces of the English lads told their own tale.

"No," replied Ross. "Besides, we are not included in the 'hands', are we?"

"You'll have to bear the consequences if you don't obey," rejoined Koppe. "I'm supposed to be looking after you, but how was I to know you hadn't turned out? Fortunately for you, I heard your knocking, and asked Herr Kapitan to open the doors. He was angry, but did so."

"What has happened then?" asked Trefusis, for the seaman seemed in a communicative mood.

"A shift of wind. It's blowing great guns up aloft, and there's a terrific tumble into this channel. We've dragged, or, rather, swung round our anchor."

"But we are safe enough?" asked Vernon.

"Yes, safe," replied Hans. "Too safe; we cannot break out our anchor. They are sending a diver to see what is amiss."

Evidently the diving arrangements on board were not considered to be of a confidential nature, for Hans led the way to the compartment under the fore-hatch, without the lads being sent back by the significant word "verboden".

A man was preparing for a submarine walk. He was already dressed in an india-rubber suit, with leaden weights attached to his chest, back, and boots. Two others were standing by, ready to place the helmet over his head, when Lieutenant Rix had finished giving him minute directions.

The officer spoke rapidly and in a low tone. Ross could not catch all he said, but the words "gefährliche Strömungen" (dangerous currents) and "Der Wendepunkt der Flut" (slack water) and "Drei Viertel funf" (a quarter to five) occurred frequently.

Vernon glanced at his watch. It was then a minute after four. Apparently Rix was impressing upon the man that he must clear the anchor at slack water, which occurred at a quarter to five.

The two attendants then proceeded to place the diver's helmet on his head. The lads noticed that it had neither air-tube nor telephone wire. Nor was there a life-line attached to his waist. Fresh air was obtained from a metal case strapped to his back. The man was able to work independently, and without having to rely upon his air supply from the submarine.

The oval door in the diving-chamber was thrown open. The diver entered, and the water-tight panel was quickly replaced. One of the seamen thrust over a short lever, and immediately water rushed into the small compartment. As soon as the space was filled the diver was able to open a similar door in the outer plating of the submarine, and thus gain the bed of the sea.

Presently Lieutenant Rix turned, and saw for the first time that Ross and Vernon were discreetly standing in the background.

"Go away. It is forbidden!" he shouted angrily.

They obeyed promptly, retreating to the space allotted to the crew, since it was neither desirable nor possible to return to their bunks.

For some minutes the luckless Hans Koppe was subjected to a severe dressing-down by his hot-headed officer, and when at length the seaman rejoined the lads he was in no humour to resume conversation.

Slowly the minutes sped. The submarine was still rolling sluggishly, in spite of the fact that more water had been admitted into the ballast tanks.

The men were talking seriously amongst themselves. From scraps of conversation that drifted to the lads' ears, it was evident that they had grave doubts concerning the ability of the diver to perform his task, and even of his chances of regaining the submarine, owing to the violent disturbances of the water.

Presently the motion of the anchored submarine became more acute. A weird grating sound—the noise made by the hull rasping over the bed of the sea—was distinctly audible.

One of the seamen produced a pocket compass. His startled exclamation brought other members of the crew around him. The magnetic needle was apparently describing a semicircle. U75 was swinging round her anchor.

Just then a bell tinkled, and a disc oscillated on the indicator board on the bulkhead. Instantly the two men who had been told off as attendants upon the diver hurried aft, while their companions crowded expectantly around the door.

The two men came back, staggering under the weight of the diver. They had already removed his head-dress and leaden weights. Water dropped from his rubber suit. His face was livid, his eyes wide open and rolling. One of his bare hands was streaked with blood that flowed sullenly from a cut in his numbed flesh.

Kapitan Schwalbe and Leutnant Rix followed him into the crew-space. It was not through feelings of compassion that they had come for'ard. It was acute anxiety to hear the diver's report.

The luckless man was laid upon the mess-table. His attendants divested him of his diving-suit, and rubbed his body with rough towels. A petty officer poured half a glass of brandy down his throat.

"What is amiss?" Kapitan Schwalbe kept on repeating.

With a great effort the diver sat up.

"An anchor, sir," he gasped feebly. "An anchor—an English naval pattern one—has been dropped right over ours. A very big one."

Then his eyes closed, and he fell back unconscious.

"Gott in Himmel!" ejaculated Rix. "We are trapped!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### Balked by a Sea-plane

"How so?" demanded Kapitan Schwalbe. "If we keep quiet, the cruiser—for cruiser she must be, judging by the fellow's description—will weigh and proceed."

"When she does weigh we are undone," said Rix despondently. "We are swinging round our anchor. For all we know, our cable has taken a turn round hers. As soon as they heave up their anchor, our anchor and cable will be brought up with it, and then the game is up. Either the strain will overcome our dead weight and we will be hauled to the surface, or else they'll lower one of their brutal explosive charges."

"The situation is serious," admitted Schwalbe in a low tone, for his Leutnant's words had produced a demoralizing effect upon the men. "How much cable have we inboard?"

Rix repeated the question. A petty officer doubled forward to consult the cable indicator. U75's anchor, when under way, was housed in a trough on the under side of the submarine's forefoot. The cable was automatically ranged in a compartment between the inner and outer skins, the space being always filled with water. The inboard end of the cable was not shackled; but to prevent its being able to take charge and run out, an indicator was placed on the bulkhead nearest to the cable tier. The amount of chain let go was regulated by a compressor, which was actuated from within the hull by means of levers and cranks, watertight glands being provided to prevent any leakage into the interior of the submarine.

"Seventy-five fathoms," reported the petty officer. "When we commenced to swing we paid out the length we had taken on board when we hove short."

"We must sacrifice the lot, Herr Rix," decided Kapitan Schwalbe. "There is no time to lose. Storm or no storm, we must slip and run for it."

It was U75's only chance, but it left her with only a small stockless kedge-anchor and chain,

insufficient to withstand a heavy strain.

The compressor was released. With a loud rumble, for every sound was magnified within the confined space, the rest of the cable was allowed to take charge. It did so promptly, the end of the chain giving the hull a defiant smack as it did so. U75, no longer held by her anchor, began to drift with the tide, scraping dismally over the bed of Helwich Channel.

Schwalbe was now back at his post in the conning-tower. He dare not take the submarine to the surface until he had put a safe distance between him and the anchored British warship. Nor did he care to order the ballast tanks to be blown. Rather than allow the "pumping" of the seas to hammer the submerged craft upon the hard sand, he preferred to take the risk of letting her drag.

Fortunately the tide set evenly along the bed of the channel. A cross-current would have set the submarine upon the jagged rocks of the hidden West Helwich Ridge. Nevertheless there was always the danger of being hurled violently against a detached rock, or of fouling a live mine if by chance the British had laid obstructions in the channel.

Both Ross and Vernon knew the danger, but, manfully concealing their misgivings, they watched the faces of those of the crew who were "watch below". Most of the men were Frisians, broad-shouldered, blonde-featured, and generally devoid of fear. Yet the ceaseless strain upon the nerves had already begun to tell. As hardy fishermen, they would not have hesitated to launch their open boats in a storm to go to the rescue of a hapless vessel aground on the grim sand-banks of the Frisian shore. As the conscript crew of the submarine, compelled to keep within the limits of a steel box that almost momentarily threatened to be their tomb, their natural bravery was quenched.

Many of them sat upon their lockers, stolid-faced men who had already tasted of the bitterness of death. Others showed unmistakable signs of excitement, bordering on frenzy. They dreaded their life of modern piracy. The idea of sinking hapless merchantmen was repugnant to them, for they understood the brotherhood of the sea. It would be different if they were called upon to attack an armed British ship of war. They had no option but to obey their junker officers, who in turn were compelled to accept the misguided orders of the arch-pirate, von Tirpitz.

They were disheartened, too, for reports, in spite of the vigilance of the officers to conceal them, had reached them of the losses inflicted upon other unterseebooten. Occasionally they heard of a submarine crew being saved, but generally it was a case of total loss of all on board, by some hitherto unknown means, at the hands of the British Navy.

A hand touched Ross lightly on the shoulder. Turning, he saw Hans Koppe standing in a darkened corner of the compartment.

"Can you tell me this, mein herr?" asked the seaman in a low tone. "Is it true that the English give no quarter to German seamen in submarines?"

"I shouldn't think that they would refuse to do so," replied Trefusis. "Of course, I can quite understand that an opportunity doesn't often occur; but I've heard of several instances in which your U-boats have surrendered, and the crews have been treated exactly the same as other prisoners of war."

"I have heard differently," said Hans, "but I hope it's a mistake. I have a feeling that we won't see Wilhelmshaven again. And I have a wife and six children at Flensburg. Our Kapitän, too, expects that we might be denied quarter, because we have sunk your merchantmen. Believe me, I regret having done so, but we have orders. Do you know why Kapitän Schwalbe took you on board?"

"Because a certain German agent wanted us out of the way, I suppose," replied Ross.

"Perhaps," admitted Hans Koppe. "But in the event of our being captured he thinks that his good treatment of you will be in his favour. We are, I do not mind telling you, in a very tight corner. Our fuel supply is almost run out. We cannot hope to return home by way of the Straits of Dover. Not one of our submarines has tried that passage of late without meeting with disaster—at least, so I heard der Kapitän tell der Leutnant. Ach! It is deplorable, this war."

The rapid ringing of a gong was the signal for the watch below to turn out. A peculiar hissing noise proclaimed the fact that the ballast tanks were being emptied. U75 no longer grated over the bottom; her motors were running almost dead slow.

Although submerged, the submarine was "pumping" violently. Seasoned men were prostrate with sea-sickness. The air, in spite of chemical purifiers, was becoming almost intolerable. Everything movable was being thrown about in utter disorder, while to add to the discomfort of the crew the covering-plates of one of the lubricating-oil tanks had been strained, and at every jerk jets of viscous fluid would squirt through the fracture and trickle sullenly over the floor of the crew-space.

Since the watertight doors were still closed, Ross and Vernon were unable to get back to their bunks. Feeling thoroughly wretched, they were glad to accept Hans Koppe's offer to lie

down on a long locker.

At noon, U75 came to the surface. The storm, being short forecasted, had quickly blown itself out, but the waves still ran high.

It was a prearranged plan on the part of the three U-boats operating in the English and Bristol Channels to communicate with each other by wireless at noon and at midnight. U75's wireless had a range of about 180 miles, and although it could be "jammed", the call could not be tapped by vessels other than the one for which it was intended. To make doubly sure, the messages were sent in code.

For nearly ten minutes U75 "made her number" without eliciting any reply. Perhaps it was well that Kapitan Schwalbe did not know what had happened to her consorts. U74 was at that moment lying on her side at the bottom of a Welsh harbour, her crew poisoned by the chlorine fumes from her batteries—the result of a rash curiosity on the part of her Lieutenant-Commander to investigate the approaches to the anchorage. As for U77, she was flying blindly for safety, with a couple of destroyers hard on her track, and a naval sea-plane overhead to direct them in their search.

Foiled in her efforts to get in touch with her consorts, U75 remained awash. The heave of the sea made it most difficult for her to use her periscope with certainty, for she had chosen a bad pitch on her ascent—the furious "overfalls" or "tide-rips" to the west of Lundy Island.

"We'll pay another visit to St. Mena's Island, Herr Rix," decided Kapitan Schwalbe, after the two officers had discussed the sinister matter of their futile attempt to make use of the wireless. "To-night at nine o'clock ought to suit. If we cannot get von Ruhle to see our signals—for my own part, I doubt whether he is in these parts—we'll have to do our best to get ashore. Meanwhile, keep a bright look-out. If we see any likely vessel coming this way, we'll try our luck once more."

"Message just received, mein herr," announced the wireless operator.

"From whom?" enquired Kapitan Schwalbe eagerly. He was devoutly hoping that either U74 or U77 had been able to "call up".

"I cannot say, sir," replied the man as he handed a code message to his superior.

Decoded, the "wireless" was as follows:

"Station 41 to unterseebooten. Two hundred gallons of fuel available here. Will be on the look-out for signals at 1 a.m."

The message was a "general call" for a secret petrol depot to any German submarine operating in the vicinity. Reference to the list of stations showed that "41" was at Port Treherne, a remote cove on the North Cornish coast about fifty miles from St. Mena's Island.

"I suppose it's safe," remarked Rix.

"With due precautions—yes," rejoined Kapitan Schwalbe. "At any rate, petrol we must have. Where's the chart? Ah, there we are! It looks a fairly easy place to approach, don't you think? The only danger from a navigation point is apparently this ledge of rocks—Lost Chance Reef, it's called. What unpleasant names these Englishmen give to their coasts!"

At that moment the Unter-leutnant, who happened to be at the conning-tower periscope, reported that a large vessel was bearing down towards them.

Kapitan Schwalbe hurried to the conning-tower. The object depicted was that of a modern tank-vessel about four hundred feet in length. She was low in the water, showing that she was well laden. In place of masts she had four stumpy poles supporting derricks. Right aft was the single funnel. The navigation bridge was well for'ard, connected with another bridge just in front of the funnel by a long slender gangway.

"An oil-tank homeward bound!" exclaimed Kapitan Schwalbe. "Just what we want to fall in with. All being well, there will be no necessity to visit either Port Treherne or St. Mena's Island. Ach! When we have taken what we require we will set fire to the ship, and the English will have a splendid view of a maritime bonfire."

The crew were ordered to their stations, the ballast tanks "blown", and U75 rose to the surface instead of "running awash", since the Kapitan had resolved to stop the tank by gun-fire.

Even then the waves were running so high that the guns' crews were almost constantly up to their knees in water.

Somewhat to the surprise of the submarine's officers and crew, the tank-steamer made no attempt to escape. The firing of a shot across her bows and the display of the black cross ensign were enough to cause the skipper to reverse her engines.

In less than five minutes, the oil-vessel was rolling in the trough of the sea and drifting slowly to leeward. Yet it was a somewhat remarkable circumstance that no attempt was made to lower

the red ensign that was proudly displayed at the stern.

Kapitan Schwalbe, with his intimate knowledge of navigation, knew that the only way possible to board the prize was to run to leeward of her, and let the hull of the large vessel serve as a breakwater. He also knew that the submarine would have to be constantly under way during the boarding operations, otherwise the tank-vessel, offering considerable resistance to the wind, would drift down upon U75, whose leeway was almost unappreciable.

"Send a boat, and lower your accommodation ladder," ordered Kapitan Schwalbe, who, as the submarine ranged up half a cable's length to leeward of the tank-vessel, had left the shelter of the conning-tower and was standing on the platform in its wake.

"Aye, aye," was the prompt response.

"Board her, Herr Rix," said the Leutnant's superior officer. "Bring back her papers with you. Order them to pump heavy oil both to windward and leeward. We will then be able to run close alongside and receive her hoses."

A boat containing two seamen and an apprentice was lowered from the tank's quarter and rowed to the submarine. Into it dropped Leutnant Rix and half a dozen armed men. With them they took two incendiary bombs fitted with time-fuses.

Rix smiled grimly as he gained the oil-steamer's deck. The captain and first mate were at the head of the accommodation ladder to receive him. Most of the crew were already mustering on deck, each with a bundle containing his private effects.

"You prize to German boat," announced the Leutnant. "Make you no trouble and we you will not harm. First we will haf much oil—petroleum, is it not? Order your engineer to get steam to donkey-engine, and your men—the—the— Hein! Ach, I haf it—the hoses to get ready. When we fill up, then twenty minutes we give you to clear out. You onderstan'?"

"Perfectly," replied the British skipper, a tall, raw-boned Scot, as he eyed the podgy German Leutnant with grim contempt. "But d'ye ken yon?"



**"D'YE KEN YON?' ASKED THE BRITISH SKIPPER, AS  
HE EYED  
THE PODGY GERMAN LEUTNANT WITH CONTEMPT"**

He pointed skywards. Less than five hundred feet up, yet sufficiently far from the tank-vessel to enable the latter to screen her from the unterseeboot, was a large naval sea-plane. It was to deaden the noise of her motors that the ship's steam-pipe was continually blowing off steam from the time that U75 made her peremptory demand.

The eyes of the Leutnant and his six men followed the direction indicated by the British skipper's outstretched hand.

At that instant the sea-plane was visible above the towering sides of the British vessel.

U75 was still forging slowly ahead. In a trice Kapitan Schwalbe decided how to act. Ordering the men on deck to their diving stations, he dropped agilely into the conning-tower and gave the word for the helm to be ported.

Thus, while the quick-firers were being housed, the submarine had drawn close under the oil-tank's quarter. Here she was comparatively safe from the sea-plane, as the latter could not drop any bombs without risk of exploding the highly inflammable cargo of the British vessel.

In ten seconds the sea-plane was over and beyond her quarry. She had then to turn and circle overhead, awaiting the chance of shattering her enemy as she dived.

U75 was already disappearing beneath the waves.

She dived at a very oblique angle, steeper than she had ever done before.

Ross and Vernon, unaware of what was taking place, thought for a moment that the submarine was plunging headlong to the bed of the Bristol Channel. They had to cling desperately to the nearest object to hand to prevent themselves from sliding violently against a transverse bulkhead.

Even as they clung they heard two muffled detonations in quick succession, followed by a distinct quiver of the submarine's hull—a movement that bore a marked difference to the vibrations under the pulsations of the motors.

The sea-plane had dropped two bombs, both of which very nearly attained their object.

Kapitan Schwalbe did not bring the submarine to a horizontal position until she had reached a depth of fifteen fathoms. At that depth he was safe, both from explosives dropped from the sea-plane and also from observation. The water being still agitated, made it impossible for the observer on the biplane to follow the movements of a dark shadow fathoms deep. For once, the rough seas had been kind to U75; but the fact remained that she was still badly in want of fuel, while his last attempt had resulted in the loss of an officer and six men, who could not well be spared.

Although the sea-plane had failed to achieve her object by pulverizing the U-boat's hull, the moral and material result was none the less effective.

The explosion of the bombs had started several of U75's plates. Numerous jets of water were spurting through the seams, the inrush requiring all the mechanical appliances at the command of the modern pirate to keep the leaks under control, while the badly-jarred nerves of Kapitan Schwalbe and his crew warned them of the grave risks they ran in attempting to try conclusions with even an apparently harmless craft displaying the Red Ensign of Britain's Mercantile Marine.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Landing at Port Treherne

"I wonder if they'll let us go on deck," remarked Vernon Haye. "If so, I vote we have a shot at getting ashore. What sort of show is Port Treherne?"

"I know it fairly well," replied Ross. "It's the most forsaken crib you are ever likely to meet along the coast. It's a deep gully in the cliffs. There's only one small landing-place—a flat rock. Years ago there used to be a tramway down to the rock, and they shipped copper ore by means of derricks into lighters, which were towed across in fine weather to Swansea. But the mine closed down, the village is now deserted, and I don't believe there are any fishermen there. They say that the stream that flows into the port is still heavily charged with mundic. At all events the water is of a bright-red colour for several hundred yards from shore, and no fish will stick that."

It was close on the midnight following the disastrous attempt on the part of U75 to capture the oil-tank. The submarine was running awash, proceeding very slowly and cautiously towards Port Treherne—Station 41 of the secret petrol depots established by German agents along the coast of the British Islands.

The lads had been informed of the destination of the submarine, but had not been told why. Nevertheless it was an easy conjecture that U75 was going there to pick up stores that she had been unable to obtain in sufficient quantities at St. Mena's Island.

The Unter-leutnant was in charge of the submarine. Kapitan Schwalbe had taken the advantage of the opportunity of a few hours' sleep. Under-officered and undermanned, the strain on the personnel was a severe one. It was only on rare occasions that Schwalbe could in future descend from his post in the conning-tower.

At midnight, according to custom, the submarine called up her consorts by wireless. Judging by the previous attempt it seemed a useless task, but to the Operator's surprise he received a reply from U77, which was then lying off the Scillies.

Kapitan Schwalbe, aroused from his sleep, eagerly awaited the decoding of the message. It was to the effect that the commander of U77 had received information that H.M.S. *Tremendous*, one of the earlier Dreadnoughts, was leaving Gibraltar for Rosyth. The *Tremendous*, he knew, had been engaged in the Dardanelles operations. U77 therefore suggested that the two unterseebooten should meet at a rendezvous off The Lizard, and attempt a *coup de main*, the success of which would go towards atoning for the blunders and losses sustained by the German submarines in their endeavour to blockade the British Isles.

"Good!" exclaimed Kapitan Schwalbe. "Tell them that I purpose to rendezvous twenty kilometres S.W. by W. of The Lizard, on Thursday at 10 p.m. I am now about to take in fuel. Will communicate again at noon to-morrow. Ask them if they have picked up a wireless from U74."

Some time elapsed before the message could be coded by the sender and translated by the receiving submarine. When the reply confirming the rendezvous was received, a message was added to the effect that U77 had heard nothing of U74 for three days. It was presumed, however, that she was now on her way back to Wilhelmshaven, and was already out of wireless range.

Kapitan Schwalbe knew better. As senior officer of the three submarines detached to operate in these waters, he was aware that U74 would not have left her station without orders from him. That part of the message had been sent merely as a "blind", so that the crews of the remaining unterseebooten should not be discouraged. It was safe to conclude, decided Kapitan Schwalbe, that another of the blockaders had gone to the bottom for the last time.

It was close on one o'clock when the "wirelessing" terminated. U75, which had hitherto been running awash, was now trimmed for surface work.

Most of the crew went on deck. Amongst them were Ross and Vernon, no one offering any objection.

The sea was no longer rough. A long oily swell took the place of the white-crested wave. The night was dark. Only a few stars were visible. Away to the S.E., the black outlines of the Cornish coast reared themselves like an enormous wall against the gloomy sky.

Suddenly Vernon touched his chum's elbow, as a faint pin-prick of light glimmered twice. It was the shore agent's signal that the coast was clear.

Barely carrying steerage-way, U75 stood in towards the as yet invisible Port Treherne. Already her crew had brought the collapsible canvas boat from below, "man-handling" it through the fore hatch. The men, having opened it out and shipped the felt-lined and well-greased rowlocks, stood by to launch it.

Gradually the towering cliffs enclosing the creek became distinguishable against the loftier background of gaunt hills. Into the gap the submarine crept with the utmost caution, until it seemed as if she were on the point of running her nose against the sheer face of the granite wall. The water bubbled slightly as her motors were reversed; then, turning in her own length, she brought up, with her bows pointing seawards.

Three of the crew grasped the canvas boat and pushed it gently into the water on the port side. One of them clambered in and shipped the oars in the row-locks.

The two lads were cautiously scanning the shores of the inlet. Ross could sniff the unmistakable Cornish air. The call of home seemed irresistible. It looked a comparatively easy matter to slip quietly over the starboard side, and swim with noiseless strokes towards the weed-covered rocks that showed six feet or more above the sea. It was half ebb-tide; there was little or no drift out of the cove. Under the shadow of those dark cliffs detection seemed almost impossible, unless the submarine went to the risky expedient of switching on her search-light.

They moved stealthily towards the light wire railing on the starboard side just abaft the conning-tower. Everything seemed in their favour. Kapitan Schwalbe and the Unter-leutnant were on the navigation platform, peering through their night-glasses towards the flat rock that served as a landing-place. Two of the seamen were engaged in coiling down a hand-lead line; the rest of the men on deck were devoting their attention to the now departing canvas boat.

"Not so fast, my friends," exclaimed a low deep voice, which the lads recognized as that of Kapitan Schwalbe. "Remember I have a pistol ready to hand."

"How in the name of goodness did he know what we were up to?" thought Ross.

The chums stood stock-still. They felt much like children found out in some petty escapade.

"Koppe! Where are you?" asked the Kapitan in a loud whisper.

"Here, sir," replied the seaman.

"I hold you responsible for these Englishmen. Now they are trying to give us the slip. Take them below. But hold on. Secure them to a stanchion. Chain them up, and bring me the key."

The seaman approached the lads almost apologetically, and led them to the port side just forward of the conning-tower. A light steel chain was hitched round Ross's right ankle and Vernon's left, and deftly padlocked round one of the uprights supporting the hand-rail.

"It is of no use trying any of your pranks here," commented Kapitan Schwalbe, still in a low tone. "You are only looking for trouble."

For several moments all was still, save for the screech of a benighted gull. Overhead a meteor passed swiftly across the sky, throwing a pale gleam upon the lurking submarine.

"Wer da?"

The words, although uttered in an undertone, travelled distinctly over the placid waters of the cove.

The sailor in the boat muttered some inaudible reply. The listeners in the submarine could detect the sound of his oars as he laid them across the thwarts. Then, after further conversation, could be heard the rumble of metal as the tins of petrol were rapidly placed in the boat.

"How many are there?" asked Kapitan Schwalbe eagerly as the men returned with the first load.

"Forty here, Herr Kapitan. Altogether there are over two hundred."

"Then be sharp and whip them on board. Was there any communication for me?"

"A bundle of English newspapers, sir, and this letter."

The man drew the documents from the inside of his jumper and passed them to a seaman, who in turn handed them to the skipper.

"I may have to land, sir," continued the seaman. "The rest of the cans are in a cove at some distance from the landing-place. Can Max go with me to mind the boat? There is a slight groundswell at times, and she might have a hole through her canvas if she is allowed to grind against the rocks."

Receiving an affirmative reply, the man told his comrade to get on board, and once more the boat vanished into the darkness.

Another twenty minutes elapsed, then came the sounds of muffled footsteps, and of volatile spirit surging inside the petrol cans. Then one of the men must have slipped, for there was a slight scuffling, followed by the loud crash of a can clattering over the rocks.

"Alt! Who goes there?" shouted a hoarse and unmistakably English voice.

"Freund," promptly replied the German sailor.

It would have been far wiser on his part if he had waited for his fellow-worker, the German agent, to reply, since his knowledge and pronunciation of English were almost perfect. But unfortunately it was the spy who had fallen, and, half-winded by coming in contact with one of the tins, was gasping for breath and at the same time rubbing a barked shin.

"Not good enough for me, old sport," rejoined the challenger, and without further ado he let loose "five rounds rapid".

A loud yell announced that one of the bullets had at least taken effect. It was the prostrate spy who received a dose of nickel through the fleshy part of his thigh.

The seaman, dropping his cans, fled for his life. Recklessly he leapt from the landing-place into the canvas boat, which his comrade had been keeping at oar's length from the shore. The sudden impetus was too much for the frail craft. She capsized, and, being only single-skinned, sank like a stone.

Already men, members of a picket, were hastening to the sentry's support, their progress marked by a lantern held by a stout and sleepy sergeant.

By this time U75 was making for the open sea. Kapitan Schwalbe was cursing loudly; not because the luckless agent had been hit—it was his fault for not making sure of his ground; not so much on account of the loss of two more men, nor of the sinking of the only boat belonging to the submarine. His anger was aroused at the knowledge that once again his efforts to obtain fuel



had been balked. The quantity contained in forty tins was a mere fraction of the amount he required in order to carry out his ambitious programme. Bitterly he realized that, like those of transgressors, the ways of modern pirates are hard.

## CHAPTER X

### A Treacherous Plot

A ragged volley of musketry followed the departing submarine. One bullet mushroomed itself against the steel conning-tower; another zipped through one of the guard-rails. The rest either flew harmlessly overhead or ricocheted from the surface of the placid water.

Nevertheless the firing was a signal for the crew to hasten below. Kapitan Schwalbe and the Unter-leutnant disappeared with ignominious speed within the conning-tower. The men, bending low, bolted for the fore hatch. In twenty seconds the deck of U75 was deserted save for Ross and Vernon, who, padlocked to the stanchion, were unable to move six inches in either direction. They were only partly screened by the rise of the conning-tower. A sharp splinter from the bullet that had splayed against the steel wall cut cleanly through Vernon's coat sleeve and inflicted a slight gash in the lad's forearm, yet in the excitement he hardly noticed it.

"I say, old man," exclaimed Ross, as a wave slapping against the submarine's bow threw a shower of spray over the two prisoners. "What will happen if they submerge? It seems to me as if old Schwalbe has forgotten us."

"He would have dived before this if he intended so doing," replied Hays. "Ten to one he's going to pay us out for attempting to take French, or rather German, leave. It's jolly cold and mighty uncomfortable, but we'll keep a stiff upper lip and show him what we are made of."

"With all due deference to you, old chap," rejoined Trefusis, his teeth chattering as the keen wind played upon his saturated garments, "I would far rather be without this badge of German kultur." He indicated the chain that encircled his ankle. "I don't think that you can hold a brief for Kapitan Schwalbe. I am not so sure about it that he is not going to dive."

U75 dipped as he spoke, submerging her fore deck almost to the base of the conning-tower. Then, with a double cascade of water pouring from her, she shook herself free, throwing her bows high above the surface.

A man, gripping the stanchion-rail as he made his way knee-deep in water, came towards the two prisoners. It was Hans Koppe. He had obtained the Kapitan's permission to release his charges from their uncomfortable position.

"Hold on tightly as you go aft," he cautioned. "There is hot coffee waiting for you below."

It was impracticable to descend by means of the fore hatch. That means of communication had already been closed and battened down, owing to the constant flow of water over the bows. Even the after hatch, in spite of the protection afforded by the conning-tower and the raised coaming, was admitting water into the interior of the submarine.

Cold, exhausted, and hungry, the lads were glad to be able to eat and drink, discard their wringing-wet garments, and turn in. Without waking they slept solidly for ten hours. It was one in the afternoon when they turned out. U75 was rounding Land's End. She was submerged, steering a compass course, but frequently showing her periscope to ascertain her whereabouts. Already the Longships Lighthouse was broad on the port beam.

It was a tedious, discomforting run from Land's End to The Lizard. The Mounts Bay fishing fleets were out, a circumstance that compelled the submarine to keep below the surface. Kapitan Schwalbe knew that once the alert skippers of these boats sighted even the tip of the periscope, the news of the presence of a hostile submarine would be quickly sent to the naval authorities at Devonport. The necessity for secrecy also prevented him from making use of the wireless: not that the message would be deciphered, but because the origin of the message could be fixed with comparative certainty by any of the British wireless stations that "picked up" her call.

The approaches to Plymouth Sound, too, gave Kapitan Schwalbe a bad time. Far beyond the Eddystone, and from Looe Island to Bigbury Bay, armed trawlers and torpedo-boats patrolled incessantly, their movements aided by sea-planes. It was almost a matter of impossibility for a hostile submarine to approach Plymouth Sound by daylight, since the aeroplanes were able to discern any sinister object moving under the comparatively shallow and clear waters between Rame Head and Stoke Point; while at night the precautions taken were of such an elaborate and efficient description as to seal the fate of any submarine rash enough to run her head into a noose.

Accordingly U75 gave the Eddystone a wide berth, shaping a course to pass twenty miles to the southward of the far-famed lighthouse. Here she was in the thick of the Channel traffic, a stream of mercantile ships passing up and down as unconcerned as if such a thing as a German submarine did not exist.

Although there were plenty of opportunities, Kapitan Schwalbe made no attempt to molest the ships. For one thing, experience had taught him that the British merchant skipper possessed a bull-dog tenacity, and a courage not to be daunted by the sight of a hostile periscope appearing from nowhere in the midst of a waste of water. For another, he was now on the look-out for more important game—his chance to retrieve his already vanishing prestige.

However, one of the merchant vessels served him a good purpose, although unknown to her. Marking a large ocean tramp bound up-Channel, U75 dived deeply, so as to be free from any danger of being hit by her forefoot.

With the noise of the tramp's propeller to guide her, U75 followed, unsuspected, in her wake as she made for the Lizard Light.

Arriving safely at the rendezvous, Kapitan Schwalbe waited until it was dark, and then cautiously brought the submarine awash. Punctually at ten o'clock a feeble violet light blinked through the night. It was U77's call to her consort.

"What's the game, I wonder?" asked Vernon, as a hail in German was borne faintly to their ears.

The chums had turned in. There was nothing else for them to do, since they had been ordered to leave the quarters allotted to the crew. As there was no furniture of any description in the alley-way that had been made their sleeping compartment, they had climbed into their bunks. Here they could maintain an almost uninterrupted conversation.

"Hist!" exclaimed Ross warningly. He had been lying with his ear almost touching one of the many voice-tubes that led from the conning-tower to various parts of the submarine. Quite by accident, he discovered that the pipes formed an excellent conductor of sound in a manner that had not been intended.

"What are you doing?" asked Haye curiously.

"Jam your ear against the centre one of these three pipes," said his chum.

Vernon did so. It required very little movement on his part, since the bunks were rather narrow. The same voice-tube that Ross was "tapping" ran vertically past Haye's bunk, which was immediately underneath the one Trefusis had appropriated from the time when he had been laid upon it under the influence of the injection.

This particular pipe formed a means of vocal communication between the conning-tower and Kapitan Schwalbe's cabin. For some reason the whistle had been removed from the cabin end, and consequently sounds from the Kapitan's quarters were conveyed with tolerable clearness.

There were two men engaged in conversation. One was Kapitan Schwalbe; the other, who spoke in a lower key, and so rapidly that Ross had great difficulty in mentally translating his words, was the Lieutenant-Commander of U77. He had been put aboard U75 only a few minutes previously.

"My dear von Hoffner," Kapitan Schwalbe was saying. "Your plan is all very well as far as you are concerned; but where do we come in? Understand that while we are on the surface our risks are increased ten-fold. Suppose, for instance, the battleship does not notice, or affects not to notice, the white flag?"

"She will, right enough," assured the Lieutenant-Commander of U77. "These English are such fools that in their anxiety to observe the rules of warfare" (here von Hoffner laughed sardonically) "they play into our hands. More than a twelvemonth of war has not taught them that the hitherto recognized observances of war are no longer binding. This is not a petty squabble between two nations. It is a struggle for existence; consequently it is where our frightfulness scores."

"It hasn't up to the present, according to my experience," objected Kapitan Schwalbe gloomily. "These Englishmen simply won't be frightened. But to return once more to the point: what steps do you propose to take to minimize my risk?"

"There must be risk, of course," remarked von Hoffner. "According to latest reports, it seems pretty certain that we cannot hope to intercept the *Tremendous* during the hours of darkness. Consequently we have to make use of a ruse. Directly I spot her I dive, keeping as much as possible close to her track, say three hundred metres off."

"Yes, you dive," commented Schwalbe caustically. "That is quite feasible. But what of U75?"

"She will keep on the surface almost exactly in the indicated path of the battleship. You will

strike your ensign and hoist a large white flag in its place. It will mean scrapping your best tablecloth, mein herr. With the wind in its present quarter the flag will blow athwart the battleship's course, so there is no risk of it not being seen. You and your crew will, of course, form up aft. That will give more colour to the deception."

"Perhaps it will work," said Kapitan Schwalbe.

"Perhaps? Of course it will," declared von Hoffher sanguinely. "Then the rest is child's play. Directly the *Tremendous* slows down—it's the speed of these battleships that has caused us to miss hitherto—I will let loose two torpedoes. There will be no bungling, I assure you. I'll take good care to hit her close to the magazine, and there will be no opportunity for her to use her quick-firers.

"By the by, I've two English boys on board," said the Kapitan of U75. In a few words he related the circumstances in which they were made prisoners. "I suppose they ought to line up on deck with the hands?"

"Certainly," replied von Hoffher, with one of his cold-blooded sniggers. "It will heighten the illusion. It will do them good to see what one of our unterseebooten can do. But it is highly important that there be no survivors from the torpedoed battleship. The ruse is a grand one, and can be employed over and over again, provided that the secret does not leak out. After all, I don't think I would bring these English youths on deck."

"They are safe enough," protested Schwalbe. "If we return to Wilhelmshaven, they will be locked up in safe custody until the end of the war. If we do not, then I fancy there will be no survivors from U75 as well as from the English battleship *Tremendous*."

The two treacherous officers conversed in a similar strain for several minutes longer. Then came the sound of glasses being clinked as an accompaniment to a boastful toast. Talking boisterously, the two officers left the cabin, and presently the lads heard the sound of oars as von Hoffner was rowed back to his command.

## CHAPTER XI

### Preparations

"The brutes!" ejaculated Vernon savagely. He was violently excited. Perspiration was pouring off his face at the thought of the almost unparalleled act of wanton treachery that was about to be enacted. "If we could only prevent them!"

"I can't see how," rejoined Ross gloomily. "We cannot give an alarm. If we could control the valves for half a minute, I'd sink this blessed craft with all on board, myself included, for good and all. But it is no use talking of the impossibly heroic."

"I have a plan," announced Vernon, after thinking deeply for a few minutes.

"Well, out with it!"

"We have to pass through one of the broadside torpedo-rooms as we go on deck. We could each snatch a spanner and give the war-heads a terrific blow. You'll remember that there are half a dozen torpedoes in the cages against the bulkhead. It would mean certain death for us, but it would save nearly a thousand lives."

Ross shook his head.

"There's no certainty of success," he objected. "Those torpedoes are very much like our own Whiteheads. The striker in the head is protected against accidental discharge by a small propeller. Until the torpedo travels a certain distance through the water—sufficient for the resistance against the blades to cause the safety device to unthread and leave the striker free to hit the primer—the danger of premature explosion is almost negligible. We shouldn't have time to revolve the safety blades enough, and I'm pretty certain that even a heavy blow on the war-head itself would not explode the charge."

"Then I'm done," said Vernon dejectedly. "Think of something, old man—something that will hold water."

Silence ensued for nearly ten minutes, broken only by the tapping of the waves against the sides of the submarine, and the gentle purr of the dynamos for supplying light to the interior of the vessel.

Suddenly Ross leapt out of his bunk. He dared not trust himself to speak above a whisper for

fear of being overheard.

"Dash it all, old man!" exclaimed Vernon, when his chum had confided his plans; "it ought to work. If it doesn't, nothing else will. I'm on it, happen what may!"

"We'll want our knives for the job," continued Ross. "Yours will open easily, I hope? Good! Sharp? We'll run no risks. A sharp blade is absolutely necessary."

They drew the knives and whetted the blades upon the soles of their boots. At Vernon's suggestion they kept open the big blades, making a hole through the lining of their pockets in order to keep the knives in a horizontal position and ready to hand.

"Now let's turn in properly," suggested the practical Ross. "We want to be fairly fresh for the job in front of us."

Soon after sunrise on the morrow all hands were mustered aft on deck, Ross and Vernon included. It was a bright morning. The sun had risen seemingly out of the sea, or in nautical parlance it was a "low dawn". There was a chilliness in the air that made the lads wish that they had been wearing overcoats.

They looked in vain for U75's consort. The unterseeboot that was to deal the coward's blow was not to be seen. Her presence was to be kept a secret from the crew of the decoy.

Kapitan Schwalbe, accompanied by his Unter-leutnant, made his way aft. He looked pale and care-worn. He had lost his military manner. His gait suggested that of a man recovering from a long illness.

"My men," he exclaimed, "circumstances over which I have no control make it necessary to bring our cruise to a speedy termination. U75 is no longer in a state of efficiency, either for offence or flight. It therefore remains for us to save our lives by surrendering to the first English ship of war that we fall in with. It is a humiliating and distasteful step to take, but there is no option."

The crew heard this lying speech in silence. They hardly knew what to make of it. The majority mentally decided that it was better to be imprisoned in England than to rot on the bed of the sea. Kapitan Schwalbe had no faith in his men's histrionic abilities; he was also afraid that they would oppose the scheme that he himself had deprecated as being too risky.

Hiding their indignation, Ross and his chum saw the Kapitan hand a petty officer a white flag. The man took it, and lashed short pieces of cord to two adjacent corners.

Hans Koppe sidled up to his charges.

"You will soon be free," he remarked. "Ach! but you do not seem overjoyed. You English are indeed a queer race."

Receiving no reply, the man went below to follow the example of his comrades, who were getting together their personal belongings. Many of them thought of the times when they had seen non-belligerents do likewise. It was the boot on the other foot with a vengeance.

Ross gave another glance across the horizon. Nothing was in sight. Gripping his chum's arm, he led him forward. U75 was motionless. The deck was deserted. A quartermaster stood on the navigation platform in front of the conning-tower. Kapitan Schwalbe and his Unter-leutnant had likewise vanished.

As Ross passed the conning-tower, he pulled out his knife and deftly severed the lashings of a couple of buoys secured to the hand-rail. It was the first act of the lad's plan of operations.

"Vessel on the port bow, sir!" shouted the quartermaster.

Kapitan Schwalbe was on deck in a trice, closely followed by his subordinate. For a few moments, he kept his binoculars focused upon the indistinct grey object, then three miles off.

"It is the *Tremendous*," he announced in an undertone to the Unter-leutnant. "Another ten minutes will see the business through."

He spoke with confidence, but it was a confidence inspired by a liberal dose of brandy. He felt that he had already passed the Rubicon. There could be no turning back.

A whistle trilled shrilly. At the signal the men again doubled aft, and joined up in a double line.

"Where are the English boys?" enquired Kapitan Schwalbe.

"Coming," replied Ross. For the first time on board he omitted to add the word "sir". His omission was deliberate. Utter contempt for the German captain consumed him. Schwalbe, too, noticed the manner in which he had replied. He smiled grimly, imagining that now the lads thought themselves about to be free they could afford to be curt.

As the chums passed the lifebuoys, they deftly heaved them overboard. They fell with hardly a splash, dropping close to the side of the motionless submarine.

No one noticed the act. The attention of the crew was centred upon a little ceremony that was taking place. Bareheaded, the men stood at attention. Their voices broke into the song of "Die Wacht am Rhein" as the emblem of German sea-power was slowly lowered from the ensign staff.

The men sang sonorously and in perfect cadence. They firmly believed that it was their last tribute as free men to their Fatherland. As the last bar terminated, the petty officer smartly hoisted the white flag. For an instant it hung limply, confined by one of the halliards; then like a square of stretched canvas it blew out in the steady breeze—a modern counterpart of the kiss of Judas.

And standing just behind the Kapitan, within arm's reach of the ensign staff, were Ross Trefusis and Vernon Haye.

## CHAPTER XII

### The White Flag—and Afterwards

H.M.S. *Tremendous*, super-Dreadnought of 24,000 tons displacement, and mounting ten 13.5-inch guns as her principal armament, was tearing up-Channel at 21 knots.

She looked far different from the spick-and-span battleship which had left Portsmouth only six weeks previously.

Her armoured sides still showed unmistakable traces of the impact of Turkish shells. Her grey paint was blotched, blistered, and stained. Her after funnel had plates of sheet-iron riveted to it to hide a gaping hole large enough to drive a stage-coach through. Her guns were worn out by sheer hard work. It was mainly on this account that she was homeward bound: to have the gigantic weapons "re-lined" in order that she might again take her place as an effective unit of the Grand Fleet.

The middle watch was about to relieve the morning watch. The mess decks were a seething mass of humanity. In spite of the apparent confusion everyone was in high good humour, for another few hours (D.V.) would find H.M.S. *Tremendous* at Pompey—as Portsmouth has from time immemorial been termed by the Navy.

On the fire-control platform sleepy-eyed officers were awaiting their reliefs. Around the 12-pounders, the muzzles of which grinned menacingly from apparently haphazard positions in the superstructure, men were grouped, ready at the first alarm to train the weapons upon a possible foe. Day after day ceaseless vigilance was maintained. One and all realized that a moment's negligence might result in destruction by one of the most horrible creations of modern science.

"Submarine on the starboard bow, sir!"

For an instant all was tense silence. Then a bugle blared, followed by the clear trills of the bos'n's mates' pipes and the hurried tramp of men's feet.

The officer of the watch brought his telescope to bear ahead. He was a junior lieutenant, Bourne by name, and in receipt of a private income of eight hundred a year. On that sum he might have lived the life of a man of leisure, but he vastly preferred a strenuous life as a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy. Not once had he regretted his choice, and upon the outbreak of war he was ready to execute a hornpipe of sheer delight at the prospect of "being in the big scrap".

"She's flying the white flag, by Jove!" he ejaculated. "Funny, deucedly funny!"

He had to act, and act promptly, for a battleship travelling at 21 knots does not give a man time to think for any length of time. Already a messenger had been despatched to inform the "skipper", but before the captain could gain the navigation bridge (more than likely he was in his bath) the *Tremendous* would have covered the intervening distance.

The quartermaster looked enquiringly at the Lieutenant. Bourne stepped hastily to the engine-room telegraph indicator, half inclined to ring down for "half-speed", or even "stop both engines".

He stopped abruptly.

"Steady on your helm, quartermaster."

"Steady it is, sir," replied the petty officer.

The telegraph indicator remained untouched. With undiminished speed H.M.S. *Tremendous* held on, under the propelling force of turbine engines of 30,000 indicated horse-power.

A midshipman, standing by the side of the officer of the watch, had been keeping the submarine under observation by means of his telescope.

"By Jove, sir!" he exclaimed. "There's something wrong there. The white flag's down, and two fellows in mufti have leapt overboard."

"Torpedo on the port bow, sir!" sang out half a dozen lusty voices in chorus.

"Hard-a-port, quartermaster!" ordered Bourne.

The spokes of the steam steering-gear revolved quicker than they had ever done before. Listing heavily to port, the *Tremendous* turned with a rapidity that belied her huge bulk and apparent unhandiness. A double track of ever-diverging foam marked the progress of the deadly missile. Another followed almost in its wake, both torpedoes travelling at the speed of an express train.

For four seconds all on board who watched these messages of death stood with bated breath. Then a general roar of relief went up as the two "tinfish" glided harmlessly past the ship, the nearest at a distance of less than twenty feet, and parallel to the new course of the battleship.

Half a dozen quick-firers spat viciously. A 6-inch, two of which for some obscure reason the designers had placed on the main deck abreast of the after 15-inch guns, added to the din. A chaos of smoke, flame, and spray marked the spot beneath which U77 had lurked to launch her cowardly and treacherous bolt.

"That's blinded her, at least," thought Bourne.

He knew that even if the hidden submarine had escaped injury, a minute at least would elapse before she could be coned into a position to discharge another torpedo. That minute would be enough for his purpose.

"Starboard!" he ordered. "Ram her, quartermaster!"

Round swung the 24,000 tons of dead weight, steadied, and bore down upon the motionless U75. Cries of terror burst from the doomed crew, many of whom leapt overboard in a vain attempt to swim clear of the vengeful leviathan.

Bourne gripped the guard-rail, half expecting to be thrown violently by the force of the impact. He was mistaken.

With hardly a tremor the bows of the *Tremendous* crashed into the unterseeboot, hitting her just abaft the conning-tower. The bow portion sank like a stone. The after part reared itself high in the air, revealing the curiously shaped stern, the two propellers, and the complication of rudders. Then, before the cloud of smoke and spray had time to drift inboard, the *Tremendous* was over and beyond the ever-widening circle of iridescent oil that marked the ocean grave of yet another of the would-be blockaders of Britain's shores.

Even in the midst of his great responsibility Bourne's keen eye discerned two heads bobbing up and down in the water. The midshipman noticed them too.

"They are those fellows who hauled down the white flag, sir," he exclaimed. "They are quite youngsters, too, and we daren't stop."

"No, we dare not," agreed the Lieutenant. For aught he knew, another unterseeboot might be in the vicinity, reserving her torpedoes in the hope that the battleship would slow down to investigate. "Pass the word to the sentry to let go the Kisbie. It's the best we can do."

With a splash the patent lifebuoy was dropped from the cage at the extremity of the navigation-bridge. It bobbed up again under the battleship's quarter, emitting a dense cloud of calcium smoke as it did so. By the time the marine had dropped the Kisbie the ship was a quarter of a mile away from the two swimmers.

"It's the best we can do," repeated Bourne as he closed the eyepiece of his telescope. "They may fetch it, they are swimming strongly."

"Well done, Mr. Bourne!" exclaimed a deep voice.

Turning, the Lieutenant faced the Captain standing beside him.

"A smart manoeuvre!" continued the skipper approvingly. "We can now only carry on; but we'll wireless the Commander-in-Chief Devonport, and report that there are survivors from the rammed submarine. He'll have a destroyer patrol on the spot within an hour, and I hope it won't be too late."

Bourne stepped to the extremity of the bridge and glanced astern. His effort to distinguish the heads of the two swimmers was fruitless, for a thin haze, the smoke from the ship's funnel, spread far in her wake, completely obliterating the spot where Ross Trefusis and Vernon Hays were swimming for dear life.

It will be necessary to set back the hands of the clock in order to follow the fortunes of Ross and his chum.

"Is she slowing down?" whispered Vernon anxiously, as they stood on the deck of U75 awaiting the approach of the *Tremendous*.

"I don't think so," replied Ross. "But now's our time."

The attention of Schwalbe and his crew was centred upon the battleship; the Kapitan momentarily expecting to see the huge vessel reel under the impact of the terrible torpedo, while the men began to entertain grave doubts as to whether the British ship would accept their token of surrender. The fact that the super-Dreadnought showed no signs of slowing down revived Kapitan Schwalbe's doubts. Knowing the difficulty of hitting, even at a comparatively short range, a swiftly moving target, he began to wonder whether he did the right thing in falling in with von Hoffner's diabolical plan.

His hurried thoughts were suddenly interrupted by some light object enveloping his head and shoulders. Before he could tear the fabric away he heard two distinct splashes, followed by shouts of astonishment from the crew; for with one clean sweep with his knife Ross had severed the halliards of the ensign staff.

The lads dived deep, swimming the while with long, powerful strokes, for both were accomplished in the art of natation. They were longer in coming to the surface than they anticipated, owing to the weight of their half-boots, which they had been unable to remove without risk of causing suspicion.

When at length their heads emerged almost simultaneously, they found themselves nearly fifteen yards from the doomed U75.

"Strike out!" spluttered Ross. "Get as far away from her as you can. Never mind about old Schwalbe. He can't hurt us."

Ross was right, for however much the Kapitan wanted to wreak his vengeance upon his former prisoners, he was unable to do so. In his rôle as that of an officer waiting to surrender, the possession of a revolver would tend to "give the show away". He had left his pistol in his cabin—an example that his Unter-leutnant had followed. And now his attention was directed upon the British battleship.

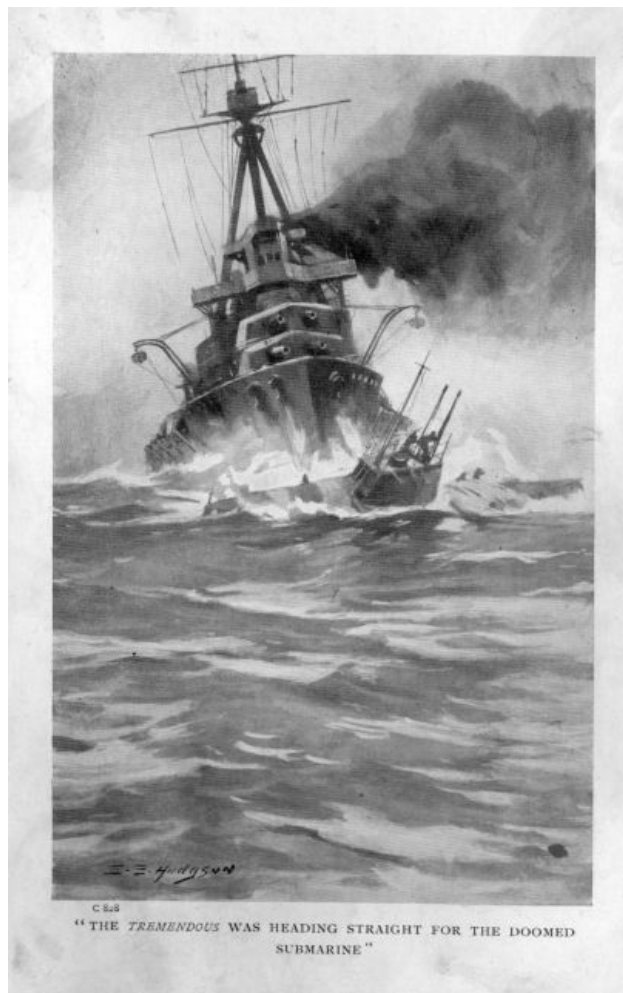
Meanwhile, the lads, swimming strongly, saw the *Tremendous* heel as she ported helm. For a minute, not knowing how a ship behaves when the helm is suddenly put hard over, they thought that the treacherous unterseeboot had successfully carried out her cold-blooded plan. Yet no explosion occurred, and the battleship recovered her normal trim.

With their eyes only a few inches above the surface, the lads could see nothing of the track of the torpedoes. They had no indication that they had been fired until the *Tremendous* let fly with her 12-pounders.

"I think we've saved her," said Vernon. "Now there'll be trouble for us. Schwalbe will certainly have a shot at recapturing us after the battleship has cleared off. Why doesn't she settle U75, I wonder?"

The lads both expressed astonishment that the motionless unterseeboot had escaped the attention of the super-Dreadnought's quick-firers. It seemed as if the latter were ignoring U75 altogether and was sheering off at full speed.

Suddenly Ross gave a whoop of delight, which ended in his swallowing a mouthful of salt water. The *Tremendous* was turning once more, and heading straight for the doomed submarine.



**"THE TREMENDOUS WAS HEADING  
STRAIGHT FOR THE DOOMED  
SUBMARINE"**

Mentally Ross compared the on-coming battleship with an express train, as shown on a cinematograph screen, in the act of approaching the audience. At one moment the ship was visible from her water-line to the truck of her top-mast; at the next her bulk had suddenly expanded and seemed to fill the complete field of vision. It looked as if the two lads, in spite of the distance they had put between themselves and the motionless submarine, would yet be in the way of the vengeful battleship, whose extreme beam was not less than ninety feet.

Yet neither of the two chums made the slightest effort to swim farther away. Mechanically treading water, they waited and watched.

They could see the terror-stricken attitudes of the crew of the doomed U75. They heard the shouts of consternation as the massive steel bows bore down upon her. Then, in a second it seemed, there was a hideous crash that outvoiced the yells and shouts of despair as the unterseeboot was rent in twain.

Of what happened during the next minute the lads had but a very hazy idea. Caught by the irresistible bow wave as the *Tremendous* tore past, they were hurled aside like feathers and buried a couple of fathoms down under the breaking, foaming mass of water. Vaguely they heard the whirring of the four propellers—very near, it seemed; then, caught by an eddy caused by the cavitation in the wake of the monstrous vessel, they were separated and flung to the surface, half-breathless and dazed.

Ross opened his eyes. The *Tremendous* had already covered nearly a quarter of a mile. Twenty yards away he saw his chum's head, as Vernon, puffing like a grampus, was striking out towards him.

Where the submarine had dived for the last time was an ever-widening circle of oil. Those of the German crew who had not been carried down by the sinking unterseeboot were too shaken by the concussion to make any great effort to save their lives. Attempting to keep afloat in that oil-covered water added to their difficulties, for whenever the head of a swimmer disappeared he did not rise again.

"Kick off your boots, old man," exclaimed Ross.

"Where are the lifebuoys?" asked Vernon as he carried out his friend's advice.

One buoy had disappeared; the other was supporting a seaman, the only survivor of the crew.



"A case of finding's are keeping's," announced Ross. "We can't sling him out of it. It might support two people. We could take turns at hanging on."

"Stop!" exclaimed Vernon as Ross began to strike out towards the buoy. "There'll be trouble if we get mixed up in that oil. It's much lighter than water. I doubt whether we could swim in it. Do you think the *Tremendous* will put back?"

"Not likely," replied Trefusis.

He looked in the direction of the fast-vanishing battleship, half hoping that she would slow down and lower a boat. As he did so, something caught his eye: a cloud of grey smoke apparently issuing from the sea.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing in that direction.

"Torpedo, perhaps; one that has finished her run," suggested Vernon; but his chum waved aside the explanation.

"If U77 did fire a torpedo, you can bet your bottom dollar it wasn't one with a dummy head!" he said. "Only practice torpedoes send up a calcium light when their compressed air has given out. By Jove, I believe it's one of those patent buoys! Let's make for it."

The lads swam strongly, making powerful and comparatively slow breast-strokes. The water was warm. They were in no immediate danger of cramp.

As they skirted the patch of oil they noticed that the seaman holding on to the buoy had turned round. His face was now in their direction. The man was Hans Koppe.

"Are you all right, Hans?" shouted Ross.

"Yes, mein herr," replied the man. "I've found a buoy."

"Thanks to us," thought Trefusis; then raising his voice: "You had better kick out and get clear of the oil," he advised. "We are making for yonder buoy."

By the time the swimmers reached the Kisbie the emission of calcium smoke had ceased. They found that not only did the buoy support them both, but that it was so constructed as to allow them to maintain a sitting position without having to hold on with both hands. Glad of a seat they waited, watching the approach of Hans Koppe, and also looking for the undesired reappearance of U77.

"Ach! My wife and children!" exclaimed Hans Koppe disconsolately, as he brought his lifebuoy close alongside. "I shall never see them again."

"Cheer up, Hans!" replied Vernon. "At any moment U77 might come to the surface and take you on board. We don't mind, so long as they let us alone. We've had enough of your unterseebooten."

"U77?" gasped the German incredulously. "How do you know that?"

Briefly Haye related the story of the ill-fated Kapitan Schwalbe's treachery. As he proceeded Han's face bore a surprised expression that presently changed to one of fear.

"If we are picked up by an English ship," he remarked, "they will shoot me for abuse of the white flag. And I am innocent. Ach! my poor wife."

"They won't," replied Ross reassuringly. "We can swear that you knew nothing about it."

The minutes passed slowly. There was no sign of U77. Little did the three survivors know that she lay within a quarter of a mile of her consort, on the bed of the English Channel—to add to the ever-increasing roll of unterseebooten that were fated never to enter a German port again.

The sun rose higher and higher, its rays gathering strength as it did so. The heads of the three survivors were exposed to the solar heat; their bodies and limbs were numbed by prolonged immersion. The desire for conversation had long since passed. Almost exhausted they hung to their supports, listless and torpid. A few sea-gulls, struck with the silence of the three men, hovered overhead, and swooped with shrill cries to settle on the water within close distance of what appeared to be a possible meal. One bolder than the rest perched upon Trefusis' head.

Raising his arm, Ross dealt the bird a furious blow. It missed, but had the effect of scattering the gulls. Apathetically the lad watched them as they flew off. As he did so he caught sight of three vessels being driven at high speed.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed feebly. "The destroyers, old man; we are saved!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Arm of the Law

"Hulloa! What the deuce have we got here?" enquired Commander Devereux of H.M. torpedo-boat destroyer *Yealm*, as three dripping figures were transferred from the destroyer's dinghy to the deck. "One strafed Hun, right enough; but who are these fellows in mufti?"

"Can't say, sir," replied the coxswain. "They sort o' collapsed directly we got 'em into the boat."

"Then take them below," continued Devereux. "I say, Fanshawe, there's a job for you at last, my festive sawbones."

Fanshawe, lately a young country practitioner with a scattered "panel" connection, had but recently entered the Navy as a surgical probationer R.N.V.R. He joined purely through patriotic motives, having sacrificed a fairly substantial income in order to do so. Up to the present his work had been almost a sinecure. The *Yealm* had not had the faintest chance of taking part in an engagement. Her crew—to use Fanshawe's own words—were "that beastly healthy, don't you know", that, out of sheer anxiety to do something, he was learning navigation from the Sub-lieutenant.

The medico undertook his first important professional task on board the *Yealm* with great alacrity, and it was not long before Ross and Vernon were in a fit state to be questioned. Hans Koppe was in a bad plight. So utterly shaken were his nerves that he seemed on the point of collapse.

"So you are the son of Admiral Trefusis," said the Lieutenant-Commander. "I can't say that I know him personally, although I know of him. But how did you get on board the submarine?"

Ross explained. He felt hurt at having to do so. The Lieutenant-Commander's ignorance of the disappearance of the two chums from St. Mena's Island "took all the wind out of his sails". In pre-War days the principal papers would have devoted at least half a column to the supposed deaths by drowning, off the Cornish coast, of two well-connected youths. Nowadays editors had neither space nor inclination to devote to such a comparatively trivial matter. Consequently Devereux could be exonerated of all lack of knowledge of the supposed accident. Yet his interest grew as Ross proceeded with his narrative.

"Look here," he remarked. "We've got to dodge around for a few hours in case your pal U77 does put in an appearance. But I'll wireless the Admiral and ask for a telegram to be sent to your homes, to let your people know you are still alive and kicking."

"Better not, sir," objected Ross.

Devereux looked curiously at the lad.

"And why not?" he asked.

"Well, you see," explained Trefusis, "a telegram is not such a confidential matter as one would like it to be, especially in a remote country district."

"It's good news though," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander.

"Yes," admitted Ross; "but it is absolutely necessary to keep it dark for a while. A few hours won't make very much difference one way or the other to my people, but it would make a thumping lot to our friend Dr. Ramblethorne, otherwise von Hauptwald. If he were to hear that we were alive, he'd do a bunk. The same with that other spy, von Ruhle. They must be arrested promptly, and within a few hours of each other, in case one of them scents trouble and clears out."

"I see your point," admitted Devereux. "I won't send a wireless at present. You must be feeling peckish. I'll get my steward to bring you in some grub. Excuse me, I must be off again. We've a lot to attend to, you know."

The Lieutenant-Commander went on deck to conduct operations. He was temporarily senior officer, and it fell to him to issue orders to his two consorts relating to the investigation of the scene of the battleship's exploit.

For two hours the three destroyers cruised over the spot where the two submarines were supposed to have sunk. At length wreckage was found by means of grapnels. It was, of course, much too deep to send a diver down to report; but the spot was buoyed, and served as a base while sweeping operations were proceeded with in the hope of locating the hull of the second unterseeboot. In a very short space of time two operations undertaken for the purpose of destroying the sunken submarine were highly satisfactorily carried out. The first resulted in the release of a small quantity of buoyant wreckage, amongst which was the flagstaff of U75. The

second brought to the surface a quantity of oil, showing that a submarine had been sunk there, but the injuries she previously received had not been sufficient to liberate the contents of the heavy oil-tanks. The explosive charge had completed the destruction of U77.

Just before five in the afternoon, the *Yealm* and her consorts passed the eastern arm of the breakwater in Plymouth Sound and brought up in the Hamoaze. Ross and Vernon, arrayed in borrowed clothes and accompanied by Lieutenant-Commander Devereux, lost no time in going ashore and proceeding to the offices of the Commander-in-Chief.

"You are acting with remarkable discretion," observed the Admiral, when Ross reiterated his desire not to communicate with his home until the spies were safely under lock and key. "Fortunately there ought to be no undue delay, as we have two expert Scotland Yard men investigating a case in the Dockyard. I'll telephone to the Superintendent of Police, and get him to send the officers here at once."

Within ten minutes the officers were ushered into the Commander-in-Chief's presence. Ross and Vernon looked at them with considerable curiosity. It had not before fallen to their lot to come into contact with two real representatives of the famous Scotland Yard. Yet there was little about the appearance to occasion comment. They were not in any way disguised. The taller of the two, who was introduced as Detective-Inspector Ferret, was about forty years of age. His closely cut hair was dark-brown, with a plentiful sprinkling of grey hairs. He wore a beard trimmed naval or "torpedo" fashion, with a moustache. He was dressed in a grey lounge suit, with dark-brown boots and a golfing cap. There was nothing of a piercing nature about his eyes, which were of a deep-grey tint. He seemed to be perpetually beaming; the lines on his face gave one that impression.

His companion, Detective Hawke, was a short, thick-set man of about thirty-five. He was clean-shaven. His features were ruddy and heavy. There was a bulldog look about his jaw that proclaimed him to be a tough customer. His rough, brown, Harris-tweed suit and bowler hat gave him the appearance of a prosperous yeoman rather than a successful tracker of criminals.

"Now, young gentlemen," began Mr. Hawke briskly, after the introductions had been made, "we'll get to business. With your permission, sir" (addressing the Admiral), "I will ask Mr. Trefusis to give me his version of the affair. To save time, I feel certain that Mr. Haye will have no objection to going with my colleague and telling him his story. That, I must explain, is the best way to eliminate any discrepancies. We prefer to make a fair start, and then all ought to go well."

During the next hour Detective-inspector Hawke was very busy. He made no written notes. He relied solely upon his marvellous retentive memory, and it was not long before he was in full possession of the facts of the case.

His next step was to telephone to St. Bedal. From the police there, he learnt that Dr. Ramblethorne was medical officer to the 4th battalion of a west-country regiment, but that he was temporarily detailed to act on the recruiting staff at Wellington.

Hawke thereupon telegraphed to Harwich. The Customs officers there informed him that the Harwich-Flushing boat service had been suspended for nearly a week, owing to the discovery of a hostile mine-field off the Dutch coast. Sailings were to be resumed that night. A man who gave himself out to be a Dutchman, but who answered to the description of von Ruhle, had applied that morning for a permit to leave the country by the night boat. His berth had been booked under the name of Cornelius Vanderhuit.

"Which one ought we to nab first?" asked Ferret. "We'll have to be very sharp, or one of them, finding that he is no longer in communication with his accomplice, would smell a rat and clear out."

"Under normal conditions I would reply, 'Collar the principal first'," replied Hawke. "It is evident that Ramblethorne, *alias* von Hauptwald, is the master-spy. Directly he's laid by the heels, the whole of the organization immediately under his control goes by the board. But there's this Harwich business. Von Ruhle crosses the North Sea to-night, unless otherwise prevented. We comprise the otherwise, I hope."

"Then it would mean catching the midday express to Waterloo," remarked Ferret.

"Could we go with you?" asked Ross.

The police officers looked rather astonished at the cool request. Like most professional men, they scouted the idea of amateur assistance when the main issue was at stake.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea," remarked Hawke. "You have already shown great discretion in the matter. Most fellows would have made a bee-line to the nearest telegraph office and given the whole show away. The only difficulty is—I suppose, by the way, you are not feeling too done up after your trying experiences?—the only difficulty is, I was remarking, that von Ruhle might spot you. Look here, Ferret; suppose you take these young gentlemen, and proceed to Harwich by an ordinary train? Keep well out of sight when you arrive at Parkeston Quay, but keep a sharp eye on the boat. I'll travel from Liverpool Street by the boat train, and see if I can pick out our quarry amongst the passengers."

It was a tedious journey from Plymouth to Harwich. Arriving at Waterloo, Ferret took the lads to a quiet hotel and ordered lunch; while Hawke, excusing himself, called in at "the Yard" to report his new case to the Chief, and to wait for the Great Eastern boat train.

The weather had changed completely during the run from the West, for when Ferret and the two lads arrived at Parkeston Quay it was raining heavily, accompanied by half a gale of wind from the east'ard.

"We've a long wait," commented Ferret. "Fortunately I know several of the Customs officials very well. I'll get them to let you take shelter in their shed. It's almost opposite the berth where the steamer generally makes fast. You'll be able to watch everyone who goes up the gangway. I'll go on board and speak to the steward. I don't suppose we'll spot friend von Ruhle until the boat train arrives, and by that time perhaps Hawke will have marked his man."

Undoubtedly, the wisest course would have been to send other officers to Wellington to arrest Dr. Rumblethorne; but Hawke was out for "kudos". Only a short while ago he had let a wanted man slip through his fingers, and had been rapped over the knuckles for it. With the professional assistance of Ferret, he hoped to carry out a double *coup* and arrest both German Secret Service agents, thereby recovering his lost prestige.

Arriving at Liverpool Street he took his ticket, and spent the time until the departure of the boat train in walking up and down the platform. He had the knack of observing without being observed. He would look at a man in quite a casual way; there was no gleam of intelligence in his eyes as he did so, but little escaped his notice. An hour or two later he could accurately describe his appearance, dress, and mannerisms.

A minute before the train started, a man answering von Ruhle's description hurried down the platform. He carried a new cane under his left arm. In his right hand he held an attaché case with the initials C. V.

Hawke waited until he had entered a carriage, then strolled to the other end of the corridor coaches and took his seat. He knew that the run was supposed to be a non-stop one.

The train started. The detective took his time. He waited for nearly twenty minutes before he made his way along the corridor, and entered the smoking-compartment occupied by the suspect.

Presently Hawke made a commonplace remark. The stranger replied stiffly and in rather a deep voice, with a slight foreign accent.

"An assumed voice," soliloquized the detective; but undaunted by the chilliness of his reception he again made some remark about the weather.

Before the train ran through Witham station, conversation was proceeding briskly. Hawke assumed the rôle of a commercial traveller, and volunteered the information that his brother had just returned from the Front.

The stranger showed no hesitation in discussing the war. Emboldened, the detective tackled the subject of East Coast defences and the futile German blockade.

"He's giving me absolutely false information," he thought. "Perhaps he's trying to throw me off the scent. I'll put a few questions that no one but an ignoramus would ask in good faith. If he's trying to bluff me, I'll beat him at that game."

Presently his fellow-passenger excused himself and, without removing his luggage, went into the corridor. As soon as he was out of sight Hawke took hold of the cane that the stranger had left in the rack. With a grunt of satisfaction he found that it was certainly not a Malacca, but made of metal.

The train began to slow down. Lifting the blind, Hawke looked out of the window. He could just discern a fairly big town, completely in darkness.

"Manningtree Junction," said Hawke to himself. "Something on the line, I suppose. H'm, we're stopping."

With a jerk the train pulled up at the station. The platform was almost deserted, for no train was due at that time to stop there. A door slammed. Again the detective pulled aside the blind. He was just in time to see his fellow-traveller, accompanied by the guard, disappear into the station waiting-room.

"He's tumbled to it!" exclaimed Hawke. "He's making off. He's tipped the guard to set him down. I'm after him!"

He made his way swiftly and stealthily down the platform, and with a quick movement threw open the waiting-room door.

The sudden transition from the semi-darkness of the platform to the brilliantly lighted interior of the room temporarily dazzled his eyes. Dimly he was aware that the place was occupied by khaki-clad soldiers struggling into their equipment, and that in their midst was the guard and the

man of whom he was in search.

"At any rate there is plenty of assistance," thought Hawke as he advanced to tap the suspect on the shoulder; but before he could attain his object a deep, stern voice exclaimed:

"Arrest him, men!"

The next instant Detective-inspector Hawke was seized by half a dozen muscular hands.

"What's this tomfoolery?" he demanded angrily. "I'm a Scotland Yard officer, and——"

A roar of laughter burst from the Tommies. Even the subaltern in command smiled broadly.

The stranger spoke again.

"Take him to the guard-room. He is arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act for attempting to elicit information prejudicial to the welfare of the State. I won't detain the train any longer, guard, although I'll ask you to drop my gear on the platform."

Still protesting vehemently but ineffectually, the detective was unceremoniously hustled into an ante-room, used since the outbreak of the war as a guard-room for the military in charge of the line. The door was locked upon him. He heard the train rumble out of the station.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Fruitless Quest

From their places of concealment Ross and Vernon watched the boat train run alongside the steamer. At last the weary vigil was a thing of the past. All fatigue was forgotten at the prospect of witnessing the capture of one of the active members of the German spy system at work in this country.

For a quarter of an hour everything was in a state of bustle. There was a continuous stream of passengers and porters, the latter bending under the weight of trunks and boxes as they hurried up the steeply sloping gangway.

At length the throng thinned. As yet there was no sign either of von Ruhle or of Detective-inspector Hawke.

A man with his coat collar turned up ran through the driving rain and entered the shed. It was Ferret.

"Something's gone wrong," he declared. "I've just had a telephone message from my colleague. I'm off to the post-office. If you want me during the next ten minutes you'll find me there."

Hawke had at length managed to get a word with his former fellow-traveller, who happened to be a staff-officer of the Eastern command. The detective had been under a misapprehension. The officer had good reason for ordering his arrest; but the comedy threatened to take a serious development. Even when the detective showed his credentials the officer was not satisfied. He proposed telegraphing to Scotland Yard, but Hawke, mindful of a former failure, induced him not to do so. The detective, who had occasion to contrast unfavourably the summary powers of arrest under the Defence of the Realm Act with those allowed by the Civil Power, was eventually allowed to communicate with his brother officer at Parkeston Quay. And then the military authorities required a considerable amount of convincing. It looked as if Detective-inspector Hawke would have to remain under arrest until next morning.

While Ferret was losing time and patience in his efforts to release his confrère, Ross and Vernon noticed a man hurrying along the quay. He was short and thick-set. He wore a long mackintosh, the collar of which was turned up and helped, with the peak of his cap, to hide his features.

Suddenly the man's foot tripped over a ring-bolt. He cursed under his breath, but sufficiently loudly for the lads to overhear.

Ross gripped his companion's arm. The fellow was swearing in German.

"Von Ruhle!" he whispered. He made a movement as if to issue from his place of concealment, but Hays restrained him.

"Hold on!" he cautioned in a low voice.

The man paused on the gangway. A partly shaded electric light threw a glare upon his face. He wore a heavy beard and moustache.

"You're wrong," whispered Vernon.

"He's a German, anyhow," persisted Trefusis.

The man still hesitated. Then he hailed a seaman.

"Where is the post office?" he asked. "I wish to telegraph. Is there time before the boat sails?"

Receiving an affirmative reply the man hurried off.

"Come on!" exclaimed Ross.

Neither of the lads had now any doubts as to the man's identity. The beard and moustache were false, but the voice was the same—von Ruhle's.

Keeping close to the wall of the line of sheds, the lads followed the spy at a distance of about fifty feet. More than once von Ruhle glanced furtively over his shoulder, as if suspecting that he was being tracked.

Presently a man, reeling along the quay, approached. The spy made no effort to avoid him. As the inebriated one rolled past he whispered a few words. The effect was instantaneous. Instead of continuing his way towards the post office, von Ruhle turned and made off abruptly in the direction of the gate of the Company's premises.

"An accomplice," whispered Vernon. "He's been warned."

They had to wait until the man who had feigned drunkenness had disappeared. By this time the German had gained a considerable distance. To get the assistance of the detective was out of the question.

"Come on!" exclaimed Ross, breaking into a run.

Concealment was no longer necessary. Should occasion arise, there would be plenty of help forthcoming, for there were several dock policemen and soldiers on duty close at hand.

Von Ruhle had increased his pace into a brisk walk when he heard the noise of his pursuers. Then he, too, began to run.

"Stop him!" shouted Trefusis, calling to a group of uniformed men standing in front of an abattoir.

Turning, the German made towards the quay-side. He was no match in speed for his youthful pursuers; but he gained the water's edge before Ross headed him off.

"Give in, von Ruhle!" he challenged.

The spy recognized the voice of the British lad whom he imagined to be miles away, on board an unterseeboot.

With a quick movement, the spy plucked a leather case from his coat pocket and hurled it over the edge of the quay, then, throwing up his arms, he dropped lifeless upon the rain-sodden ground.

Rapidly a crowd collected. Amongst them was Detective-inspector Ferret, who, having finished his conversation with his luckless confrère, was leaving the post office when he heard the commotion.

"Well, what's all this?" he asked brusquely. He bent over the body of the spy and flashed a pocket-lamp upon his face. "It's our man," he continued, addressing the lads in an undertone. This remark was needless, since they were already certain upon that point. "He's done us out of a job. Heart disease? No fear: it's poison. Don't wait here. Your work in this direction is done. I have still a few unpleasant tasks to perform. Cut off to the hotel and await me there. I may be an hour."

"One moment," protested Vernon. "We saw von Ruhle heave something over the quay. It might float; if so, there might be a chance to pick it up by means of a boat. The tide is almost slack. If it has sunk it will be a diver's task to recover it."

"'Something' is always unsatisfactory," remarked Ferret reprovingly. "Was it large, small, heavy, or light?"

"He was so jolly quick that I could hardly see it," replied Haye. "I should think it was about the size of a cigar-case."

Directing two policemen to remove and take charge of the body, the Detective-inspector accompanied the lads to the edge of the quay. It was dead low water. There was hardly sufficient

current coming down the Stour to swing the anchored craft against the wind. Then the investigators made a discovery. Although there was a good depth of water at the greater extent of the quay, at this spot the mud was uncovered at the base of the wall, while almost at their feet was a flight of stone steps.

Ferret descended cautiously and switched on the light of the torch. Almost within arm's length, and partly buried in the slime, was the object which the spy had thrown away.

As the detective hooked at it with his stick a hoarse voice shouted:

"Ahoy there! What are you doing with that light?"

Apparently from nowhere a boat ploughed through the mud until its bows were within a couple of feet of the steps. The next instant Ferret and his companions were covered by a revolver.

It was a naval guard-boat, the watchful eye of the officer in charge having discovered what he took to be surreptitious signalling. Explanations followed, and were accepted. Ferret, holding the recovered prize, ascended the steps, followed by Ross and Vernon, while the boat backed noiselessly away. It was but one more example of the ceaseless vigilance of the great, silent Navy.

Almost dead-beat, Trefusis and his chum made their way to the hotel, had supper, and went straight to bed. Ferret, they decided, could wait until morning.

At 6 a.m. Hawke, having secured his release, arrived at Parkeston, having engaged a motor-car to bring him from Manningtree. Already his vindictiveness towards the military had vanished. He had taken a sensible view of the situation. He had played and lost, and the staff officer was justified in the circumstances. As for the soldiers, they had to obey orders.

Nevertheless he was chagrined when he heard his confrère's report. It was galling to think that their spy had outwitted him by taking his own life. The whole energies of the two detectives must, for the present, be concentrated upon the capture of the master-spy, Von Hauptwald, otherwise Dr. Ramblethorne.

Ross and Vernon met Hawke again at breakfast. He was now quite cheerful.

"You managed to get hold of von Ruhle so well," he remarked, "that I think you really ought to bear a hand with friend Ramblethorne,—that is, unless you've had enough of man-hunting?"

"We'll do our best," said Ross. "It's our duty."

"When do you start?" asked Vernon.

"Almost at once," he declared. "Ramblethorne might be alarmed if no telegram arrives from his fellow-spy. Again, the man who communicated with von Ruhle on the quay last night might have given Ramblethorne warning. It's not at all surprising to me, since what you told us, Mr. Trefusis, that there has been an alarming outbreak of enteric at St. Bedal camp."

He turned over several pages of a complex timetable.

"Here we are," he announced. "We must get to Paddington in time to catch the 10.20 for Wellington. One thing, young gentlemen, you'll be nearly home. Ferret has arranged about the inquest on von Ruhle. Your evidence will be taken down in writing, and in that case you won't have to put in an appearance at that grim farce."

Hawke spoke feelingly and from experience. In his opinion, based upon circumstantial evidence, "crownor's quests" were a form of legal absurdity.

The train journey to Liverpool Street was undertaken almost in silence, as far as the four travellers were concerned. Hawke buried himself in his paper; Ferret was poring over some document found in von Ruhle's pocket-book, trying to unravel the complex code that, if deciphered, would be of the utmost importance to the country. Ross and Vernon, still feeling tired, tried to make up for arrears of sleep.

Taking a taxi across London, they were just in time to catch the Great Western express, which would take them to Taunton. Arriving at that place, they changed into a slow train that eventually landed them at the little Somersetshire town nestling under the Black Down Hills.

Without delay the party proceeded to the regimental depot. Enquiries for Captain Ramblethorne, R.A.M.C., only resulted in looks of perplexity. He was unknown to the authorities.

"But we heard from St. Bedal that Captain Ramblethorne was ordered to Wellington for recruiting duties," persisted Hawke.

The orderly-room clerk smiled sadly.

"Are you quite sure that it was this Wellington?" he asked. "We've had similar mistakes

before."

Detective-inspector Hawke felt like kicking himself. He, too, was aware of the existence of the Shropshire Wellington, but, without giving the possibility any consideration, he had rashly jumped to the conclusion that the place to which Ramblethorne had been appointed was the one nearest to St. Bedal.

Sorrowfully the four marched out of the office. More delay ensued while a wire was dispatched to St. Bedal, asking for further details.

It took two hours before the reply came. "Regret not to have added Salop to Captain Ramblethorne's address.—C.O."

"It's a long lane that has no turning," observed Ferret as they made for the railway station.

Hawke bit his lip. He knew that had the spy been warned promptly he might be out of the country by this time.

It was dark when, after a tedious journey, the four travellers alighted at Wellington, Salop. Here, guarded enquiries elicited the information that Captain Ramblethorne had gone to Bridgnorth to examine men "roped in" at a recruiting meeting. He had left for Bridgnorth two hours previously.

"There are no trains to-night," announced Hawke. "We'll have to get a car."

Ten minutes later, Ross and his companions were speeding over the horribly rough and hilly road between Wellington and Bridgnorth. Past ironworks and coal-fields, over or under a network of railway lines, the car tore; then, leaving the mining district behind, it entered the picturesque valley of the Severn, where the road skirts a range of towering limestone crags.

In spite of their fatigue, the lads could not restrain an exclamation of surprise and delight as the town of Bridgnorth, bathed in moonlight, appeared in sight—a cluster of houses perched upon a bold rock, and dominated by the scanty ruins of the old castle. At the foot of the cliff the Severn meandered placidly. In the midst of the greatest war the world has ever known, Bridgnorth appeared to retain all the characteristics of complete peace.

The recruiting office was closed for the night. With unerring instinct the detective made for the principal hotel. Here they found that Captain Ramblethorne had engaged a room, but the manager showed them a telegram that had just reached him.

"Took wrong train cancel room arriving to-morrow morning Ramblethorne."

"A blind," mentally ejaculated Ferret. "He has been warned."

The telegram had been dispatched from Shrewsbury. Ferret was again at fault, for the mistake was a genuine one. It so happened that the two trains left Wellington at precisely the same time, the one for Bridgnorth starting from a side platform. Before he realized his mistake Ramblethorne found himself well on the way to Shrewsbury, for the train stopped at no intermediate station.

"Shrewsbury, as hard as you can go!" ordered Hawke, addressing the chauffeur.

At a pace averaging fifty miles an hour the powerful car bounded over the road. Without mishap it gained the outskirts of the county town of Shropshire, when an involuntary halt occurred.

It was on the English Bridge, a comparatively narrow structure crossing the Severn. A belated drover was driving a herd of refractory cattle into the town when a motor-bicycle whizzed down the hill.

The cattle stampeded. With a jerk that almost threw Ferret and Vernon from the seat, the car brought up. At the same time the motor-bicycle slowed down, and dexterously avoiding a huge bullock, glided past the stationary car.

The moonbeams shone directly upon the rider's face as Ross thrust his head out of the window. The motor-cyclist was Ramblethorne the spy.

The recognition was mutual. The spy, cool and collected, gave no sign of recognition. The next moment he was travelling "all out" along the Much Wenlock road.

"That's Ramblethorne!" exclaimed Ross excitedly.

"Botheration take him!" ejaculated Ferret. "Are we to get no rest to-night?"

He opened the window in front of him. Hawke was sitting with the chauffeur. Quickly the detectives arrived at their decision.

"After that chap!" exclaimed Hawke, addressing the chauffeur; "that motor-cyclist who has



just passed. Ten pounds if you overhaul and stop him."

It was the bright moonlight that had tempted Ramblethorne to go for a midnight ride. He was a keen out-of-door man. He could handle almost any make of car or motor-cycle with the utmost skill. Finding himself at Shrewsbury, he hired a motor-cycle from an agent, intending to have a run along the road following the banks of the Severn as far as Ironbridge. It was his practice, whenever in a strange place, speedily to become conversant with the locality. It was, in fact, part of his training as a spy.

Ramblethorne was somewhat taken aback when he saw Ross's face in the moonlight, although he betrayed no sign of surprise. In an instant he realized that, by some means, young Trefusis had escaped from U75; more, he was with a party of men evidently hard on his track.

Quickly he made up his mind. His career as a medical officer to the British Service was ended. He could no longer hope to serve the German Government in that direction. Before morning a hue and cry would be raised.

As he swung along the broad, level road he thought out his plans. He would ride as hard as he could until his supply of petrol gave out—a matter of about seventy or eighty miles. Then he would abandon and hide the motor-cycle, and make his way on foot to the Essex coast. There, he had means to get on board a nominally British fishing-boat, which would run him over to a Dutch port.

Although the motor-cycle was travelling at close on forty miles an hour, Ramblethorne glanced back over his shoulder. He hardly expected to be pursued. If the car had turned to attempt to overhaul him, it would almost to a certainty take the wider of the two fork roads—that leading to Wellington.

Disagreeably surprised, the spy saw the two powerful head-lights of the car less than a mile behind him.

The chauffeur of the pursuing vehicle had set his heart on winning the promised guerdon. "All out" the car bounded along the road, leaving in its trail a dense cloud of dust that slowly dispersed in the moon-lit air.

Hanging on desperately to the sides of the swaying car, Ferret and the two lads knelt upon the front seat of the coupe and peered through the dust-flecked glass at the solitary motor-cyclist in front. They were gaining—rapidly at first, but now the gap between lessened almost imperceptibly.

At that tremendous rate, the bursting of a tyre would result in complete disaster, yet not one thought did the pursuers give to the danger they were running. Their sole attention was centred upon the spy.

A sharp bend close to the village of Cressage enabled the car to get within fifty yards of the motor-cyclist. Hawke drew a revolver from his pocket. The chauffeur noticed the action out of the corner of his eye. Purposely he toyed with the sensitive steering-wheel, causing the car to swerve erratically.

"Put it up, sir!" he exclaimed, shouting in order to make himself heard above the roar of the wind over the screen. "If you bring him down we'll smash up on top of him before we can pull up. We'll have him on Harley Bank right enough."

A sharp run down through the village of Harley brought the car within sight of a very steep hill, up which the road wound like a silver thread against the black slope. This was Harley Bank, one of the steepest of many stiff Shropshire hills, its gradient averaging one in seven.

Up mounted the motor-cycle. Ramblethorne was attempting to take it on high gear.

The chauffeur of the car took no risks. He promptly dropped into second gear, with the result that the gap between them increased to nearly a hundred yards. Then the motor-cycle began to falter. Perhaps Ramblethorne was not thoroughly acquainted with the mechanism of the two-speed. By the time he got the friction-clutch into action the car had more than regained the lost distance—and the fugitive had not yet reached the stiffest part of the hill.

"Head him off—jam him up against that bank!" ordered Hawke.

"What for, sir?" asked the chauffeur. He had no objection to taking part in a midnight chase, but his sense of prudence told him that it was not advisable to deliberately smash up another vehicle.

"He's a spy," replied Hawke. "Don't hesitate. I will take all risks."

Fifteen seconds later the near front wheel of the car was abreast of Ramblethorne's back wheel. Hawke leant sideways with the intention of gripping the motor-cyclist by the collar, since the relative speeds were practically the same. At the same moment the car edged a little closer to the left-hand side of the road.

Ramblethorne realized the danger. A collision would with almost certainty result in his receiving a broken neck; capture meant ignominious death at the hands of a firing-party. There was yet a third alternative—a dash for safety.

He threw out the clutch and applied both brakes, at the same time bringing the motor-cycle on to the grassy bank. He alighted on all fours, but almost immediately regained his feet. The car was already twenty yards on ahead and still in gear.

He grasped his cycle by the handle-bars and raised it from its recumbent position. One look showed that the glancing impact had bent the front forks. The machine was no longer rideable. Without hesitation he sprang up the bank. As he did so he heard the footfalls of his pursuers.

"Be steady!" cautioned Ferret, as Ross and Vernon alighted from the car. "He may be armed. We're the people to take the brunt of it—not you."

They were now within a few feet of the summit of the road, which at this spot ran through the hill by means of a cutting. Close by were three excavations. Someone had evidently attempted to commence quarrying there, but had abandoned the undertaking. As far as the detective could conclude, these pits formed the only possible hiding-place in the vicinity.

"Hist!" exclaimed Hawke, holding up one hand to enjoin silence.

All was still. No sound of stealthily retreating footsteps reached their ears. Hawke knelt down and placed one ear to the ground.

"Someone breathing pretty hard," he whispered. "He can't be very far away; in one of these holes most likely. Perhaps he's hurt himself."

An investigation of the first possible hiding-place produced no result. At the second Ross heard a long-drawn sigh, emanating from a patch of bushes and tall grass.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed.

The place was in shadow, yet he could discern some dark object lying at full length in the midst of the grass.

In a trice the two detectives threw themselves upon their prey. For an instant the man struggled wildly. Ross and his chum joined in the fray, each hanging on desperately to his plunging legs. Ignominiously he was dragged from his place of concealment into the bright moonlight.

Ferret was the first to give a gasp of astonishment. Their victim was not Ramblethorne the spy, but a powerfully built tramp, who, finding himself released, began to expostulate with alarming vehemence.

"Stop that!" exclaimed Hawke authoritatively. "We are police officers. If you don't behave we'll take you in charge for sleeping out without visible means."

The fellow, cowed into silence, slunk away.

"Confound it!" ejaculated Ferret. "We've let Ramblethorne slip away under our very noses. He'll be clear by this time."

"I'm afraid so," agreed Hawke ruefully; then turning to the chauffeur he told him to drive into the nearest village, which happened to be Much Wenlock.

Here Ross and Vernon were able to secure a room at an inn, while the Scotland Yard men were busy at the little police station, getting a description of the spy issued through the countryside.

Next morning the lads set out on their return journey to Killigwent Hall.

## CHAPTER XV

### The Admiral Works the Oracle

"Look here, old man; what do you say about having a shot for the Naval Reserve?" asked Ross. "In ordinary circs I would be prepared to go through Sandhurst, but this isn't ordinary circs. Before we pass out, the war will be over perhaps."

"I'd rather like to see something of the fun," agreed Vernon.

"As if we hadn't already," added his chum. "But I know what you mean. Instead of being cooped up in an unterseeboot and hunted by our fellows, we want to have a hand in rounding up the German submarines. I vote we write to our respective governors about it."

This conversation occurred two days after the lads' return to Killigwent Hall. They had been given up as lost, and their unexpected return had caused unbounded rejoicings. Pressmen thronged the Hall to gather "exclusive" information of the manner of their seemingly miraculous rescue, but both Ross and Vernon were determined not to satisfy outside curiosity. They even kept the story of how the white flag fluttered down from the signalling mast of U75 from their immediate friends.

"It will take a long time for us to get a reply," objected Vernon. "By the time the letters hang about at the G.P.O., before they are sent to the fleet, a week will elapse, and before we get a reply bang goes a whole fortnight. Let's get hold of a Navy List and see what the qualifications are."

A careful perusal of the regulations resulted in a setback. Midshipmen in the R.N.R., they found, had to be between 16 and 18 years of age, and must either have passed through a course of instruction for two years on board an "approved" training ship, or else one year on board a first-class British merchant ship.

"That's put the hat on it," declared Ross.

"One minute," interposed Vernon. "Why not write to Admiral Garboard? He's an old shipmate of my governor's, and I know he's a bit of a pot up at Whitehall, although he's on the Retired List."

"He was with my pater in the old *Rhodaphlare* on the China station," added Ross. "We'll try; the wheeze might work."

Accordingly Vernon wrote to the Admiral, who lived about twenty miles from Killigwent Hall. Promptly came Sir Peter Garboard's reply:

"TRELANKERRICK,  
CORNWALL.

"DEAR VERNON,

"In reply to your letter I am sorry that I cannot help you in the matter to which you refer, unless you and your friend can produce sufficient evidences of qualifications for the desired posts.

"On principle I object to influence in any shape or form. Entry into any branch of the Service should, like promotion, depend solely upon the aptitude and ability of a candidate. This has been my standpoint throughout the whole of my career, and I see no reason why I should now depart from it.

"If, however, you think you have strong reasons for pressing your claims, and you care to see me, we will go more fully into the matter.

"Believe me,  
"Yours faithfully,  
"PETER GARBOARD."

"Not so dusty," commented Ross. "He does leave us a loophole, although I'm afraid we'll have to blow our own trumpets. I vote we cycle over at once. We'll catch him in just before lunch."

"Better wait until after he's had his grub," said Vernon. "That's always the time to get a man in a good humour."

"We'll risk that," declared young Trefusis. "Come on."

It was a very hilly twenty miles run across the moors to Trelankerrick. Starting at ten in the morning it took the lads two hours and a quarter, in the face of a strong south-westerly breeze, to cover the distance.

Half-way up the drive, they saw the Admiral and a companion emerging from a path leading from the kennels.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed Sir Peter cordially, as he recognized Vernon Haye. "So you haven't marked time in coming to see me. This is young Trefusis, I presume? Glad to meet you. Knew your father very well back in the 'eighties. Hope to renew the acquaintance soon, you know. If it hadn't been for the war——"

Admiral Garboard had taken Trelangkerrick only since the declaration of hostilities; consequently he had had no opportunity of meeting Admiral Trefusis, who, since July of the previous year, had been continuously "somewhere in the North Sea".

"Cecil, my boy," he continued, addressing his companion, a tall, sunburnt man, in shooting garb although his clean-shaven features and slightly rolling gait proclaimed him to be a sailor. "Let me introduce the sons of two of my old shipmates to you. Ross Trefusis and Vernon Haye—my nephew, Cecil Bourne. You'll stay to lunch, of course. Cecil's on three days' leave. He's not satisfied with hunting German submarines, but must needs go after my rabbits."

They walked towards the house, Ross and Bourne leading, and the Admiral and Vernon bringing up the rear.

"We'll discuss this little matter after lunch, my boy," remarked the Admiral.

The meal proceeded without a hitch, the Admiral in his breezy way relating anecdote after anecdote of the Service in the good old days.

"By the by," he remarked, "what's this yarn I hear about your neighbour, Dr. Ramblethorne? There's a report that a warrant has been issued for his arrest."

"For espionage, I believe," replied Vernon.

"Bless my soul! Is that a fact? One doesn't know whom to trust in these days. No details, I suppose. A decent fellow, too, from what I saw of him. No, I don't think you've met him, Cecil, at least not here. By the by, you might tell the boys about your little adventure up-Channel in the *Tremendous*."

Ross and Vernon turned very red in the face, but as they sat with their backs to the window the change of colour passed unnoticed.

"Oh, that submarine business!" remarked Lieutenant Bourne modestly. "Just an ordinary occurrence, don't you know, except for one thing. I was officer of the watch at the time. We spotted a strafed unterseeboot flying a white flag. Have to be jolly careful, you see. Either give the thing a wide berth, and wireless the destroyers to take possession of the prize, or else cut the brute in two. Anyhow, something funny did happen. There were two fellows in mufti standing close to the skipper on the submarine's deck. Goodness only knows why they did it, but I saw one of them——"

"Cut the halliards and let the white flag down," interposed Vernon.

There was dead silence in the room. Only intense excitement was responsible for young Haye's lapse of manners. The words had slipped from him almost unconsciously. Ross barked his shin as a gentle reminder.

"By Jove! How did you know that?" demanded Bourne. "Shouldn't have thought that the yarn had had time to travel very far. Hope I haven't been boring you?"

Vernon took his courage in his hands.

"It was Ross who cut the halliards," he announced. "We were both on board, and jumped overboard just in time, and got hold of a lifebuoy dropped from the *Tremendous* as she passed."

"By Jove!" ejaculated the Lieutenant. "I am surprised. I wondered whether you were picked up. It was a jolly plucky action. But how did you get on board the unterseeboot?"

"Aye, out with it!" added the Admiral. "I heard that you were missing, of course, and also of your return. Truth to tell, I thought when I got your letter that the pair of you had been acting the goat, and had run away to sea and had thought better of it."

"We didn't run, sir, we were carried," explained Ross. "And Dr. Ramblethorne was responsible for it."

Admiral Sir Peter Garboard was not satisfied until he had heard the complete story of his young friends' adventures. When they had finished he turned to his nephew.

"Young Haye and his chum came to see me on a private matter," he remarked, "but I don't think they will object to your hearing what we have to say."

"Are you quite sure you won't?" asked Bourne, addressing the lads.

"Both Trefusis and Haye are supposed to be going in for Sandhurst," continued Sir Peter. "Although, candidly speaking, I don't see why a naval man should want to put his son in the Army."

"In my case it is only following a family precedent," said Ross. "For generations back the eldest son has alternately been in the Navy and Army."

"And in my case it is the force of circumstances," added Vernon. "When I was of the age to be sent to Osborne I was a puny little chap. The doctor wouldn't pass me."

"You've altered a bit since then, I can see," remarked Bourne. "You look as strong as a young horse now."

"Yes, I've grown out of my early ailments, I think," said Vernon.

"Pity the doctor hadn't passed you," said Sir Peter bluntly. "Ten or eleven is too young an age for any medical man to express a final opinion upon. I remember a fellow in the Service who was nearly blind on one eye and almost as deaf as a post. He got through the medical—influence, I expect. Anyway the Navy was none the worse for it. You'll remember him by name, Cecil: he was my secretary on the China Station. Funny thing about him was that he couldn't see to read red figures unless he looked through a green glass. Do you know that when I received your letter I imagined that your temporary disappearance had something to do with your running away to sea?" reiterated the Admiral. "The idea, I believe, comes to most boys almost as a matter of course; something like measles, in fact."

"Well, now we've had a taste of submarine work, we feel that it is high time we had a hand at helping to collar the German unterseebooten," explained Ross.

"I think it could be arranged," remarked the Admiral. "You haven't had actual experience, of course——"

"Eh!" exclaimed Bourne. "By Jove, Uncle, I should say they had!"

"From a strictly professional standpoint, I ought to have said, only you didn't give me time," added Sir Peter. "I'll write off to the Admiralty to-night and see if I can get you both into the R.N.R. You are too young to receive commissions as Sub-lieutenants, but no doubt you can be taken on as midshipmen. Stringent regulations go by the board in war-time. Isn't that so, Cecil?"

"They would probably be appointed to an armed liner for patrol duty," observed Bourne. "There are, I believe, no midshipmen on the trawlers and motor-boats in submarine-hunting."

"We must take what we can get," said Vernon, "but we would rather——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Admiral. "I know. You leave that to me."

Accordingly Ross and Vernon "left it to" the genial Sir Peter, with the result that within a week they were specially appointed as temporary midshipmen to the motor-patrol ship *Capella*.

## CHAPTER XVI

### H.M.S. "Capella"

With the least possible delay the two chums joined the *Capella* at Southampton. She was one of an entirely new class of vessel, built for the express purpose of ridding the high seas of the presence of the modern pirates. Looking at her as she lay in the Empress Dock, there was little about her to attract the eye. A raised fo'c'sle and poop, and a low superstructure abaft the funnel, two stumpy masts and grey-coloured "wall" sides, gave her the appearance of a trawler. It was only when one had an opportunity of seeing her in dry dock, where her graceful under-body, with its fine "entry" and clean run aft, was visible, that any idea of her speed could be arrived at. Further details would be undesirable. Sufficient to add, to quote a Yankee journalist who had been given an opportunity of paying a visit to the Grand Fleet and inspecting the component units of the greatest armada that the world has yet seen, the class to which she belonged were "some boats". The exigencies of the hitherto unprecedented method of carrying out the naval side of the Great War had demanded the creation of large flotillas of small motor-driven hornets. In the initial stages the want was temporarily supplied through the patriotism of owners of private motor-boats. These craft, good in their way, were handicapped by a lack of uniformity. Nevertheless they served as an excellent training-school until the Admiralty with remarkable celerity produced the novel type of craft to which the *Capella* belonged.

The *Capella* carried a large crew in proportion to her size—four officers and twenty-four men. Her skipper was Stanley Syllenger, who held the rank of Lieutenant-Commander, R.N.R. He was a big, bluff man of about thirty-five, a strict disciplinarian, and a stickler for duty. He could be very outspoken when he wanted, which was fairly frequently, but withal he was of a thoroughly good-natured disposition.

There were two Sub-lieutenants, R.N.R. The senior was John Barry, a very mild type of young officer. He usually spoke in a very soft voice, except when occasion warranted, when he could bellow in a way that would take a stranger entirely by surprise. It seemed incredible that such a

bull voice could belong to such a dapper little man as John Barry.

The other Sub was Noel Fox—a tall, deep-chested fellow of twenty, boisterous, and full of spirits. In five crowded years he had gained a good knowledge of three oceans, and a nodding acquaintance with the remaining two. Beginning his career on board a five-masted sailing ship, he had served in tramps, "intermediates", and mail steamers until the outbreak of the war, when he found himself appointed to an armed liner that abruptly terminated her existence by trying conclusions with a German mine.

Captain Syllenger and Sub-lieutenant Barry were pacing the diminutive quarter-deck of the *Capella* as she lay alongside the quay. The skipper had heard officially that morning of the appointment of two temporary midshipmen to the craft under his command. "Hanged if I can understand it, Barry!" he exclaimed in his outspoken manner. "What's the idea of turning the *Capella* into a nursery, I should like to know! These youngsters are somebody's pigeons, I suppose. The usual yarn. Influence up topsides does the trick, and we're saddled with two raw lubbers."

"There is no mention of their having had previous sea-service, sir?" remarked Barry. "But perhaps they'll turn out fairly smart."

"They will," added the Lieutenant-Commander grimly; "that is, if I have anything to do with them for any length of time. But, by Jove! here they are, unless I'm much mistaken."

Looking rather self-conscious in their brand-new uniforms, Ross and Vernon doubled down the steeply sloping gangway. As they came aboard, Syllenger noted with professional satisfaction that they both saluted the quarter-deck. The action showed, by one thing at least, they were not the greenhorns he expected to receive.

"You have had no previous experience, I believe?" he asked, after the midshipmen had introduced themselves.

"Very little, beyond knocking about in yachts and boats," replied Ross.

"That's something," decided the skipper. "A fellow who starts his career in a small boat has the makings of a good seaman. It is rare indeed that a man who goes straight to sea in a steamship makes a smart man in a boat. If ever you go on patrol duty you'll find your experience of value. By the by, I suppose you know our particular job?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ross. "Hunting submarines."

"Ever seen one?" asked Syllenger abruptly.

"Several of the D and E classes manoeuvring in Plymouth Sound."

"But a German one?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"We've both spent nearly a week on board an unterseeboot, sir."

The skipper sternly regarded the two midshipmen.

"Look here," he said. "If you think you've come on board to gammon me, the sooner you get that idea out of your heads the better. There's no room on the *Capella* for a pair of modern Ananiases."

Ross said nothing. From the outside left breast-pocket of his "undress" coat he produced a white foolscap envelope, bearing in blue the "foul anchor" badge of the Admiralty.

The Lieutenant-Commander took the proffered envelope somewhat suspiciously. He more than half expected that it was a letter of introduction from a high official at Whitehall, on the strength of which the two midshipmen felt inclined to "put on side".

Instead, he found that it contained an autograph letter from the Admiralty, thanking the lads for their bravery and presence of mind, whereby they materially assisted in the preservation of H.M.S. *Tremendous* and in the destruction of two of the enemy submarines. The document finished by congratulating Ross and Vernon on their escape from U75, and trusted that their career as midshipmen of the R.N.R. would be marked with success.

Syllenger read it through carefully and slowly, deliberately returned it to the envelope, and handed it back to Ross. Then he held out his hand.

"I'm sorry for what I've said," he declared simply. "Forget it, if you can. Come and lunch with me at one bell."

"Thank you, sir," replied Ross in answer to the invitation; then, after a pause, he added: "we

didn't want to brag about it, but you made us."

"So I understand," said the skipper. "I've misjudged the pair of you, but the least said about my part of it the better, I fancy."

He hailed a couple of men, instructing them to strike the midshipmen's luggage down the companion-ladder. Ross and Vernon followed, to be introduced to their new quarters.

Owing to the *Capella's* shallow draught, the cabin space was rather limited. The Captain's quarters were a double cabin, comprising a state-room and sleeping-room, in a deck-house under the bridge. The two Subs had each a small "dog-box", as they termed it, aft on the starboard side. The engineer had a similar cabin on the port side. Adjoining his quarters was another cabin, which had hitherto been used as an overflow receptacle for officers' luggage. This had now been cleared out, and hooks provided for the two midshipmen to sling their hammocks. The slinging and unslashing of the hammocks was performed by a servant, to whom Ross and Vernon had each to pay ten shillings a month for the privilege. During the day the cabin made a fairly comfortable room, although the furniture was Spartan-like in its simplicity.

At six bells (11 a.m.) the *Capella*, having replenished her fuel and stores, and made good slight defects, was "tracked" out of the dock. An hour later she left Southampton, bound for a rendezvous off Beachy Head, near which a U-boat had been reported to have made an unsuccessful attack upon a swift merchant vessel.

The run down Southampton Water was necessarily performed at quarter-speed, for in spite of her light displacement the *Capella's* wash at full speed was almost equal to that of a liner. Even as it was, a long line of white foam lashed itself upon the mudflats several minutes after she had passed.

When Calshot Castle was abreast, speed was increased to 30 knots. There was an easterly breeze blowing against the ebb-tide, with the result that quite a choppy sea was met with outside Southampton Water. Like a knife, the sharp cutwater of the *Capella* cleft the waves, sending up showers of white spray; but such was her speed that, before the wind could carry the spindrift on deck, the swift vessel was beyond the cascade of foam. She hardly felt the motion of the waves; indeed, she was so steady that it was possible to place a pail of water on deck without any of the contents being spilt by the "lift" of the ship.

Under the guidance of Noel Fox, the midshipmen made the round of the vessel, the Sub explaining everything to them in detail. Already the lads had taken a great fancy to the Sub, and Fox reciprocated the sentiment. He had a way about him that enabled him to give particulars of the most intricate mechanism without having to resort to dry, parrot-like instruction.

By the time he had explained the ingenious devices used to entrap the German unterseebooten, Ross and Vernon felt inclined to marvel how it was they found themselves on board the *Capella*, since only sheer good luck had saved U75 from being doomed during every hour of their brief and involuntary detention.

"Yes, we can mop up the German submarines quicker than they can turn them out," said the Sub. "Of course I don't mean to say that a few of them won't get a smack at some of our ships for some time to come; but all the same we are giving them beans. From a strictly professional point of view we would be sorry if Old Turps abandoned his 'effectual' blockade. Our chances of having a high old game with the unterseebooten would be considerably reduced."

"There are still some in the English Channel," hazarded Vernon.

"Yes, a few; but have you noticed how those fellows fight shy of Dover? They shun it like the plague. It's horribly unhealthy for them. D'ye know why? Perhaps you wouldn't have paid much attention to it, but some months ago the Admiralty issued a 'Notice to Mariners', stating that the Straits of Dover were heavily mined, and that all shipping was to pass through the Downs within three miles of the Kentish coast.

"So it's fairly safe to assume that the few stray unterseebooten that are still lurking in the Channel have made the passage round the north coast of Scotland. It's only a matter of time before we bag the lot, I fancy."

"And our submarines?" enquired Ross.

"Have fewer opportunities since the Hun battleships and cruisers have such a decided inclination to remain in harbour," rejoined Fox. "When there's a chance, you can bet your bottom dollar that our fellows seize it. Quite recently one of our submarines found herself alone and disabled in the Bight of Heligoland. Undismayed, her lieutenant-commander signalled to a passing German trawler, covered her with his guns, and made the Hun tow the crippled submarine into British waters. Then he released his involuntary benefactor, but before so doing can you guess what he did?"

"No," replied both lads.

"Made the Huns line up on deck and sing the 'Hymn of Hate'. You can imagine the surprise of

the trawler's men, who, judging by the treatment meted out to our fishermen by the German submarines, expected nothing less than imprisonment and the loss of their boat. But it's close on one bell," remarked Fox at length. "You're messing with the skipper to-day, I believe. He's quite a decent sort when you know him properly, but it takes a bit of doing."

A seaman strode up to the bell and gave it a sharp stroke. Just then a messenger hurried from the diminutive "wireless" room abaft the chart-house and, leaping down the ladder at a single bound, knocked at the door of the Captain's cabin.

"Stow those things away, Sparkes," exclaimed Captain Syllenger. "Lunch will have to wait."

He dashed out of his cabin. On the way to the bridge he passed Fox and the two midshipmen.

"You'll have to tighten your belts, my lads," he announced. "We've just had a message through. A strafed unterseeboot has been spotted trying to get into Spithead. If we don't nab her within half an hour, I'll eat my hat!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### A Double Bag

It was a sea-plane, flying at fifteen hundred feet above the Warner and The Nab Lightships, that had detected an elongated shadow creeping stealthily over the shingly bottom close to the Dean Tail Buoy. The shadow was that of a German unterseeboot, since none of the British submarines were known to be in the eastern approaches to Spithead. Evidently she had gone out of her course, for instead of being in the main channel she was well to the north of it. More than likely the strong east-going tide, which hereabout surges at such a rate that it causes the shingle 30 or 40 feet beneath the surface to emit a deep rumble, had taken the unterseeboot in its grip.

Promptly the sea-plane wirelessly the news, and quickly a "general call" was sent to the patrol vessels in the vicinity. The *Capella* was one of the craft that picked up the welcome order.

She was now only seven sea miles distant from the Dean Tail Buoy. Within ten minutes of the receipt of the wireless she was on the spot—one of the very first of a regular hornet flotilla bent upon adding yet another of Von Tirpitz's pets to the "bag".

For the next quarter of an hour it looked as if a novel kind of marine waltz was in progress. Nearly a score of swift vessels were executing fantastic movements at full speed, circling and interchanging positions until it seemed as if collisions were impossible to avoid.

Their object was to thoroughly bewilder the already doomed U-boat, for, if possible, her capture in a practically intact condition was desired. In very deep water, salvage of a sunken submarine was out of the question; here, in a comparatively shallow depth, and close to an important naval base, to which the prize could be taken with little trouble, the opportunity for capture rather than instant destruction was too good to be missed.

Suddenly a cloud of white smoke shot up from the sea. Its appearance was greeted by hearty cheers from the patrol vessels. It was a signal that the U-boat, in her attempt to find deep water, had floundered blindly into the trap. Over and over again the hunters passed, towing non-explosive grapnels, until it was certain that the prey was helpless in their toils.

Then, in obedience to an order from the senior officer, the swift vessels withdrew for nearly three cables' length from the spot where the boat lay. Two slow but powerfully engined trawlers approached at a cable's length abreast, towing the bight of a massive steel hawser between. Doing little more than drift with the tide they crept past the submerged U-boat, one on either side of the mark-buoy that indicated her position.

Presently the strain on the hawser increased. It was only by making full use of the twin-screws that the trawlers were able to prevent themselves from swinging together. The steel rope stretched until it resembled two metal bars which bore silent testimony to the strain.

Just then the two vessels shot ahead. Although the hawser was still intact, it no longer took any strain. But its work was done. The bight, engaging the conning-tower of the unterseeboot, had turned the submarine on its side. In the space of a few seconds the deadly fumes from the capsized batteries had almost painlessly accounted for the crew of the U-boat, who themselves had neither pity nor consideration for the hapless victims, men, women, and children, massacred against all dictates of humanity and convention of civilized warfare.

"A bit of work for the dockyard lighters to-morrow," commented Sub-lieutenant Barry, as the *Capella* parted company to resume her run up-Channel. "They'll raise the U-boat, and take her into dry dock, before the sulphuric acid has had time to do much damage to her mechanism."



"I shouldn't be surprised if there were another U-boat knocking around," remarked Vernon. "From our limited experience we know that they work either in pairs or threes."

"Then the worse for them," rejoined Barry. "It would be a great wheeze to bag two of them in one day. Desperate diseases need desperate remedies, you know."

Therein the Sub voiced the unanimous opinion of the British Navy. At the commencement of the war, the torpedoing of several battleships and cruisers by German submarines aroused no enmity within the hearts of the British tars. They realized that a warship is "fair sport" to the submarines of the opposing side. To run the risk of being blown up was one of the excitements to undergo in the course of duty. But when it came to torpedoing helpless merchantmen, and jeering at the death-struggles of the unfortunate crews, Jack Tar began to regard the unterseebooten in the light of pirates and murderers. The wanton destruction of the *Lusitania*, accompanied by the appalling death-roll of non-combatants, women and children, literally sounded the death-knell of the crews of von Tirpitz's jolly-Roger-flying submarines. In their methods of "frightfulness" they had overreached themselves. They had sown a wind: they were now reaping a whirlwind with a vengeance.

And now the great silent Navy was paying back von Tirpitz in almost, but not quite, his own coin. While the much-advertised blockade of Great Britain was petering out, British submarines were playing havoc with German shipping in the Baltic—a sea which the Teutons regarded as being almost their very own. Yet what a difference marked the methods adopted by the humane commanders of our submarines when dealing with German mercantile shipping. A punctilious regard for the safety of the crews of overhauled merchantmen won admiration even from the seamen of the destroyed vessels. Humiliation and reproach seemed to haunt the white-bearded dotard, whose hands had sought in vain to wrest the trident from Britannia's virile grasp.

At about five in the afternoon the *Capella* arrived at her station off Beachy Head, relieving her sister ship the *Markab*, that, with three other motor-driven craft, had been engaged in a vigorous, but for the most part uneventful, patrol.

Day and night for a fortnight at a stretch, unless anything unforeseen took place, the *Capella* was to cruise up and down, keeping a smart look-out for any sign of an object resembling a hostile periscope. In order to economize her fuel supply her speed was reduced to 10 knots. It was then that her bad qualities showed themselves. With her shallow draught and high freeboard she rolled like a barrel, since speed was essential to impart steadiness. The motion was certainly disconcerting, although it did not imply that the *Capella* was unseaworthy.

"Fraid our chances of bagging another U-boat to-day are off," remarked Barry to Ross.

It was within half an hour of sunset. The chums had been temporarily separated. It was Vernon's "watch below". The senior Sub and young Trefusis were on the bridge. In spite of the still-prevailing east wind it was a grand evening. Three miles away, broad on the starboard beam, the chalk cliffs known as the Seven Sisters were beginning to be tinted by the crimson hues of the western sky. To seaward, three large vessels were in sight. One, a liner bound down-Channel, was pelting along at such a pace with the wind that the smoke from her funnels was rising almost perpendicularly. Forging ahead in the opposite direction were two big tramps, the smoke from their funnels, beaten down by the strong breeze, trailing across the surface of the water for a couple of miles in their wake.

"An object lesson," remarked Barry. "The arteries of the Empire. Hang it all! The blockade reminds me of a pigmy treacherously stealing up behind a giant and trying to cut his jugular vein. Instead, he merely scratched a comparatively unimportant capillary, and feels mighty sorry for himself when the giant turns and scruffs him by the neck."

Leaning over the bridge-rails, the Sub startled his companion by bellowing in a voice loud enough to be heard a mile away:

"On look-outs! Stand by bow and stern lights!"

The *Capella* was making preparations for the night. Unlike the armed merchantmen that are compelled to scour the North Sea, summer and winter alike, without showing the faintest glimmer of a lamp, the *Capella* observed the rules and regulations for preventing collision at sea. Her port, starboard, and bow lamps were lighted by electricity, but, in order to guard against possible break-down of current, oil lamps had also to be trimmed and lighted, ready, should occasion serve, to take their places.

It was part of Ross's duty to report to the officer of the watch that these lamps were in order, and also, at regular intervals, that the navigation lights were burning brightly.

Presently the Sub prepared to take a cross-bearing. He was fairly certain that the *Capella* had reached the westernmost limit of her patrol-ground. From that point she was to proceed due south for 10 sea miles, and then due east for 20 miles until she fell in with her "opposite number".

While Barry was thus engaged, Ross noticed a sail about 2 miles distant on the starboard quarter.

"By Jove!" he muttered as he brought his glass to bear upon the stranger. "That's a funny rig."

The craft was a "two-sticker". She was square-rigged on the foremast, carrying fore-topsail and fore-course. No jibs were set; neither, as far as he could see, was any sail set on the mainmast. The vessel's sides were painted green with a broad red band.

Even as he kept the craft under observation she starboarded her helm, shaping a course that would converge upon that of the rearmost of the two tramps. By so doing she exposed a considerable portion of her broadside.

Ross gave an exclamation of astonishment. Above the green sides appeared what was undoubtedly the conning-tower and housed periscope of a submarine. "Submarine on the starboard quarter, sir!" he reported.

"What!" exclaimed Barry, levelling his telescope. "By Jove, yes! What luck!"

The unterseeboot had, of course, noticed the *Capella*, and had mistaken her for a trawler. She realized that she ran a risk in case the latter might be armed, but, trusting to her disguise, she hoped to get within torpedo range of the tramp—a vessel of over 3000 tons—sink her, and make her escape in the confusion that was bound to ensue. On the other hand, her Kapitan had good reasons for thinking that the supposed trawler was not one of the armed patrol, since they usually worked in company. By rigging canvas bulwarks and setting sail upon dummy masts, he was able to approach with little fear of detection.

"Action!"

Quickly the *Capella's* crew were at their stations. The quick-firers were loaded, and their screens lowered so as not to impede their arc of fire. Until these preparations were complete the vessel still held on her course.

Then Captain Syllenger, who had come on deck, telegraphed for full speed ahead. Like a racehorse the *Capella* leapt forward.

A double, converging line of white foam marked the track of a torpedo from the doomed U-boat. By a slight alteration of helm the *Capella* avoided it. The action was hardly necessary: it was merely a matter of precaution, since the *Capella's* peculiarities of construction made her practically immune from torpedo attack.

Captain Syllenger had no intention of ramming his opponent. Ramming with a lightly built vessel, such as the *Capella*, would only be employed as a last resource.

At an almost point-blank range of 400 yards both bow guns were fired simultaneously. There was no need for another shot. One of the projectiles, hitting the U-boat at the base of the conning-tower, tore a jagged hole a couple of feet in diameter. The other shell hit her about 10 feet from the bows, and, with an erratic peculiarity that such missiles have after the first impact, was deflected downward, expending the full force of its explosive charge in the submarine's bow torpedo-room.

In a moment the luckless U-boat was done for. A huge column of smoke marked the spot where she had disappeared like a stone, while flying pieces of metal hurtled far and wide through the air. Several of the fragments clattered upon the *Capella's* deck as she swung round to avoid any possibility of fouling debris. Of the crew not a man was to be seen. Those who had not been killed by the shell-fire had been wiped out by the explosion of their own torpedoes.

"We've pulled off a double event to-day, after all," remarked Sub-lieutenant Fox as he disappeared down the companion-ladder to resume his interrupted "watch below". "Barry has got his wish."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The Smoke-signals

For the next ten days nothing occurred beyond the ordinary routine. Even Ross and Vernon, to whom everything was at first a novelty, began to feel the irksomeness of the constant and vigilant patrol. No hostile submarines made their appearance; there were not even any reports, true or otherwise, that they had been sighted. It was the same all along the English Channel—"nothin' doing". It seemed as if the unterseebooten had finally given up these waters as a "bad egg".

Yet it would be most injudicious for the naval authorities to relax their watchfulness. Areas of

strategic importance must still be closely guarded, since it was just possible that the wily Teuton would refrain from submarine warfare in the Channel until the patrol-boats' crews were lulled into a sense of false optimism.

The only break in the monotony was the occasional and welcome appearance of a motor-boat from Shoreham, bringing off fresh supplies, newspapers and letters for the patrol vessels.

Amongst Ross's correspondence was a letter from his father. Admiral Trefusis gave no indication of what he was doing, merely a brief statement that he was still "somewhere in the North Sea". He congratulated his son upon his escape, and mentioned that he had heard from the captain of H.M.S. *Tremendous* with reference to his son's action in warning the battleship. But although the Admiral did not express himself very enthusiastically on paper, he was as pleased as only a proud father can be at his boy's display of gallantry and resource. "Under the circumstances," he wrote, "I think you did right in temporarily abandoning your preparation for Sandhurst. No doubt you will acquit yourself in your present position as a Trefusis should do. I was certainly surprised to hear about that fellow Ramblethorne. He always appeared to be a really decent man. It only shows how careful one has to be when dealing with a highly organized enemy."

Amongst Vernon's batch of correspondence was a letter from Detective-inspector Hawke. It was couched in semi-official language, a survival of days long ago when the Inspector was a budding constable and had to submit countless written reports to his superiors.

There was, he wrote, no definite news concerning Ramblethorne, otherwise von Hauptwald. The local police had taken up the case, and, assisted by the military, were still scouring the country. As usual, there were inaccurate and misleading reports from various parts of the country. It was generally accepted that the spy was being hidden by some of his compatriots who, by indulgence of the British Government, were still at large in the country, or else that he had succeeded in getting away on board a neutral ship.

The inquest on von Ruhle had taken place, with the anticipated result, a verdict of *felo de se* being returned by the jury. No evidence had been submitted as to the dead man's real occupation. Under the name of Cornelius Vanderhuit his body was handed over to the authorities for interment.

But the case did not end there. It remained for the competent Authorities to decide the steps to be taken with reference to the papers that had been found in von Ruhle's possession.

"I am keeping von Ruhle's 'malacca' as a memento," concluded Hawke. "It may help me to discriminate between it and a portable metal tripod, and save me from being placed under arrest by the military. Fortunately, upon the last occasion, I did not meet with my Waterloo."

"The old chap feels a bit sore about it, I can see," remarked Ross. "He's written a good deal more than he evidently intended. However, he looks like 'making good' this time."

"It's a pity Ramblethorne slipped through the detectives' fingers," said Vernon, as he prepared to go on deck. "That fellow's bound to cause trouble until he's laid by the heels."

It was Noel Fox's "trick". The Sub was standing on the bridge with his eye glued to his telescope. A mile or so inland, on the summit of the South Downs where they approach Beachy Head, three columns of smoke were rising in the still air. There was nothing extraordinary in that. It might be a farmer burning rubbish on his fields; but what attracted the Sub's attention was the remarkable and systematic changes in the density of the smoke. At one moment the two outside pillars were heavy, the centre one being little more than a thin haze; at another the conditions would be reversed.

Fox decided to take action. Rapidly the *Capella* closed with the shore, until she was within signalling distance of a coast-guard station.

The station in question was not manned by coast-guards. Not considered important, its complement was depleted at the outbreak of hostilities, most of the men joining the large armoured cruisers. A chief officer and a boatman alone remained. These were at a later period augmented by a party of Sea Scouts.

As soon as the *Capella* had "made her number", a signaller took up his position on the roof of the chart-house.

"Fires burning one mile inland to north-west of coast-guard station," he semaphored. "Suspect smoke-signals. Investigate and report."

Keeping his telescope bearing on shore, Vernon watched the result of the signal. Promptly half a dozen Scouts, mounted on bicycles, set off to the position indicated. Their progress was hidden by an intervening clump of trees, but in less than a quarter of an hour they returned. By this time the smoke had disappeared. One of their number worked the semaphore attached to the station.

"Fires made with damp straw. Found old blankets apparently used to stifle smoke. Saw large

car stationary; made towards Lewes on approach; number known; have informed police."

"Smart youngsters!" exclaimed Captain Syllenger. "They've helped to nip some little plan in the bud. We'll have to be jolly careful for the next few days, I expect. Did you make a note of the fog-signals, Mr. Fox?"

"I did, sir," replied the Sub, producing a leaf of a notebook covered with an unintelligible number of lines. "Each of these strokes represents a column of smoke according to its position."

"I can make nothing of it," remarked Syllenger. "At any rate I'll send your result to the Admiralty with the utmost dispatch. Take her in, Mr. Fox, and bring up where you find the two-fathom mark."

The *Capella* headed nearer towards the shore, a leads-man sounding until the required depth was found. One of the boats was lowered, manned, and rowed to the coast-guard station, Sub-lieutenant Barry being in charge, with Ross as his immediate subordinate.

"I want this to be forwarded to the Admiralty with the least possible delay," he announced, addressing the chief officer. "How long do you think it will take to get through?"

"Too late for the eleven something train from Brighton, sir," was the reply. "There's a gentleman in the village who has a big car. He's a member of the Volunteer Training Corps. No doubt he'll take it as far as Lewes. Why, sir, here's the gent himself! Mr. Hyde's his name."

The newcomer was a sparely built man of below medium height. He looked about thirty years of age. In reality he was nearly fifty. Having vainly attempted to obtain a commission in the R.N.R. and the Army, he had joined the V.T.C. in the hope that, perhaps, some day his services might be utilized in a very practical form. Now his chance was at hand.

He had strolled down to the beach on noticing a boat putting off from the patrol vessel.

"Lewes? Certainly," he replied in answer to Barry's question. "I doubt whether you'll save much. Why not let me take the message right to the Admiralty? I'd like to do it, 'pon my word I would."

The Sub hesitated. Perhaps the stranger might be all right; but he might be all wrong. One had to be very careful in these times. Yet the offer was a tempting one. If possible, it was most desirable to be able to decipher the transcription of these mysterious columns of smoke.

"I say, Trefusis," he said, "you've had a fairly long time afloat; what do you say to a run up to town? I'm sure this gentleman would make no objection to giving you a seat in his car."

"With the greatest pleasure," declared Mr. Hyde.

"Thanks!" rejoined Barry. "Of course the honour of delivering the letter will be yours, sir. Mr. Trefusis accompanies you merely as a passenger. We'll stand by to pick you up, Trefusis. I'll make it all right with the skipper."

The Sub accompanied Mr. Hyde and the midshipman to the garage, which was about four minutes' walk from the coast-guard station. While the man was getting out the car (he was his own chauffeur), Barry seized the opportunity of telling Ross to be on his guard, in case anything suspicious occurred.

With a terrific bound the powerful car started on its sixty-mile journey. Between the sea and Lewes the needle of the speed-indicator never fell below 40 miles an hour, until at times the car was running at 60. Village after village was passed at almost break-neck speed. In vain, sleepy rural constables sought to hold up the reckless driver. Discretion was the better part of valour, so they stood aside and attempted to note the number on the identification plate of the car. Again in vain. All they could see and swallow was a cloud of white, chalky dust that hung thickly on the sultry air long after the car was out of sight and hearing.

The hills around East Grinstead it surmounted at 40 miles an hour, dashing down the inclines at the speed of an express train, and swerving time after time to avoid lumbering farm wagons.

At Croydon Mr. Hyde wisely slowed down. He had covered 49 miles in exactly fifty-five minutes, but twenty-eight minutes later the car drew up under the Admiralty Arch.

"Room 445 is the one I want," he explained to Ross. "I know my way about here, you know. I've several relations at the Admiralty. Come along: the car won't hurt where she is."

"Your pass, sir," demanded a Metropolitan policeman who, with a naval pensioned petty officer, was stationed at the door.

"Haven't one," replied Mr. Hyde. "Urgent business—see?" and he produced the envelope, bearing the words "On His Majesty's Service", in which was enclosed Captain Syllenger's communication.

The policeman was the essence of imperturbable dignity.

"No use, sir; you must have a pass. They are obtainable across the road there."

"It will mean at least twenty minutes' delay," muttered the motorist savagely, as he turned away. "Come on, Mr. Trefusis, let's try our luck across the way."

As Ross descended the short flight of stone steps leading from the lobby to the street, he nearly cannoned into a couple of naval officers who were about to enter the building. Suddenly remembering that he was in uniform, the midshipman brought his right hand smartly to the peak of his cap. As he did so, he recognized that one of the naval men was his father.

The recognition was mutual.

"Hullo, pater!"

"Hullo, Ross! What brings you here? Duty, eh? It's the same in my case. Sorry I can't have you to lunch, but must catch the first train north. This is the first time I've come up to town since the war started. In any case I'm not sorry that I am not stopping the night here. Judging by reports, it's a jolly sight too dangerous for me. Don't fancy being run over by a taxi in a dark main thoroughfare. Give me the North Sea any day. Well, I must be moving. Can't keep My Lords waiting, you know. Good-bye, Ross!"

It was Admiral Paul Trefusis' way. Whenever he had any business on hand that kept him from his ship, he invariably spoke in short, jerky sentences. Ross knew his parent's little mannerism.

"One moment, pater," he exclaimed. "We're in an awful hurry too——"

"Don't look like it," growled the Admiral good-naturedly. "You were ambling out like an old shellback. Always execute orders at the double: that's my advice to budding midshipmen. Well, what is it?"

As briefly as possible, Ross told his parent of the rebuff Mr. Hyde and he had received, and of the matter that brought them at 50 miles an hour from a remote Sussex coast-guard station.

Making a hurried excuse to his companion, the Admiral skipped up the steps into the lobby, Ross and his fellow-traveller following closely.

The policeman naturally asked for no pass from a Flag officer in uniform, but he was on the point of stopping his companions when the messenger recognized the Admiral as his former captain. His apologies surprised even the stolid policeman.

"Don't apologize for doing your duty, my man," remarked Admiral Trefusis. "Hope you're fit. Must have a yarn with you when I've more time. Come along, Ross."

Having seen Mr. Hyde and Ross safely to the outside of the door of Room 445, the Admiral abruptly took his departure.

In reply to a knock the door was opened by a very tired-looking clerk, who was bravely bearing up under the strain of having to work ninety hours a week, including Sundays. Having explained his business, Mr. Hyde was shown into the presence of an official whose talent was little short of miraculous.

A dozen precise and pointed questions put him in full possession of all the facts bearing upon the document that he required. He touched an electric bell. An assistant hurried to his desk.

"Bring me the papers on the von Ruhle case," he ordered in an undertone.

In less than half an hour the transcription was completed, although the *Capella's* officer of the watch had not taken down the actual commencement of the smoke-signal. Then, having "pressed" the paper in order to obtain a duplicate copy, the official placed it in an envelope, which he secured with an imposing wax seal.

"No mistake about it, the war has bucked the civilian staff at the Admiralty," observed Mr. Hyde to Ross as they gained the street. "I can remember a time when all you had to do was to mention someone's name, and you had practically a free entry. Your particular pal could always contrive to have an hour's yarn with you, and perhaps an interval for refreshment. They know what working at high pressure means now."

Hyde was more cautious on the return journey. He was well within the limit that he had set himself. An hour and forty minutes later, the car drew up outside the coast-guard station.

"Captain Syllenger presents his compliments, Mr. Hyde, and requests your company on board," said Sub-lieutenant Barry when the *Capella's* boat arrived to take off the midshipman. "Ton my word, you haven't been long. We didn't expect you back before six o'clock."

Having received his guest, Captain Syllenger led the way to his cabin, Barry and Ross being included in the party. The skipper's face glowed with satisfaction when he had opened the envelope, for the signal as decoded was as follows:

"(words missing) closely patrolled. Unable to provide stores here. Will attempt removal of (word missing) from Station 123 on Friday night. Will signal from Station 125 at 1 a.m. on Saturday if possible. Transports leaving by Needles Channel at daybreak."

Following this was an explanatory note.

"Station 123 is stated to be in Keyhaven Marshes. Station 125 one mile west of white house at Milford-on-Sea."

"Humph!" ejaculated Captain Syllenger. "It looks as if there's trouble in store for some gentlemen of marked Teutonic sympathies. I only hope we'll have a chance of being off Station 125."

## CHAPTER XIX

### That Friday Night

Three hours later H.M.S. *Capella* received the following order by wireless:—

"Await relief by *Taurus*, then proceed to Rendezvous Y, Portsmouth Command. *Capella* to be temporarily attached to Western Inner Patrol."

The meaning of the message was plain to all on board. The *Capella* was to proceed to Rendezvous Y, which according to Admiralty instructions was off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, where a flotilla of small craft was patrolling day and night, as a precautionary measure in the unlikely event of any hostile craft forcing the formidable defences of the western entrance to the Solent.

At eight on the following morning the *Taurus* arrived on the station, and with the least possible delay the *Capella* made for the west'ard.

Only one incident marked the run. A few miles from the Royal Sovereign Lightship, the *Capella* sighted a number of submarines running on the surface. They were on Particular Service, and although opportunities for torpedoing a hostile surface craft were very remote, the submarines were constantly rendering yeoman service by keeping the approaches to the German North Sea ports under close observation. On rare occasions, when a German light-cruiser or destroyer did venture beyond the protection of the mine-fields and guns of the land-batteries, British submarines were not backward in seizing their chance of letting loose "tinfish" against their quarry.

Having arrived off Yarmouth, Captain Syllenger reported himself to the senior officer. He came back beaming. The *Capella* was to take part in combined sea and land operations for the capture of the German agents, who were supplying petrol to one of the submarines, and also for the capture of the U-boat.

The eventful Friday evening came at last. The *Capella*, in company with four first-class torpedo-boats, was to be ready at a signal from Hurst to make a dash through the North Channel. A fleet of armed trawlers from the Poole base was to operate farther out to sea, in order to cut off the U-boat's retreat should she be lucky enough to escape the attentions of the *Capella* and her consorts.

At ten o'clock the east-going tidal stream began to set through the Needles Channel. Half an hour later it ran with a velocity exceeding five knots. The *Capella*, moving at a rate equal to that of the tide, kept about half a mile from the Isle of Wight shore, with the white, occulting light of the Needles just visible to the north of Cliff End Fort.

It was a perfectly calm night, overcast, but with no wind. A dull rumble, rising and falling in volume, could be heard from the direction of the open sea.

"Breakers on the Shingles—a large bank on the starboard hand of the Needles Channel," explained Barry in answer to the midshipmen's enquiry.

"Then it means that bad weather is approaching," said Ross, who had had plenty of opportunities of observing the phenomenon of "ground swells" on the North Cornish coast. "If it's like this, the U-boat won't be able to make direct communication with the shore."

The appearance of Captain Syllenger on the bridge put an end to conversation. The officers, by the aid of telescopes and binoculars, kept the Hampshire shore under close observation.

To the naked eye nothing was visible but a dark bank of trees. Not a light was to be seen, although there were several houses in the vicinity. The position of Lyminster, in time of peace discernible by reason of a strong blaze of light, could only be determined by the feeble glow of

the high red light marking the course up the river.

"It's nearly midnight," observed the skipper. "If our friends the Germans are going to shift their supplies from here to Milford, they'll have to be pretty sharp. Seems to me like a case of 'nuthin' doing'."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when the silence was broken by a peremptory hail. The sound travelled clearly across the water, although the person shouting must have been a mile and a half away.

Then came the jumbled noise of men's voices, quickly followed by two rifle-shots. The voices then died away, and, as far as the listeners on the *Capella* could hear, all was quiet.

"That's soon over, whatever it was, sir," remarked Barry.

"Hurst calling up, sir," announced a signalman, as a light blinked rapidly from the fort guarding the Hampshire side of the narrow channel. It was the order to proceed at full speed to the position previously decided upon.

Although the torpedo-boats were speedy craft, the *Capella* left them behind "hands down". Fortunately there were no search-lights to baffle her quartermaster, for those of both Hurst and the batteries on the Isle of Wight shore had been previously switched off. Since the Needle Channel was closed to all mercantile shipping, the *Capella* could, and did, without risk, extinguish her navigation lights. Only the phosphorescent spray from her sharp cutwater marked her position.

Suddenly she ported helm, just in time to avoid a collision with a long dark shape that proved to be an interseeboot in the act of diving. Her commander had detected the pulsations of the *Capella* motors, but he was too late.

Round spun the patrol vessel. From her quarter, a long length of something that resembled an exaggerated string of sausages was paid out. At the rate that the *Capella* was circling, it was impossible for the U-boat to escape from her toils. Dive to a safe depth she could not, since the maximum depth was but 5 3/4 fathoms.

The last of the "sausages", to which was attached stout flexible wire, disappeared beneath the water. Then a jerk upon the wire announced the gratifying fact that the fugitive submarine had fouled the string of sausages, which was in reality a number of gun-cotton charges, primed and connected to a powerful battery by means of an insulated wire.

Sub-lieutenant Fox, who was standing by the firing-key, needed no orders. His fingers pressed the ebonite disc. A hundred yards astern of the *Capella* a column of water was flying high in the air, followed by a tremendous roar. For one minute the vessel rocked violently in the agitated waters, then, circling, she made for the spot under which the explosion had occurred. With a splash a mark-buoy was dropped overboard to indicate the position of the shattered U-boat. By this time the torpedo-boats had arrived on the scene.

"A deuce of a commotion on shore, Barry," exclaimed the skipper.

"I should be surprised if there were not, sir," replied the Sub. "The racket was enough to smash every window within a couple of miles of the beach. They're signalling, sir."

"German submarine's boat rowing off. Intercept her," was the signal spelt out by the long and short flashes.

"More work," remarked Barry. "It's like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. Shall I order the searchlight to be run, sir?"

"Very good," replied Captain Syllenger. "But before you do so you might signal to Hurst, and request that all available search-light be brought to bear in this direction."

Soon the hitherto pitch-dark sea was flooded in a blaze of light. Giant beams from the Isle of Wight shore joined with those of Hurst Castle to sweep slowly across the waves, supplementing the twin rays projected from the two search-lights on the *Capella's* bridge.

It was indeed a brilliant spectacle. The *Capella* and the torpedo-boats seemed outlined in silver. Along the shore as far as Hengistbury Head, the low line of cliffs was thrown into strong relief against the dark background of sky. The crest of every wave seemed as if made of delicate filigree work. Nothing afloat could hope to escape detection within the radius of action of the concentrated millions of candle-power search-lights.

Less than a mile away, and about the same distance from shore, a small black object bobbed buoyantly upon the waves. It was the ill-fated U-boat's canvas dinghy, apparently empty.

Down bore the *Capella*, her search-lights fixed upon the object of her search. The boat was not deserted. Lying at full length on the bottom boards were two men, who had adopted that position, in the vain hope of escaping detection.

As the patrol vessel approached, they sat up and raised dolorous cries of "Mercy, Englishmen!"

"Chuck it, Fritz!" shouted one of the British seamen. "You won't get hurt. You ain't in a strafed submarine now, you know."

"Silence!" ordered the skipper. "Stand by there. Get that boat aboard. See they don't sling anything overboard."

There was precious little that the German seamen could throw overboard, for when the canvas boat was placed on the *Capellus* deck it was found to contain only a pair of oars and two crutches. What the German sailors hoped to do had they escaped detection was a matter for conjecture, for without a compass, food, and water, and in a frail cockle-shell with every indication of bad weather approaching, certain death stared them in the face.

Finding themselves well treated, the Germans grew quite communicative. They freely admitted that they expected to obtain a considerable quantity of petrol from their agents ashore. They did not know their names, or if they did they professed complete ignorance on the point. Their craft, numbered for some vague reason U7, was built at Altona, and completed only a fortnight previously. In addition to her normal crew of twenty-eight officers and men, she carried five officers and ten men for instructional purposes. She was one of four that had come round Cape Wrath and the West and South coasts of Ireland, rather than risk the hazardous passage through the Straits of Dover, or the almost equally dangerous North Channel between Scotland and Ireland. Two of the five were missing; the other was supposed to be in the neighbourhood of Cape Ushant. U7's particular mission was to intercept transports that were known to be leaving Southampton for the French coast.

The men admitted that they had been tricked. A light had been flashed seaward, and although the signal was not strictly in accordance with the prearranged plan, it was sufficiently accurate to delude the U7's Lieutenant-Commander.

The German officer had shown considerable skill and audacity in closing with the shore so close to the numerous and powerful batteries. He dwelt upon the almost absolute certainty of the gunners devoting their attention solely to the Needles Channel, and since it was a little past the time of dead low water the intervening Shingles Bank, which in places rears itself 20 feet above the sea, would afford an efficient screen from the search-lights.

But he had reckoned without the patrol vessels. Barely had the U-boat's collapsible rowed a hundred yards from her parent when the *Capella* raced up, and promptly put another hostile submarine to her credit.

Early next morning, the *Capella* having returned to her station off Yarmouth to await orders, Vernon Haye went ashore in charge of the whaler in order to pick up mails and secure fresh provisions.

Arriving alongside the little stone quay, he left a boat-keeper in charge and proceeded towards the post office, while the coxswain and the rest of the men went in search of the much-desired commodities in the shape of fresh butter and milk.

Just as Vernon was about to enter the post office, he nearly collided with a very sleepy-looking subaltern in the uniform of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

"By Jove, Barraclough!" he exclaimed. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Barraclough was an Upper Sixth man at the same school as Haye, but had left four terms previously. On the outbreak of war he had applied for, and had obtained, a commission, and had been stationed, somewhat to his disappointment, at Hurst Castle. Beyond a few false alarms and a liberal experience in target practice, his existence at that isolated fortress bordered on the monotonous. He was simply on thorns to be able to proceed to the Front; the probability was that he would have to "do his bit" for his country at a spot within 20 miles of his home until the termination of the war.

"Bless my soul, Haye!" he rejoined. "Whoever would have thought to see you here, and in naval get-up. How long have you been in the Service, and what ship are you on?"

"Only a few weeks; and I'm on the *Capella* with Trefusis."

"Trefusis, eh? Well, he's a lucky boy to have an Admiral for a father. And the *Capella*? Then you were in last night's affair? I heard they bagged the submarine."

"Rather!" declared Vernon proudly.

Barraclough stifled a prodigious yawn.

"Jolly glad to hear it. 'Scuse me, but I'm beastly tired. Had a night of it after those spies across yonder. Didn't turn in till three, and at six I had to cross from Hurst to Vic.—that's Fort Victoria, you know—on duty."



"Did you collar them?" asked the midshipman eagerly.

The subaltern yawned again.

"No," he drawled. "Worse luck, we didn't; but we had some fun. You know we were warned to watch Keyhaven marshes—and a dreary spot it is. Worse than the most dismal flats on the Essex coast, which is saying a lot. Well, before I tell you what happened, I ought to describe the place. It's a marsh, with patches of dry ground thickly covered with furze, that extends from Keyhaven to Lymington River—about four miles. It is separated from the sea—or rather mud-flats, covered at high tide—by a low bank on which is an apology for a footpath.

"Our orders were to post a squad at a certain point where the spies were supposed to have hidden a quantity of petrol. The place in question was close to a rifle-butt. Men were detailed to guard all roads leading to the marsh, and to allow all traffic, whether motor-cars, carts, or pedestrians, to pass unchallenged. The sentries were on no account to show themselves, except to hold up everything and everyone coming *from* the marsh.

"Other men were told off to watch the three available roads between Keyhaven and Milford, where the submarine was expected to send ashore for her stores, so you see the U-boat didn't stand much chance of getting what she wanted. She copped something she didn't expect.

"As soon as it was dark, my squad left Hurst by motor-boat and landed near the toll-house at Keyhaven. It was almost dead low water, you know, or we might have been able to save ourselves a long tramp—you couldn't call it a march.

"We followed the wretched footpath, slipping on the slimy mud, and either tumbling over each other or else side-slipping into the morass, which was a jolly sight worse. To make a long story short, we took up our position, which was in the middle of a circular clump of furze within 50 yards of the butts, at ten o'clock.

"There we stuck for nearly two mortal hours, and not so much as a chance of having a cigarette. Of course the men were frightfully keen, and it took me all my time to stop them from chin-wagging. Some of them began to get jumpy, swearing they saw all manner of men and things.

"I had just looked at my watch—luminous face, thank goodness—when my sergeant whispered to me that someone was approaching. It was then close on twelve. He was right. There were three men ambling cautiously along the sea-wall. They were talking softly. Once one of them stopped, bent under the lee of a furze bush and lit a cigarette, which seemed a rummy thing for a spy to do unless it was a prearranged signal.

"We let them come on until they got within 20 yards, then up popped my sergeant.

"Halt, who goes there?" he shouted, loud enough to be heard a couple of miles away.

"Bless me if the three fellows hadn't the cheek to answer in exactly the same words, although they didn't sound particularly cheerful over the job; and, instead of halting, one of them came on, holding a stick above his head. The others didn't seem very keen to follow him, but began jabbering away as hard as they could.

"So I gave orders for a couple of shots to be fired over their heads, just to let them know what to expect when they deliberately ignore a challenge. But instead of 'hands up' they bolted, with our men after them.

"Then I had good reason to bless that blessed marsh, for between us and the rifle-butt was a deep ditch filled with water, and a nice wire fence on the other side. Half a dozen of us, myself included, were floundering up to our waists; the others were lucky enough to avoid the ditch by making straight for the path. But we had the fellows all right."

"The spies?" asked Vernon.

Barraclough yawned, and then laughed mirthlessly.

"Nuthin' doing," he replied. "They were three members of a local defence corps engaged in patrolling the marshes. Goodness only knows what for, for they hadn't any weapon with them except walking-sticks. Perhaps 'twas as well, though, for they might have let rip in their excitement. When a man's nerves are all upset it's not safe for him to have his finger on the trigger of a rifle, you know."

"But the spies?" asked Vernon.

"Not a sign of 'em," replied the subaltern. "If they were anywhere about, they must have sheered off pretty quickly when they heard the racket. An hour later an orderly brought us word to return to the fort, so we guessed that something had taken place between a patrol-ship and the submarine. But I must be on the move. Regards to Trefusis. If you've a chance to get ashore on the other side, look me up."

## CHAPTER XX

### To the Rescue

Twelve hours later found H.M.S. *Capella* back on her station off Beachy Head.

The long-threatened gale had burst with great violence upon the South coast. Long crested breakers surged towards the chalky cliffs, thundering with terrific force against the sheer face of the rocks.

Seaward, as far as the eye could reach, was nothing but a confused tumble of foam, backed by a lowering bank of ragged and sombre clouds.

The *Capella* and her consorts had to "stick it". Without orders they dare not seek shelter in Newhaven harbour. All they could do was to forge slowly ahead, keeping bows on to the furious seas. In spite of her shallow draught, the *Capella* was an excellent sea boat, although inclined to be "jumpy". Frequently green waves broke over the fo'c'sle and surged aft as far as the deck-house under the bridge; but with unfailing regularity the stanch vessel would shake herself clear of the tons of water that had invaded her deck, to be ready to receive the next contribution from the hand of King Neptune.

Nevertheless, while the gale lasted it was a time of discomfort. One thing for which the crew were thankful was the fact that it was still September, and the gale was not one of those wintry varieties which are so trying to the hardy patrollers of the North Sea.

Everything had to be battened down. 'Tween-decks the air was stifling, and reeked of fumes from the motors. It was impossible for a man to stand unsupported. Anything that had not been securely lashed would be sure to be flung across the deck by the erratic motion. No hot meals were obtainable. Officers and crew had to eat as best they might, without the use of articles of civilization such as plates and similar things.

Ross and Vernon saw very little of each other during the gale, except for a brief interval during the changes of the watch on deck. Each enjoyed his "trick" on deck, as he crouched behind the bulging storm-dodgers and faced the howling wind and the stinging spray. It was greatly to be preferred to being below, cooped up in an atmosphere which resembled that of an underground scullery on washing-day, with the odours of petrol and lubricating oil thrown in as extras.

"One thing we've to be thankful for," remarked Barry, "and that is that it's a sou'wester. It minimizes the chance of being blown up by a derelict mine."

"How is that?" asked Ross.

"A sou'easter's the brute for that. Brings with it dozens of German mines that have broken adrift from the Belgian coast. When I was stationed at Great Yarmouth we had the same game in easterly gales. It was nothing unusual to find twenty of the brutes lying ashore; and on several occasions they have exploded on coming into contact with the rocks, and then, especially at night, everyone thought that the Germans had at last ventured to risk 'The Day'.

"I remember one that came ashore a few miles from Lowestoft. It was a whopper, of a different type from the rest. An Engineer officer brought a dozen young subalterns down to see it and give them an object-lesson. He talked for the best part of an hour, explaining its construction, and laying particular stress upon the need of the greatest caution when handling it. Finally he proceeded to explode it electrically. The circuit of the battery was tested and found to be in perfect order, and the wires were then connected with the detonator of the mine, after the tube containing the fulminate of mercury had been removed.

"The whole crowd took cover. The circuit was completed, but the mine didn't budge. They tried three times, and finally came to the conclusion that the thing was a dud.

"Then a squad of soldiers took pot-shots at it until it was fairly riddled with bullet holes, but still the blessed thing wouldn't explode. Eventually it was decided to remove the mine to a laboratory for examination, and a team of mules was requisitioned to drag it off the beach.

"One of the mules suddenly took it into his head to be a little bit premature, for he lashed out, broke away from the traces, and pelted down the beach. When the brute came to the place where the mine lay, he found that the tackle which the men had already rove to shift it was in his way. Possibly the sight of a rope upset him, for he backed and lashed out with his hind legs—and up went the mine with a terrific bang. They never found any of the pieces of the mule."

At length, as is invariably the case, the gale blew itself out, and, although the sea still ran high, the absence of broken water made it possible for the hatchways to be kept open.

The behaviour of the *Capella* and her consorts was a matter for congratulation. They had stood the test remarkably well, and had proved themselves good all-weather craft, provided that they could be kept head to wind.

A week later the *Capella* returned to Southampton to replenish her stores, and after three days in port she received orders to proceed to the French coast and patrol off Cape Levi, where the presence of a hostile submarine had been reported.

This intelligence was serious. It meant that, once again, an unterseeboot had made its way into the English Channel, and was lying on the track of the British transports and hospital ships running between Southampton and Rouen.

It took the *Capella* two hours only to run from The Nab to within sight of the French coast. Even then her motors were not running at the maximum number of revolutions. Extreme speed was only resorted to when actually engaged in submarine hunting.

As the vessel closed with the grey cliffs of Normandy, Ross suddenly shouted: "Submarine on the port bow!"

Less than two cables' length away could be discerned the twin periscopes and a portion of the conning-tower. The submarine was not forging ahead; it was simply stationary, except for a slight movement caused by the action of the waves. It certainly was not a British craft. It might be French. The odds were that it was German, since submarines belonging to the allied nations were not in the habit of keeping awash, unless in the presence of an enemy.

Quickly the guns, which were already cleared for action, were trained upon the visible part of the submarine; but as she made no attempt to move, Captain Syllenger refrained from giving the order to open fire.

Thrice the *Capella* circled round the mysterious craft, at the same time gradually closing, since she had nothing to fear from the discharge of a torpedo.

"I believe she's abandoned, sir," said Barry.

The *Capella* stopped. Preparations were being made for the lowering of a boat, when one of the seamen shouted:

"It's a dud, sir; a blessed decoy-bird!"

The man was right. Upon investigation, the submarine was found to be nothing more than a couple of barrels covered with painted canvas. Two thick poles passing vertically through them, and weighted at the lowermost ends to give the necessary stability, served as periscopes.

"There's a real submarine knocking about, I'll swear," said the skipper. "Put a shot into those barrels, Morgan."

One shell was sufficient. Little more than a hundred chips floating on the surface was left of the decoy.

The *Capella* was about to resume her course when a warning cry was heard:

"Torpedo coming, sir!"

From a point bearing half a mile on the vessel's port quarter, the track of the on-coming torpedo was clearly discernible. The *Capella*, being without way, would undoubtedly have fallen a victim had it not been for her light draught, for before she could forge ahead the missile passed under her keel. Its track could be followed as far as the eye could reach, which showed that it was a modern weapon propelled with superheated air and having a range of about five miles.

Straight for the source of the missile, tore the British craft, but her effort to grapple with the unterseeboot was in vain. The submarine had dived immediately. No sounds betrayed her presence in the vicinity. Had the U-boat been moving, the churning of her propellers would have been distinctly audible.

"She's got away, worse luck," growled Sub-lieutenant Fox. "I wonder how she did it? It's too deep for her to sound, and she can't be moving under her own power."

"We'll have her right enough," rejoined Barry, the optimist. "A light haze and a calm sea is what we want. We'll run her down in less than a week, you mark my words."

Four days passed. The *Capella* kept her station almost without incident. Ship after ship, deeply laden with troops and munitions, entered the sand-banked estuary of the Seine, having been escorted thus far by destroyers. Ship after ship, more lightly burdened, left the river, homeward bound. Amongst them were hospital ships, clearly distinguishable by their broad green bands and conspicuous red crosses on both bows and quarters. A big action had taken place "somewhere in France", and the passing of the Red Cross vessels was the aftermath of a dearly-bought victory.

Yet nothing occurred to threaten the constant stream of shipping. It seemed reasonable to surmise that either the U-boat had met with an accident or else that she had transferred her energies to another area.

Meanwhile Ross and Vernon had been working hard, improving their seamanship. Under the instruction of the two sub-lieutenants they were making rapid progress in navigation; they could fix their position by the use of a sextant, were able to use the semaphore, and, generally, competent to carry out the duties required as midshipmen of the watch.

Captain Syllenger had long before overcome his prejudices against the sons of Flag Officers—at least in their case—and even expressed his willingness to grant them each a certificate of proficiency, should they wish to transfer to one of the cruisers of the Royal Navy.

At length the *Capella* received orders for recall to her station off Beachy Head. She was to put into Havre to revictual that day, leaving at 9 a.m. on the morrow.

The lads were heartily glad when the *Capella* left the malodorous *bassin à flotte*. The irksomeness of lying in the harbour at Le Havre palled upon them, even after a few hours. They yearned for the open sea almost from the time their ship made fast alongside the grimy quay.

Forty minutes after leaving French waters, the *Capella* sighted a large cargo-boat steaming northwards. She was high in ballast and rolling like a barrel. On bringing glasses to bear upon her, the *Capella's* officers found that she was the *Orontabella*, one of the vessels chartered by the British Government and fitted as a horse-transport ship. She was doing 16 knots to the *Capella's* 34, and when first sighted was nearly five miles off.

Suddenly a low rumble was heard by the crew of the patrol-vessel. Telescopes and binoculars that had just been laid aside were again brought into action, and it was seen that the transport was sinking rapidly by the stern. She had been torpedoed under the starboard quarter. The terrific impact of the explosion had torn a large hole, besides shattering the rudder and one of the propellers, while all her boats in davits were rendered useless by the concussion.

It was a matter of but a few moments before she made her final plunge. Already signals were fluttering from her stumpy masts—the well-known N.C. (in distress; want immediate assistance) and A.R. (boats are stove in).

Captain Syllenger gave a quick glance astern. There were other vessels, but low down on the horizon. To expect succour from them was for the present out of the question. He had a double task: to attempt to destroy the aggressor, and to rescue the transport's crew.

"Prepare to lower boats!" he shouted. "A midshipman and a couple of hands in each. Guns' crews stand by!"

Clang, chang, went the engine-room telegraph. Like a greyhound, the *Capella* increased her speed, until she was within a quarter of a mile of the foundering vessel. Then reversing engines, she almost lost way at less than a cable's length from the transport.

By this time Ross and Vernon were in their respective boats. Before way was off the ship the falls were paid out and the disengaging gear cast off.

"Give way, men," ordered Ross.

His scanty crew, for more men could not well be spared, "gave way" with a will, gaining a couple of lengths before his chum was able to push off.

With hardly a pause the *Capella* dashed off, quickly increasing her pace to full speed ahead, in her quest for the U-boat that had launched the deadly torpedo.

The *Orontabella's* stern was now under water. She had a pronounced list to starboard. Dense volumes of smoke and steam, pouring from her funnels and hatchways, showed that the water had already invaded her boiler-room. Above the hiss of the scalding vapour and the rush of escaping air, could be heard the terrified neighing of a dozen or more wounded horses, for whom no escape was possible.

Clustering on the fo'c'sle were about twenty or thirty men, the officers and crew who had survived the explosion; for the death-roll, especially in the engine-room and stokehold, was very high, men being overwhelmed by the inrush of water before they could scramble up the steep ladder and through the narrow hatchway.

The waiting men showed no signs of panic. Those who could swim had not troubled to don their cork life-belts, but were calmly engaged in lashing their life-saving devices round the shoulders of their less fortunate comrades.

#### **[Illustration: THE SINKING OF THE "ORONTABELLA" (missing from book)]**

Ross ordered his men to back towards the foundering vessel. He realized that at any moment the transport might plunge suddenly, and the danger of being dragged down by the suction was a

thing he had to avoid. There was also a risk of the boat being swamped by the men as they clambered on board.

"Jump!" he shouted. "Not too many at a time."

Three men accepted the invitation: two good swimmers and a non-swimmer. The former, grasping their struggling companion by the shoulders, struck out without much difficulty and reached Ross's boat, where they were quickly hauled into safety.

Setting the rescued men to take an oar each, for there were several to spare lying on the thwarts, Ross took the whaler closer in, since he had now more means of propulsion at his command.

Four more followed, and were picked up by Vernon's men. Meanwhile the bows of the *Orontabella* were rising high out of the water, as the stern sank correspondingly deeper, until those of the officers and crew who still remained on board had to cling desperately to the rails to prevent themselves slipping into the maelstrom that surged over the submerged part of the sinking ship.

Suddenly the vessel dived. Where a few seconds previously a towering mass of black and red plating rose high above the boats, there hung a cloud of smoke, steam, and spray, while all around the water was thrashed white with foam.

"Give way, men!" shouted Ross.

The rowers were too late. Before the boat could pull clear of the scene of disaster, a vicious, crested wave, so hollow that the lean quarters of the whaler were unable to rise to it, poured into the frail craft.

The next instant Ross and his crew were struggling in the confusion of the broiling sea.

Vernon, although farther from the spot, narrowly escaped the fate of his chum. It was surprising what a terrific commotion the *Orontabella* caused at the last. For some minutes he could see nothing beyond the tips of the blades of the oars. Everything else was enveloped in smoke, steam, and spray.

Gradually the waves subsided and the wind dispersed the pall of vapour. The sea was dotted with the heads of swimmers. Ross's boat, with her stem and stern-posts just visible above the surface, was waterlogged, yet retained sufficient buoyancy to support half a dozen men.

Here, indeed, was a pretty pickle. At the very most, Vernon's boat would hold fifteen or sixteen men. The *Capella* was almost out of sight. The whole attention of her officers and crew would be centred upon the U-boat. So long as there was any indication of the latter's whereabouts, the patrol-vessel would cling tenaciously to her quest.

There was very little left floating from the sunken ship. A few gratings, handspikes, a couple of breakers, and fragments of the shattered boats, but nothing substantial enough to support a man above water; and in mid-Channel, although it was only September, the sea was too cold to enable the swimmers to keep afloat very long without almost certain danger of cramp.

Vernon looked around for his chum. He saw him sharing an oar with one of the crew.

"Come on, my lads!" shouted Ross encouragingly. "We'll hike her up. Half a dozen of you who have life-belts come round this side, and when I say 'All together!' lift for all you're worth."

The men obeyed as quickly as they could in the circumstances. Finding that they could easily keep afloat, the non-swimmers had regained their confidence. Piloted by those who could swim, the men ranged themselves along one gunwale of the waterlogged whaler.

"All ready?" asked Ross, whose knowledge of how to empty a waterlogged Canadian canoe prompted him to try a large, heavy boat. "Together!"

Up rose the boat's gunwale as high as the men's arms could reach, but with a dull swish the whaler resumed its former position. In lifting one side the other had dropped deeply beneath the surface, and the attempt to shake out the water had ended in failure.

"Now then," ordered Vernon, taking his turn to direct operations. "All swimmers get overboard for a few minutes. Those with life-belts get on board, and take off your belts."

In five minutes a dozen cork life-belts were available. Manoeuvring his boat alongside the waterlogged whaler, Vernon gave directions for the belts to be lashed underneath the thwarts, so that they were completely submerged. Then taking the whaler's painter he hove taut until, added to the lifting powers of the cork and the upward strain on the ropes, the gunwale rose a good three inches above the water.

This done, one of the *Capella's* men, armed with a baler, began throwing out the water from the whaler. In another five minutes the boat showed sufficient buoyancy to allow two more hands to clamber on board. They, too, baled vigorously, with the result that once more the whaler was

free from water.

Between the two boats, all the survivors of the *Orontabella* were easily accommodated; but when at length the midshipmen looked for the *Capella*, the patrol-boat was nowhere to be seen.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Adrift in the Channel

"She'll be back for us soon," declared Vernon optimistically, addressing his chum, for the two boats were within twenty feet of each other. "Can you see any signs of her now?"

Ross stood upright in the stern-sheets and, shading his eyes with his hand, gave a careful look in the direction where the *Capella* was supposed to be.

"No," he answered. "And I cannot see any signs of the other vessels we saw some time ago. We'd better let the men rest on their oars."

Unknown to the two midshipmen, they had for the last hour and a half been in the grip of the strong west-going tide that surges along the French coast. In that interval they had been carried out of the course of the vessels they had sighted, and were some four or six miles from the spot where the *Orontabella* had sunk.

Another hour passed. The men who had been in the water took the opportunity of drying their clothing in the hot sunshine. They treated their misfortune lightly, making very little reference to the loss of their vessel. One would have thought that being torpedoed was almost an everyday occurrence.

As the minutes slipped by, it began to occur to Ross and his chum that the *Capella* had missed them entirely. In another few hours night would be coming on, and the prospect of spending ten hours of darkness in a couple of open boats in mid-Channel was not at all alluring.

Each boat was equipped with compass, lead-line, signal-book, lamp, box of biscuits, and beaker of water. None of these articles belonging to Ross's boat had suffered, in spite of their being immersed, except the lamp, for the provisions were in watertight boxes. Masts and sails were not in the boats, having been left on board the *Capella* when the rescuers put off hurriedly on their errand of mercy.

"What's the best thing to be done, skipper?" asked Ross, addressing the master of the *Orontabella*.

"Well, sir, since you ask me," was the reply, "I'd shape a course due north. We'd be in the track of craft making up and down Channel before it gets dark. If we don't fall in with any vessel, we can carry on. 'Taint so very far to land, considering the number of hands we've got in the boats."

Quickly the available oars were manned, the men being told off in relays to row for half an hour at a time, while the skipper of the torpedoed boat relieved Ross at the yoke-lines. The mate, who had been picked up by the other boat, was also able to give Vernon a spell.

At six o'clock, a biscuit and a small quantity of water were served out to each man, and preparations were made for the approaching night. Vernon's boat, which possessed the only lantern that would burn, was to take the lead as soon as darkness set in, the light enabling the whaler to keep in touch with her consort.

"Jolly funny where the *Capella's* got to," remarked Ross to the skipper. "With her speed she could search a couple of hundred square miles by this time."

"'Spouse she wasn't torpedoed?" asked the *Orontabella's* master.

"No jolly fear!" replied the midshipman decidedly. "She's torpedo-proof. We've had plenty of them fired at us, but never the least danger of being hit."

"It's a good thing the sea's calm," continued the skipper. "We're doing a good four knots. Twelve hours at the very most ought to bring us in sight of the Wight, but we've dropped a long way to lee'ard. P'raps it's as well, for it's no joke to be in the thick of the cross-Channel traffic at night, with only a tuppenny dip to light us. Good heavens! What's that?"

Less than fifty yards from the boat a pole-like object, throwing off a double feather of spray, was forging through the water.

"A periscope, sir!" shouted half a dozen voices.

Ross did not require to be told that. With considerable misgivings, he saw the metal shaft rise higher and higher out of the water; then the tip of an ensign-staff, followed almost simultaneously by the snout and conning-tower of a large German submarine. Finally the unterseeboot rose to the surface, revealing her entire length, which was not less than three hundred feet.

She slowed down. The aperture in her conning-tower opened and a couple of officers appeared. From hatchways fore and aft, seamen clad in grey fearnought coats came tumbling on deck, greeting the British with jibes and laughter.

"So you getting on, Englishmen!" exclaimed a lieutenant. "Still it is long vay to land, hein? An' where vos der *Capella*? Suppose I tell you: we her haf sent to der bottom. Goot night, ver' goot night. Our ver' kind regards to Jellicoe."

The U-boat forged ahead, then, getting way, made off at high speed. In a quarter of an hour she was out of sight.

"I suppose those fellows were telling the truth, old man," called out Ross, addressing his chum.

"'Fraid so," replied Vernon. "They had her name pat, so it looks as if the poor old ship's done for. But, I say, what a whopper of a submarine!"

"One of the new type, I should fancy," said the skipper of the *Orontabella*. "I shouldn't be surprised if she were a mine-layer as well."

Darkness fell upon the scene. The men rowed doggedly, Vernon setting the course by the simple expedient of keeping the Pole Star in line with the boat's stem. It saved the strain of peering into the compass bowl, and in any case the boats were bound to hit the English coast, unless they were swamped or run down.

Throughout the long night the steady progress was maintained. It was horribly cold. Most of the men were lightly clad in imperfectly dried garments. Both Ross and Vernon were glad when the officers of the *Orontabella* relieved them, since they could take turn at the oars and derive a certain amount of warmth from the exertion.

Day dawned at last, a brilliant pink sky that betokened bad weather before the day was out. Away on the starboard bow could be discerned a grey cliff surmounted by dark hills. It was the Isle of Wight, distant about six miles off.

With the appearance of the sun the wind freshened, and soon developed into a strong breeze dead in their teeth. Spray began to fly over the bows, soon to be followed by green seas, that necessitated constant baling. It was quite evident that every yard of that six miles meant desperate work, with the chances of being swamped before the boat reached land.

The men, weakened by hunger and exposure, stuck gamely to their task, yet after another half an hour's hard pulling the boats seemed no nearer their object. They were barely holding their own against the wind and waves.

"What's to be done now?" asked Ross, consulting the experienced skipper. Although the midshipman was in charge, he was not above asking the advice of a man who had been to sea almost as many years as the lad had been days. "We're hardly making headway, and the sea's beating up fast."

"And the men are almost done up," added the skipper. "It's bound to be worse before it gets better. I would suggest that we ride to a sea-anchor, and trust to luck to be picked up."

The men quickly got to work. A triangle was composed of six oars in pairs lashed together, two of the boat's gratings being secured between the ash spars. To the apex the anchor was made fast, in order to make the sea-anchor float in a vertical position, its weight compensated by the use of the now empty water-beaker as a float.

Secured by three spans of equal length, which in turn were bent to the boat's painter, the sea-anchor was dropped overboard. For some distance the whaler drifted to leeward, until held by the strain of the painter she rode head to wind, and in comparative safety in the wake of the floating breakwater.

Vernon's boat then came close alongside. Her painter was caught and secured, allowing her to ride astern.

The crews were then at liberty to rest, with the knowledge that their drift was little more than half a knot. Yet every two hours they would be drifting a mile farther from shore, unless their plight were observed by passing vessels.

By this time the sea was running high. At one moment the whaler would be tossing high upon the rounded crest of a wave, with the other boat deep in the trough. At the next, nothing was to be seen from the whaler save an incline of green water and a canopy of dark-grey sky. On either

side the crests were white with foam, yet, thanks to the sea-anchor, hardly a drop of water was taken in over the boats' gunwales.

The men sat in silence, turning their backs to the keen wind. A few who had tobacco smoked. Those who had not were glad to chew the small quantity given them by their more fortunate comrades. As for Ross and Vernon, they were glad to doze, lying on the damp bottom-boards with their heads pillowed on their arms.

Ross was almost asleep when he was aroused by one of the men announcing that a vessel was in sight. At the prospect of rescue, all hands were alert. The man was right, for, as the whaler rose on the crests of the waves, a dark, grey shape could be discerned through the mirk at a distance of about a couple of miles.

Quickly the shape resolved itself into a large four-funnelled cruiser pelting down-Channel at full speed. Unless she altered her course she would pass within a hundred yards of the boats.

"Lash a shirt to the boat-hook, lads!" ordered Ross.

A few moments of intense anxiety followed. Then a groan of disappointment rose from the men as the cruiser ported helm.

She was then a couple of miles to windward. The smoke from her funnels drifted around the boats, making it impossible for the derelict men to see what she was doing, until the evil-smelling haze dispersed, showing the cruiser less than two cables' length away and bearing down towards them.

From her after bridge a seaman was semaphoring vigorously.

"Will slow down to windward of you," read the message.

"Oars, lads!" ordered Ross.

The bowman of each boat promptly cut the painter. With renewed spirit the rowers bent to their work, and soon the boats were alongside and under the lee of H.M.S. *Oxford*, armoured cruiser of the County class.

By the aid of bowlines the rescued men were quickly hauled over the side. Without delay the *Capella's* boats were cut adrift, and the cruiser proceeded on her way.

## CHAPTER XXII

### An Unexpected Capture

"I can see no possibility of landing you at present," said the officer of the watch, after Ross had reported the events that had led up to the rescue of the two boats. "We're under sealed orders. We have to make for a certain rendezvous at full speed. When we arrive we shall know where we are bound for—until then we are quite in the dark. We'll wireless, however, and let the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth know that you are safe."

"Have you any news of the *Capella*?"

"Yes; she was mined while in pursuit of a submarine. It is a dickens of a puzzle to know why, for our sweepers were over there early that morning and never found a single mine. Whatever it was, it was not so powerful as they generally are, for the *Capella* was able to make for shore and run aground within a few miles of Barfleur. All hands were saved, luckily, but I'm afraid this gale will do for her entirely. It's blowing great guns."

"Then those fellows on the unterseeboot were wrong," remarked Vernon. "They said she had gone down with all hands. We believe that the submarine is a mine-layer, and perhaps it was one of her mines that the old *Capella* bumped against."

"Let's hope the patrol-vessels will settle her," rejoined the officer of the watch. "But you must be awfully knocked up. I'll introduce you to your new messmates, and they'll give you a shake-down in the steerage flat. The *Orontabella's* officers can mess with the 'warrants', and the men will be berthed for'ard."

The Lieutenant stepped to the top of the ladder from the navigation bridge. A couple of midshipmen were standing on the superstructure, watching with professional interest the splicing of a six-inch hawser.

"Mr. Sefton!" sang out the officer of the watch.



The midshipman ran up the ladder and saluted.

"Your messmates for the time being," continued the Lieutenant, after he had formally introduced Trefusis and Haye. "They've had a pretty rough time, and they are jolly peckish, I know."

Midshipman Sefton led the two chums below, and piloted them into a very long room on the main deck. It was plainly, nay scantily furnished, and appeared at first sight to be utterly cheerless. Possibly the idea was heightened by the fact that frequently the scuttles were obscured by the seas that slapped viciously against the cruiser's sides.

"This is the gun-room," explained Sefton apologetically. "We've had to clear it out pretty thoroughly, you know. No knick-knacks or pretty-pretties in war time. Sorry the other fellows aren't here. We're four one-strippers, three midshipmen R.N., and five midshipmen R.N.R.—a jolly lively crowd of us, I can assure you."

He touched a bell. A messman appeared.

"Jones," ordered the midshipman, "a good square meal for two, and jolly well look sharp about it."

"You've got to be dead nuts on that chap if you want anything done in a hurry," explained Sefton after the man had cleared off. "It's the only way to check slackness. No doubt he gets his own back by giving us plum-duff without troubling to extract the cockroaches; but we manage to thrive on it. By the by, I'll tell my servant to sling a couple of hammocks for you. There'll be no need to turn out before dinner."

Sefton hastened below to acquaint the marine who, for the sum of ten shillings a month, acted as the budding Nelson's factotum to make the necessary preparations for his new chums. By the time he returned, a substantial lunch had been set before Trefusis and Haye.

"I say, you fellows," remarked the midshipman; "I notice that Eccles—that's the officer of the watch, you know—was greasing his jaw tackle a good bit. Did he mention where we are bound for?"

"Nothing definite," replied Vernon. "He said that the ship was under sealed orders."

"Then it's no use hazarding a guess," decided Sefton. "It might be anywhere from China to Peru. In any case, it's a change from what we've been doing—knocking about in the North Sea, waiting for an appointment which the Germans flatly decline to keep. Four months solid, and I've never seen a gun discharged except at target practice."

During the progress of the meal young Sefton was a little inclined to patronize his guests. Perhaps he did it unconsciously.

"My governor's a post-captain," he observed in the course of conversation. "What's yours?"

"Only an Admiral," replied Ross.

"Is he, by Jove!" exclaimed Sefton. "Then why the deuce are you a 'with but after'?"

"A what?" asked Trefusis, somewhat mystified.

"An R.N.R. man ranks with, but after, an R.N. fellow with equal rank," explained the midshipman. "It's a fact: look it up in the King's Regulations. But, I say, do you play footer? We're in a match. Gun-room versus Ward-room, coming off this week. If you play, I'll get Cranbury—he's president of our mess—to put you in the team."

The meal over, Ross and Vernon were taken to the steerage flat, an electrically lighted space out of which opened the cabin of the junior officers. At the after end of the flat, a marine sentry paced day and night, his post extending from the stern torpedo-tube to the gun-room door on the port side, and to the armoured door on the starboard side. Amongst his varied and multitudinous duties, particularly strict orders were given him not to allow anyone to put their hands on the paintwork—one of the standing orders dating from the prehistoric days before the war, when "spit and polish" were regarded as being absolutely essential to the efficiency of H.M. ships.

At three bells in the second dog-watch, the *Oxford* having arrived at the rendezvous, the sealed orders were opened. It was then found that, in company with the *Guildford* and the *Launceston*, the cruiser had to proceed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to escort a contingent of Canadian troops to Liverpool.

This was but one of the manifold odd jobs performed by the British Navy in connection with the war—necessary, but without any prospect of excitement. The trip was regarded as a picnic, after weeks of monotonous patrol duty, for when 800 miles west of Ireland there was little likelihood of falling in with any hostile submarine, while other German craft had been swept off the board months previously.

On the third day out the football match came off. Ross and Vernon were included in the gun-

room team, and never before had they participated in a rigger match in such strange circumstances. The *Oxford* was pitching slightly in the long Atlantic swell. The "ground" was the port side of the quarter-deck, nets being rigged up to prevent the ball getting very much in touch with the sea. The fun was fast and furious, the referee being inclined to tolerance; and before half-time half the players were off the field owing to minor injuries, ranging from the smashing of the Assistant Paymaster's eyeglasses to the laying out of the portly Engineer-Commander.

Suddenly the *Oxford* turned 8 degrees to starboard. The alteration of course resulted in a break in the game. Something out of the usual had occurred for the cruiser, which was the leading vessel in line ahead, to break out of station.

A bugle sharply sounded the "G"—officers' call. For'ard the bosn's mates' pipes were turning up the hands. The Captain, Commander, and officer of the watch were on the fore-bridge looking steadily at a dark cloud of smoke showing beyond the horizon.

It was a ship on fire. The alert officer of the watch had noticed the smoke, which was much too dense to be caused by the vessel's furnaces. On reporting the matter to the captain, the latter immediately ordered the *Oxford* to be steered in that direction. As senior officer, he gave orders for the other cruisers to stand on that course.

"She's quite a small packet, I should imagine," remarked one of the Subs. "At any rate she's not fitted with wireless."

In half an hour the cruiser was sufficiently near to see clearly the distressed vessel. She was a cargo-boat of about two thousand tons. Amidships, flames were mounting fiercely from her hatches. She had stopped her engines, and was preparing to lower boats. Aft, she flew the Stars and Stripes, upside down as a signal of distress.

The ship was doomed. Fanned by the light breeze, the flames were rapidly spreading. Her cargo undoubtedly consisted of highly inflammable material, since it blazed freely, while the smoke smelt strongly of burnt oil.

The *Oxford* stopped at four cables' length to windward of the burning ship. She could do nothing beyond rescuing the crew on board. There was no necessity to lower her boats, since the cargo-boat obviously had enough for all hands.

At length the boats of the unfortunate ship were lowered. There was no undue haste. Men deliberately threw their bundles into the arms of their waiting comrades before they swarmed down the falls. The captain was the last to leave, a bulge under his coat betraying the fact that he had taken the ship's papers with him.

"Nothing of an explosive nature in her cargo," said Ross to his chum. "Otherwise they would have sheered off a bit quicker. My word, how she does burn! Isn't it a grand sight?"

"Yes," admitted Vernon. "It's lucky there's help at hand. Knocking about in the boats in mid-Atlantic must be ten times as bad as in the English Channel."

"I beg to differ," remarked one of the Subs who was standing by. "There's not so much shipping, I'll admit, but the waves are longer and more regular in mid-ocean. It's marvellous what an open boat can do when she's put to it, except in very broken water."

The boats were now approaching the *Oxford*. A monkey-ladder had been lowered to enable the men to surmount the lofty side of the cruiser, while the sailors, always ready to lend a hand in cases of distress, were swarming down to the net-shelves in readiness to receive the personal belongings of the American seamen.

"Look!" whispered Vernon. "Isn't that chap like our old pal Ramblethorne?"

He pointed to a tall, bronzed man clad in canvas jumper and trousers, and wearing a grey slouched hat. He was sitting in the stern-sheets of the second boat, with his shoulders hunched and his face half-averted.

"Like him?" echoed Ross. "By Jove, it's he, right enough!"

Trefusis was right. Von Hauptwald, alias Ramblethorne, had succeeded in evading the hue and cry after his escape on Harley Bank, and had continued to remain hidden in the house of a naturalized German in Cheshire until the search for him had somewhat relaxed.

He then managed to ship as a fireman on board a vessel bound for Montreal, knowing that his chances of getting out of Great Britain would be greater if he made for a Dominion port rather than one in the United States.

At Montreal he promptly deserted, made his way across the border, and thence to New York. Here he picked up with a German-American shipowner, who readily agreed to help him back to Germany.

A cargo-boat, the *Tehuantepec Girl*, was loading with a cargo consisting of cotton, ready-made clothing, and leather equipment. Nominally her destination was Leith. Her manifest and

bill of lading were made out to that effect, but secretly her skipper had instructions to make for Stockholm. If he were overhauled and taken into Lerwick by a British patrol-boat, well and good. The owners must be compensated by the British Government, even if the *Tehuantepec Girl* was miles out of her course for Leith. On the other hand, if the boat succeeded in reaching the Baltic, she would be conveniently "captured", by previous arrangement, by a German cruiser or destroyer and taken into Kiel.

Unfortunately the fact of keeping secret the real destination of the *Tehuantepec Girl* led to her undoing. A German dock-hand, who was really in the pay of the Teutonic Government, had placed an infernal machine in the cargo, setting it to explode two days after leaving New York.

In less than a quarter of an hour after the discovery of the outbreak, the fire had taken such a firm hold that all attempts to subdue it were hopeless.

And now von Hauptwald, in the disguise of a Yankee deck-hand, was being rowed towards a craft which he would have given almost anything to avoid—a British cruiser.

Still, he was not dismayed. The chances of detection were absurdly small. None of the *Tehuantepec Girl's* crew knew his true personality except the captain, and he was to be handsomely rewarded as soon as the spy was safe in German territory. On the other hand, there might be one amongst the 655 forming the complement of the *Oxford* who might recognize the one-time doctor who had lived at Devonport.

"Let's get out of his way," suggested Vernon. "We'll inform the Commander, and he will order him to be put under arrest."

"I'm not going to budge," declared Ross. "If he sees us, what can he do?"

"I'm not afraid of him," protested Haye.

"Very well, then; let's stop where we are. He's got to know sooner or later."

The first boat had already delivered her human cargo Upon the cruiser's quarter-deck. As each man's name was taken down by the master-at-arms he was sent forward. The first mate remained in conversation with the Commander until the arrival of the *Tehuantepec Girl's* skipper.

Von Hauptwald was one of the last men to come aboard. As he swung himself over the rail he gave a swift glance at the group of officers. His eye caught that of Ross Trefusis.

For a moment the spy thought that he was mistaken, but a second glimpse confirmed his suspicions.

"Steady on there!" shouted the Commander. "What the deuce are you up to?"

Von Hauptwald had broken into a run across the quarter-deck. With a bound he cleared the stanchion-rails, and plunged head foremost into the sea.

He had realized that to remain on the cruiser meant arrest and ultimate death as a dangerous spy. Better by far to be drowned without further delay than to experience all the horrors of lying under sentence of death.

He had acted spontaneously, yet there was method in his madness. By running across to the other side of the ship there was little chance of the boats being able to pick him up ere he sank for the last time. Not until he rose to the surface did he realize his difficulty. He was a strong swimmer, and the natural instinct to strike out overpowered his determination to sink.

There was a rush of officers and men to the ship's side to see what was taking place. With two exceptions, they thought that the supposed seaman had suddenly lost his reason.

Two seamen, one a brawny specimen, the other a red-haired middle-weight, dived after the would-be suicide. Others were on the point of following when the Commander restrained them.

"Away sea-boat!" was the order.

The *Oxford* was now forging slowly through the water. During the rescue of the *Tehuantepec Girl's* people, she had drifted rather too close to the burning ship to be safe, should an explosion occur. Already von Hauptwald was fifty yards astern, with the two seamen swimming towards him with powerful strokes.

His efforts to drown were a failure. He simply couldn't keep his head under. His attempts to swallow quantities of salt water only increased the instinctive motion of the limbs to keep himself afloat. Bitterly he regretted that he had not picked up some heavy metal object during his career across the cruiser's quarterdeck.

The approach of his would-be rescuers made him realize the necessity of self-destruction. At the encouraging shout of "Cheer up, old mate, you're safe!" spluttered by the leading seaman, he dived, pressing his chest with both hands in the hope that he would be able to expel the air from his lungs.

A horny hand gripped him by the arm. He felt himself being drawn to the surface. As his head appeared, he swung round and dealt the seaman a powerful blow with his fist. The man, taken completely by surprise, relaxed his grip. Von Hauptwald's blow had almost broken his shoulder.

"Be careful, Ginger!" he shouted to his mate. "He's fair balmy. Mind he don't plug you."

The second seaman swam in a circle just beyond reach of the spy's arm. His attempt to get behind the German failed, for the simple reason that von Hauptwald gave no opportunity for an attack in the rear. The other sailor, floating on his back and rubbing his injured arm, was content to shout advice and await developments.

The red-haired man was not deficient in courage, but he did not at all relish the idea of tackling single-handed a powerfully built maniac—for such he took the spy to be. He wisely awaited the approach of the *Oxford's* sea-boat, which, manned by four rowers who were encouraged by Midshipman Setley, was being urged rapidly towards the scene.

"Way enough!" shouted the middy.

The bowman boated his oar and leant over the bows. As he did so von Hauptwald avoided his grip, and, seizing the boat's keel, brought his head in violent contact with the elm planking.

Then it was that Ginger saw his chance and took it. Grabbing the German by the legs, he hung on like grim death, shouting to his comrades to "tackle the lubber".

Within an ace of capsizing the boat, von Hauptwald was hauled on board. He fought desperately. For a moment it seemed as if he would more than hold his own against the four seamen, until one of them, seizing a stretcher, dealt the spy a crack on the head that laid him senseless across the thwarts.

"Couldn't help it, sir," exclaimed the man apologetically.

"You did perfectly right, Dickenson," said the midshipman. "He's properly mad. Come on, you men, are you going to bathe for the rest of the day?"

The victim of von Hauptwald's attack had to be assisted into the boat, which, on making the ship, was quickly hoisted and secured.

Meanwhile the *Tehuantepec Girl* was on the point of sinking. From stem to stern she was a roaring furnace. Mingled with the roar of the flames could be heard the hiss of water coming in contact with the red-hot plates, while ever and anon came the crash of metal as the deck beams gave way and fell into the hold.

Suddenly she parted amidships. The flames died out, overpowered by the inrush of water. A thick column of smoke and steam arose as the bow and stem [Transcriber's note: stern?] portions floated apart. Then with the roar of escaping air the remains of the Yankee cargo-boat disappeared, to find a resting-place 7000 fathoms deep on the bed of the Atlantic.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### Mined

"So that accounts for the fellow's behaviour," remarked the Captain of the *Oxford*, after Ross and Vernon had communicated their discovery to the Commander, who in turn reported the news to the skipper. "The doctor says he is out of danger, eh? From a medical point of view, no doubt. Put him in the cells, Master-at-arms. We'll take good care not to land him at Halifax."

Upon arriving at the Nova Scotian port, whither the *Oxford's* consorts had preceded her, the officers and crew of the *Tehuantepec Girl* were landed. Forty-eight hours elapsed before the transports were ready to leave, and thus Ross and Vernon, with most of the officers of the cruisers, had an opportunity of a "spell ashore".

On the homeward run nothing untoward occurred, except that, instead of proceeding to Liverpool, the cruisers and their convoy were suddenly ordered by wireless to make for the Clyde.

Off the Pladda Light the transports were met by a flotilla of destroyers, while the cruisers were ordered to proceed via Cape Wrath to rejoin the fleet at Rosyth. Without slackening speed the three cruisers flung about, and steered a course immediately opposed to the one they had previously been following. Experience had told them that speed was one of the essentials to safety, even when in land-locked waters such as the Firth of Clyde.

"You don't look like leaving us in a hurry," remarked Midshipman Sefton, when he communicated the latest change of plans to Trefusis and his chum.

"We don't mind in the slightest," Ross hastened to assure him. "It's jolly comfortable on board the *Oxford*."

"Wait until we're ordered straight away for patrol work," said Sefton. "It's more than likely that we may be pushed off to the Norwegian coast without having so much as a sniff at Rosyth. We'll just about hit the equinoctial gales, and in those latitudes they get ice and snow pretty early in the autumn. But, by the by, I heard the doctor tell the Commander that your pal, von Hauptwald, is in a pretty state of funk."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Ross. "A court-martial will make it pretty hot for him."

"It's hardly that," said Sefton. "The fellow's absolutely crazy with fear. He's been imploring the master-at-arms and the sentry on the cells to ask the skipper to shift him above the water-line. It's only since the ship arrived in home waters, so it seems as if he's in mortal dread of being cooped up below and the *Oxford* being mined or torpedoed."

"And what did the Captain say?"

"Merely told the M.A.A. to carry on. Since the cells are below the water-line, and the King's Regulations say that prisoners are to be placed in cells, that ends the matter."

Passing through the Little Minch, and continually steering an erratic course in order to baffle any unterseebooten, should they be operating off the West coast of Scotland, the *Oxford* rounded Cape Wrath.

In spite of a rapidly falling glass the weather still remained fine, although the heavy swell encountered off the coast of Sutherland and Caithness betokened, in conjunction with the barometer, a gale at no distant date.

"This will be you fellows' last night on board," remarked Farnworth, one of the Acting Sub-lieutenants, as Ross and Vernon prepared to turn into their hammocks after a strenuous sing-song in the gun-room mess. "We'll be at Rosyth before noon to-morrow. 'Fraid it's been a bit tame after the *Capella*. Beyond that affair of the *Tehuantepec Girl* there hasn't been much doing. The small fry get all the excitement, I'm sorry to say. These armoured cruisers seem to be neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring in these times."

It seemed to Ross that he had been asleep only a few minutes when he was suddenly awakened by a terrific crash, followed by a concussion that shook the cruiser from stem to stern. His hammock rolled so violently that he promptly fell out on the floor of the flat. Before he could rise, the occupant of the next hammock tried his level best to thrust his toes into Trefusis' mouth. The rest of the midshipmen, who were watch below, were either thrown from their hammocks or had leapt hurriedly from them. The electric lights were out. The shock had either shattered the carbon threads or had broken the wires.

"Torpedoed!" exclaimed a junior midshipman.

"Dry up!" ordered Sefton sternly. "On deck all of you; there's the 'Action' bugle—no, it's 'Collision Stations'."

Just then a light appeared. The sentry in the steerage flat had lit one of the bulkhead lamps, which are always in readiness for use in the event of a break-down in the electric current.

The cruiser was listing perceptibly to starboard.

She was in danger of turning turtle and foundering, but even in the face of death not one of the handful of young officers showed the faintest sign of fear. If in their inmost minds the lads were a little timorous, they bravely kept their feelings to themselves. They were part and parcel of a British warship's complement. They had a reputation to maintain—the reputation of a Navy dating back for centuries. It was in safe keeping, for the *Oxford's* midshipmen were made of the right stuff.

A few made a hasty dive into their sea-chests to make sure of some precious article. Others scrambled into their thick coats, bantering each other as they did so.

Overhead, the noise of hundreds of feet could be heard as the men doubled aft to the quarter-deck. Above the tumult rose the shrill pipes of the bos'n's mates' whistles, and the hoarse shouts of "On deck, every mother's son of you!" bawled by a leather-lunged petty officer.

"We don't want to leave you, but we fear that we must go," parodied one of the midshipmen, giving a farewell glimpse into the gun-room that had been his home for the last fifteen months. "Come on, you fellows, who's going to enter for the long-distance swimming race?"

Up the ladder swept the throng of youthful humanity, followed by the sentry, who had received orders to abandon his post. On the half-deck, the gun-room officers met the swarm of senior officers issuing from their cabins, mostly clad in pyjamas and uniform caps. The Gunnery-

lieutenant was afterwards heard to declare solemnly that he had seen the Paymaster issuing from the ship's office with the ledger on his head, while under his left arm he held his cap.

"Let's stick together, old man!" exclaimed Ross as the chums gained the quarter-deck.

The first hurried rush aft had now given place to strict discipline. The men were falling in as calmly as if mustered for divisions. Some were blowing up their pneumatic swimming-collars, others helping to adjust a comrade's life-belt. A few were joking and talking, none of the officers gainsaying them. By virtue of an unwritten law the men were allowed to smoke, and the odour of strong tobacco wafted across the broad quarterdeck.

"Got a fag, Lofty?" Vernon overheard a burly stoker ask his neighbour.

"No; I don't smoke, mate," replied the man.

"You will soon," replied the stoker, and a roar of merriment rose from the lips of the men within hearing. They thought the retort was a smart bit of humour, and, when at length the implied nature of the man's words dawned upon him, even Vernon had to smile.

From the after bridge, search-lights were playing upon the waves. The light quick-firers were manned ready to deal with any visible foe. On the navigation bridge the Captain, with the officer of the watch, was pacing calmly up and down the slightly inclined structure.

Presently he was joined by two dark forms—the Commander and the carpenter. A bugle sounded the "Still". A hush fell upon the swarm of humanity, the silence being broken only by the hiss of escaping steam, and the rush of water under the action of the powerful Downton pumps.

"My lads!" shouted the skipper. "The old ship is holding out. We'll get her into dock yet. Pipe down!"

The *Oxford* had not been struck by a torpedo. Examination showed that she had bumped against a mine, with the result that the fore compartments were flooded. Fortunately the transverse bulkhead and watertight doors withstood the strain of the terrific inrush of water. Although well down by the bows the cruiser was in no immediate danger.

The watch below disappeared from sight; those of the officers who were not on duty retired to their cabins, yet few of them slept again that night.

As Ross and his chum were about to leave the quarterdeck, the Commander strode by.

"Pass the word for the master-at-arms," he ordered. "Master-at-arms went below, sir, to release the prisoners," reported a petty officer.

"By Jove!" whispered Ross. "I'd clean forgotten Ramblethorne. I wonder how he liked the business?"

"Let's wait," suggested Vernon.

They took up their position on the leeward side of the after 7.5-inch gun-shield. Here they were sheltered from the wind and out of sight of the alert Commander, although they could hear what was being said.

"Master-at-arms is in the sick-bay, sir," reported the messenger as he came up at the double. "He's nearly done for, trying to get to the prisoners. The ship's corporal managed to release the two ordinary seamen, but the spy's done in, sir—I mean he's drowned."

Almost immediately following the explosion, the master-at-arms had hurried to the cells. The flat was in darkness. The sentry on No. 6 post, in charge of the prisoners, was lying stunned on the floor of the passage. Water was surging aft. Already it was up to the knees of the master-at-arms as he plunged through the gloom towards his goal.

The three prisoners were shouting in mad panic. They realized their awful peril. Caged like rats in a trap, they felt certain that the cruiser was foundering, and that they would be carried down in a living tomb until the pressure of water burst open the comparatively strong steel walls of the cell.

At length the chief of the ship's police forced the door of the nearest cell. By sheer good luck he inserted the key into the lock without having to fumble for the opening. The prisoner, a young seaman who had broken out of the ship at Halifax, was too terrified to know his way to safety. He clutched at the master-at-arms, following him to the next cell.

The water was now waist-deep. In trying to find the keyhole the master-at-arms dropped the keys. It took some minutes to find them—a loss of valuable time.

The noise of the inrushing water was deafening. For all the petty officer knew, the ship might be about to make her last plunge. Yet his duty lay before him. At the risk of his life the prisoners must be set free.

A light appeared upon the scene. A ship's corporal, bearing a lantern, descended to the flat with the laudable intention, of assisting his superior.

The door of the second cell flew open, but a rush of water on the flood, under the movement of the stricken vessel surged and swept the master-at-arms off his feet. His forehead came in violent contact with the steel frame of the door, and, rendered senseless, he dropped inertly upon the flooded floor of the passage.

"Pull yourselves together, men!" exclaimed the corporal to the two prisoners. "You're all right. Bear a hand here."

Together they carried the unconscious master-at-arms out of the flat. The corporal returned to liberate the occupier of the third cell—von Hauptwald. But once again the keys were missing, having slipped from the insensible man's hand.

The water in the confined space was now shoulder-deep. The corporal could hear the stout bulkhead groaning under the pressure. Fixing the lantern on a bracket he dived, groping with both hands for the keys. At length he found them, and threw open the door of the cell.

"Out you come!" he shouted.

There was no reply. Von Hauptwald had ceased to shout for some minutes. The silence was ominous.

A movement of the badly stricken ship sent the water well over the corporal's head. He was swept off his feet. It was time for him to get back to safety. He had done all he could. The spy was dead.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### "Shrap"

It was late in the afternoon when the *Oxford* arrived, under her own steam, at Rosyth. Although the dry docks were in use, accommodation was quickly found for the damaged cruiser by the simple expedient of floating out a battleship that was being cleaned and recoated with anti-fouling composition. Since speed is an absolute necessity for efficiency in war-time, it was the practice to dock all the ships of the battle-cruiser and armoured cruiser class in rotation, the margin of safety being sufficient to allow this to be done without impairing the strength of the squadrons.

By the aid of powerful arc-lamps the dockyard hands took the crippled *Oxford* into dock, and, the caisson having been replaced, the water was quickly pumped out. The damage done was found, on examination, to be limited to a space extending 30 feet from the bows. The actual aperture caused by the explosion measured 6 feet by 30 inches, but the adjacent plates had been buckled and the bolts "started" under the violent concussion. Well it was that the armoured bulkhead had withstood the strain, otherwise nothing could have saved the ship.

There was no delay in setting to work. Almost before the last of the water had been pumped out of the dock, stagings were built up round the bows, and scores of shipwrights set to work to rebuild the damaged portion of the hull. Under normal conditions the work would have taken a couple of months, but, by working day and night, the efficient dockyard staff hoped to effect repairs within nine days.

Since the commencement of the greatest war the world has ever yet seen, it was the custom to allow the officers and crews of torpedoed or mined ships—if they were fortunate enough to be numbered amongst the survivors—seven days' leave. A rest on shore was necessary for the crews to recover from the mental shock, for it was found that although the men might escape from physical injury and appear bright and cheerful immediately after the occurrence, the reaction was most marked at about forty-eight hours afterwards.

Ross and Vernon, although not borne in the books of the *Oxford*, received permission to go on leave. Since Haye's father was somewhere in the North Sea, and he had no near relatives, he gladly accepted Ross's offer to sample again the hospitality of Killigwent Hall.

It was late when their train arrived at King's Cross; so much so that the lads realized it would be useless to attempt to catch the Cornwall express that would land them at St. Bedal just before midnight.

"I vote we have an evening in town," suggested Vernon. "Let's go to a theatre. It seems ages since I was inside a music hall, or even a picture palace."

"All right," agreed Ross. "We'll have a jolly good square meal before we go. I know of a decent little hotel just off the Strand."

The two midshipmen took the Underground as far as Charing Cross. As they emerged from the station they renewed their acquaintance with the metropolis in war-time. The streets were plunged in almost Stygian darkness. Omnibuses and taxicabs crawled painfully through the gloom; pedestrians were cannoning into each other at every step. The only relief to the blackness were the two search-lights from the Admiralty Arch that swung like gigantic pendulums across the dark and misty sky.

"Let's get out of it," exclaimed Ross, as he just managed to save himself from being run down by a motor-car. "It's a jolly sight more dangerous than keeping the middle watch on the old *Capella*."

Five minutes later they were sitting down to an ample dinner, provided at a cost that proved pretty conclusively the futility of the German submarine blockade. In the well-lighted room there was little to suggest that business was not proceeding "as usual", except perhaps the predominance of khaki-clad officers.

A string band was discoursing the latest operatic music, the diners were laughing and chattering. Within, the gaiety and light-heartedness contrasted violently with the dismal gloom inflicted upon the metropolis as a result of precautions adopted by the triple authorities responsible for its defence against air-craft.

Presently the band finished one item on the programme. The comparative silence that followed was almost immediately interrupted by a series of sharp reports, punctuated by a deeper crash.

"Zepps!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

Instantly there was a rush—not for the deep cellars underneath the building, but for the open street. The white faces of a few of the guests showed that they had, perhaps, a little anxiety, but for the most part an excitable curiosity took possession of the crowd.

"Come on!" exclaimed Ross to his chum. "Let's see the fun. We haven't had a chance of seeing a real Zepp before."

The lad's words voiced the thoughts of nine-tenths of the dwellers of the metropolis who were within sight of the would-be Terror of the Air. Useless, indeed, were the official warnings as to the right thing to be done when the Zeppelins came. One man, however, drew a respirator from a hand-bag and proceeded to don it, until a roar of laughter from the stream of people issuing from the hotel caused him somewhat shamefacedly to replace the useless article.

Into the street the lads elbowed their way. The progress through the long corridor of the hotel reminded them of a football scrum. It was not the blind rush of panic; merely a desire to lose nothing of the "fun".

A couple of thousand feet overhead, a silvery-grey, bluff-pointed cylinder was moving with apparent slowness. Half a dozen search-lights concentrated their beams upon it. All around were rings of smoke, marking the bursting shells from the anti-aircraft guns; yet, apparently untouched by the hail of bullets, the giant gas-bag passed on, hurling out death and destruction upon the greatest city on earth—a city that, until the present war, had only once heard the thunder of hostile guns.

Breathlessly the lads watched the progress of the huge Zeppelin, momentarily expecting it to collapse and come tumbling, a tangled mass of flaming wreckage, to the ground. Viewed from below, it seemed impossible for the airship to escape the bursting shells. The air was rent by the crash of falling bombs and the sharp reports of the "anti's", while in the distance could be heard the clatter of broken glass. The explosive bombs wrought havoc upon the homes of harmless Londoners. Flames, too, were springing up, throwing a lurid glare upon the sky.

Yet, unless actually within radius of the German explosives, the populace was remarkably calm. Men, women, and children watched the Zeppelin, much in the same way as if they were witnessing a Brock's display at the Crystal Palace. Once again German frightfulness had failed—and failed badly—to attain its desired end.

"Hurrah! She's got it properly in the neck," shouted an excited special constable, as the Zeppelin gave a sudden lurch and began to drop at an acute angle.

But the next instant the silvery envelope was hidden in a cloud of dense black smoke. Seconds passed, but no shattered wreckage streamed earthwards. When the vapour dispersed, the Zeppelin was nowhere to be seen. Under cover of the smoke-cloud she had dropped a large quantity of ballast, and had soared skyward to a great altitude.

Gradually, like the rumble of a passing thunderstorm, the reports of the distant anti-aircraft guns died away. The Zepps had taken themselves off, leaving half a dozen fires and hundreds of more or less damaged buildings to impress upon the strafed English that insularity is no longer a



protection from the cowardly night-raiders of the air.

"The show's over," declared Ross. "I vote we turn in. By Jove, there'll be a rush to the recruiting offices to-morrow!"

Requesting to be called at eight, the two midshipmen entered the lift and were whisked up to their room.

"What's that noise?" asked Vernon, pausing in the midst of unpacking his portmanteau.

"Something in the corridor," replied Ross.

"I don't think so. It's something or someone under my bed. Lock the door, old man; no, don't ring, if it's a burglar we'll tackle him."

Haye knelt by the bedside, Ross standing behind him ready to grapple with the intruder. Cautiously Vernon lifted the valance. As he did so he quickly withdrew his hand, which had come in contact with something warm and moist.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed. "It's a dog. Come out, sir!"

He was right. The animal gave a low whine, but made no attempt to budge.

"Mind the brute doesn't fix you," cautioned Ross.

"No fear," replied his chum confidently. "All dogs take to me. Come along, old boy."

Again he groped with his hand. His fingers touched the long, silky hair on the animal's neck. Slowly he drew the creature from its place of concealment. It was a sheep-dog pup, of about four months.

"Pretty-looking dog," exclaimed Vernon. "I wonder how it came here? Suppose it was frightened at the racket. It looks terrified out of its wits. Good dog!"

The pup fixed its large brown eyes upon Vernon's face, and attempted to wag its stumpy tail. As it did so the lads discovered that its hind quarters were tinged with blood.

"Oh, you poor little beggar!" said Vernon sympathetically. "However did you get that? I say, Ross, fill that basin with water."

"Better send for the boots," suggested Trefusis. "He'll take it to a vet.'s, or perhaps he'll know whose dog it is."

"Not much chance of finding a vet. at this time of night," objected Vernon. "Even the chemist will be busy with minor casualties. No, I won't worry the management. I've doctored dogs before now."

He began bathing the matted hair. The flow of blood had ceased, but upon examining the wound he found that it was a small circular incision.

He felt the spot. The pup, hitherto patient, uttered a low moan.

"There's something hard there," reported Vernon. "It's only a little way under the skin. We'll have it out. Hold his head, old man. Don't let him yelp; keep your hand over his muzzle. I'm afraid I must hurt the poor little beggar a bit."

Using the little blade of a knife, Haye adroitly probed the wound. Soft-hearted as he was, the action seemed to hurt him more than the patient; but his efforts were rewarded by the extraction of a small steel ball.

"A shrapnel bullet!" exclaimed Ross. "That accounts for the poor little brute being in such a terrible funk. Give him a drink of water. He'll be better now. We can bandage the wound with our handkerchiefs."

Five minutes later the dumb patient, his hind quarters swathed in elaborate bandages, was lying contentedly upon the hearth-rug, his stumpy tail, protruding between the folds of linen, wagging, as he tried to express his gratitude in doggy fashion.

"Now what's to be done?" enquired Ross.

"Let him stop until morning," replied Vernon decisively. "There might be a row if the hotel people know that there's a dog in the bedroom. The owner can't be much of a chap if he doesn't make enquiries."

"Perhaps he hasn't missed the dog," suggested Ross; "or it's just likely he isn't stopping at the hotel. Well, here goes. I'm turning in."

Ten minutes later both midshipmen were fast asleep. They had no middle watch to keep, and as for Zeppelins, they were merely a passing show.

At daylight Vernon was awakened by something licking his face. The pup, having shown his contempt for bandages by biting them to ribbons, was standing on his hind legs and licking his benefactor's nose, while his tail was wagging with the rapidity of the flag of an expert signaller. The hardy little animal had made light of his wound.

Having dressed, the midshipman made enquiries of the waiter, but without satisfactory results. No one in the hotel had a dog.

"I'll report him to the police," decided Vernon. "Ten to one the owner won't claim him. At any rate I'll stick to him. He's awfully fond of me already."

After breakfast Vernon sent the obliging waiter to purchase a collar, for the sheep-dog was wearing none. Sticking closely to Vernon's heels, the pup followed his new master to the police station, where an inspector took down a number of particulars.

"Very good, sir; that's all I want. I don't fancy you'll hear any more about it."

"What are you going to call him?" asked Ross, as the chums were seated in a first-class carriage, with the dog at Vernon's feet, on their way to Cornwall.

"Zepp," replied Vernon promptly.

"Not patriotic," objected Ross with a laugh.

"I think so," rejoined his chum.

"Why?"

"Because, like last night's Zeppelin, he turned tail when he had a shrapnel bullet in his stern."

"That's all very well," said Ross, "but you can't explain all that to everyone. Why not call him Shrapnel?"

"All right. 'Shrap' for short," agreed Vernon. "Good boy, Shrap! Wag your tail, you little rascal."

And Shrap obeyed promptly. Evidently the choice of a name reminiscent of bodily injury troubled him not one jot.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Off the Belgian Coast

"A chance of seeing something exciting at last!" exclaimed Ross. "Of course we've not had altogether a dull time, but this ought to be absolutely 'it'."

Two months had elapsed since the lads saw a hostile air-ship over London. Now they were about to see what a fleet of heavily armed British ships could do—not against a practically defenceless town, but against the strongly fortified German batteries on the Belgian coast.

Trefusis and Haye were on board the *Capella*, lying in the outer harbour at Dover. It was not the *Capella* that had come off second-best in an encounter with a floating mine, but another, similar in almost every respect to the lost patrol-boat. She was manned, too, by the same officers and crew—with one exception. Sub-lieutenant John Barry had obtained his promotion, and had been appointed to H.M.S. *Hunbalker* in command.

What the *Hunbalker* was, no one on board the *Capella* knew. The Admiralty publications at their disposal were blank as far as that ship was concerned. Speculation ran high: some of the officers expressing their opinion that Barry's command was a subsidized cargo-boat; others that she was one of the mosquito flotilla that had been evolved out of modern naval requirements. All were wrong, as they had yet to learn something more of the type of vessel flying the White Ensign that was helping to sweep the seas of the Black Cross of Germany.

"Well, old boy, how do you think you will like the racket?" asked Vernon, stooping to pat the massive head of a healthy-looking sheep-dog. Shrap had been allowed, by the Captain's permission, to join the *Capella* as a mascot—the pet of both officers and crew, and of Vernon Haye in particular.

Shrap winked knowingly, then trotted off to a secluded part of the chart-room, where, under a locker, he had hidden the remains of what, half an hour previously, had been Sub-lieutenant Fox's shaving-brush.

The *Capella* was by no means the only craft rolling sluggishly in the vast artificial harbour. There were seven motor patrol-vessels, specially detailed for the forthcoming operations as tenders to the sea-planes.

A strong array of monitors, craft of ugly but utilitarian design, low-lying, and mounting two 14-inch guns, had assembled for the purpose of making it hot for the Hun on the morrow. Only light-draughted craft were to be employed in the attack, since they could approach within very effective range of their guns, and at the same time stand little chance of being torpedoed by a handful of unterseebooten that had been transported in sections to Zeebrugge and there fitted for service.

According to the Admiral's plan, the monitors were to approach Ostend just after daybreak. In the offing a number of empty transports were to assemble, protected by a powerful flotilla of destroyers. The appearance of these transports would be taken by the Germans as an indication of an attempted landing of a British force, and troops would be hurriedly massed to repel the threatened invasion.

The monitors were thereupon to fire a certain number of rounds, then, followed in a parallel course by the transports, make for Zeebrugge. Alternate visits to both the Belgian ports in German hands were to be made throughout the day, thereby wearing out the German troops in fruitless marching and counter-marching, and at the same time diverting a strong body of men from a section of the trenches upon which the British troops were to deliver a sudden and unexpected assault.

At four in the morning the monitors began to leave Dover Harbour. Thanks to the stringent military precautions taken in the town—precautions that could with decided advantage be imitated elsewhere—the presence of spies was almost, if not quite, a matter of impossibility. Unheralded by the Kaiser's agents, the small yet powerful vessels cleared the entrance to the breakwater and headed for the Belgian coast.

An hour later a masthead lamp blinked from the *Vega*—the senior officer's ship of the patrol flotilla. Then, in line ahead, the swift motor craft slipped quietly out of the harbour to overtake their slower consorts.

The *Capella*, like the rest of her sister ships, was cleared for action. Stanchion-rails were unshipped; everything likely to splinter was sent below. In the wake of the armoured protection, sandbags were placed to reinforce the steel plating. Although the patrol-vessels were not to take part in the bombardment, they had to be prepared in case a forlorn hope in the shape of a few German torpedo-boats might attempt a sudden onslaught.

As attendants upon the sea-planes, too, it was possible that the patrol-boats would have to approach within range of the garrison artillery, especially in the event of one of the aerial craft being disabled and falling into the sea, on its return from "spotting" the hits of the monitors' guns.

Dawn had not yet broken when the monitors, followed at two miles' distance by the motor patrol, came in sight of the search-lights on the low-lying Belgian coast. Beyond the limit of direct rays, yet within range of their monster guns, the monitors were safe from detection. All that was wanting was the presence of the sea-planes, for whose work daylight was essential.

Slowly a pale light spread on the north-eastern horizon. The short wintry day was breaking. The sea was calm. The air was piercingly cold. A thin coating of frost covered the *Capella's* deck. Ross and his chum were heartily glad of their thick pilot-coats, mufflers, and woollen "mitts", as they sheltered behind the breast-work erected on the bridge.

Captain Syllenger slowly paced the bridge, frequently glancing at the clock in the chart-room, since it was almost a matter of impossibility to consult his watch, owing to his generous accumulation of clothing. It was now nearly eight o'clock, but as yet there were no signs of the expected sea-planes.

Just then the dull morning light was pierced by a brilliant flash from one of the monitors. The watchers on the *Capella's* bridge could see the low-lying hull give a decided jerk in a sternward direction under the reaction of the enormous projectile.

Long before the shell reached its objective, other 14-inch guns added their quota, and the air was rent with the flashes of the ordnance and the ear-splitting detonations following the discharge.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sub-lieutenant Fox, who with his brother officers had had telescopes levelled upon the faintly outlined sand dunes. "There are the sea-planes!"

He was right. Flying at a great height the air-squadron had passed over the warships, and had taken up their observation stations without being seen or heard by anyone on board the patrol-vessels immediately over the German batteries, they were cutting "figure eights" and describing seemingly erratic circles, while the observers, coolly wirelessly the results of the monitors' shells, hardly heeded the furious fire directed upon them by the hostile anti-aircraft guns.

On a point extending for nearly three miles, the shore was torn by the terrific explosive shells. Clouds of sand, and yellow smoke mingled marked the scene of destruction, as battery after battery was spotted and promptly put out of action. Across the dunes could be seen swarms of ant-like figures—German troops flying for shelter from the devastating fire of the British guns.

But the action was by no means a one-sided one. Guns, large and small, replied; the heavier ordnance vigorously at first, and then gradually slackening down as the lyddite shells sought out the fixed emplacements. The lighter guns, mounted on armoured motor-cars, gave more trouble, since, after every shot, each piece was moved a hundred yards or more.

For several minutes the lads watched the unusual spectacle through the binoculars. Then something resembling a concentrated tornado screeched above their heads. Instinctively they ducked, the glasses falling from their hands. Ten seconds later Ross ventured to look up. Vernon was still holding his hands over his face. Then slowly he, too, opened his eyes.

The lads smiled sadly at each other, picked up their binoculars, and somewhat shamefacedly resumed their former positions.

It was their baptism of heavy gun-fire. A 42-centimetre shell had ricocheted and leapt full twenty feet above their heads.

Captain Syllenger was standing a few paces from them. Luckily, thought Ross, the skipper's back was turned, and he had not noticed the action of his young subordinates. But Trefusis was wrong. The Captain had seen them. Out of consideration, for he remembered his own sensations when first under fire, he affected not to notice the temporary panic that had overtaken the midshipmen.

The *Capella* was now running at half speed, in a direction parallel to the shore. All around, the sea was torn by the falling projectiles, most of which were sufficiently large to send her to the bottom like a stone. Yet, beyond the wounding of her wireless operator, the loss of her signalling-mast, and the shattering of one of her boats, she came off lightly. Although not the object of the hostile guns, she narrowly escaped several ricochets, until, at a signal from the senior officer, the patrol-vessels withdrew to a safer distance.

One of the monitors, too, was slowly steaming seawards, well down by the bows and smoke issuing from her fo'c'sle, while her single funnel was riddled like a sieve.

"Sea-plane returning, sir!" announced Sub-lieutenant Fox.

Flying at an altitude of about a thousand feet, one of the aerial scouts was making towards the line of patrol-vessels. She was flying steadily; her motor was purring rhythmically; a trail of thin bluish smoke from her exhaust belied the suggestion of an overheated engine. Yet something must have taken place for her to have quitted her observation station.

Promptly Captain Syllenger gave orders for the *Capella's* motors to stop, then "Easy astern" until way was off the ship.

Making a graceful volplane, the sea-plane alighted with a faint splash upon the surface of the water, and "taxied" to leeward of the motionless vessel.

The sea-plane was a "two-seater". The rearmost or observer's seat was unoccupied. In the foremost was a young Flight-Sub-lieutenant heavily clad, and his clean-shaven face almost hidden by an airman's helmet. For the first time, the officers on the bridge of the *Capella* noticed that the light steel plating was holed in many places, while the planes bore testimony to the accuracy of the enemy's shrapnel.

"A casualty!" sang out the Flying officer. "My pilot's been hit. Can you take him on board?"

Two of the *Capella's* crew swarmed over the side and gained the nearest float, whence they clambered upon the body of the sea-plane. At the same time, one of the davits from which the *Capella's* shattered boat had hung was slung outboard. By dint of careful manoeuvring, the sea-plane was brought alongside with her main planes practically parallel to the side of the ship.

The injured man was lying on the floor of the fuselage. A canvas band was strapped round his waist, and, supported by the two seamen, he was gently hoisted on board the ship by means of the davit tackle.

The Flight-Sub swung himself over the side of the *Capella* and ascended the bridge.

"Got it hot at fifteen hundred feet," he explained. "My pilot was winged. Hit twice, I believe. Luckily the old bird kept fairly steady until I could clamber into the pilot's seat and take control. Rough luck, too. We were just doing a useful bit of spotting. I suppose, sir, there's no one on board who can handle a 'plane?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Captain Syllenger.

"Rough luck!" exclaimed the Sub despondently. Then, brightening up, he asked:

"Can you lend me a 'wireless' man? I could take on the pilot's job."

"Our man's knocked out," said the skipper.

"That's done it!" exclaimed the Sub. "There's a particularly tough battery that I wanted to see knocked out. No. 5 was almost on it when we got it hot."

Ross was thinking rapidly and deeply. He knew the Morse code well. He had dabbled in wireless telegraphy at school. Perhaps—

He felt that it was almost too impertinent to offer his services, yet the matter was urgent. It was dangerous, too, most dangerous; but the midshipman had learnt to place duty before personal consideration.

"Well?" asked Captain Syllenger as Trefusis stepped up and saluted smartly.

"I'll go if I can be of any assistance, sir," said Ross. "I can Morse and use a buzzer, and I have a knowledge of wireless."

"Carry on, then," replied Captain Syllenger.

"Good man!" exclaimed the Flight-Sub-lieutenant. "Can you stick heights?"

"I've done a lot of cliff climbing—I am a Cornishman, you know," said Trefusis. "I haven't had a chance of flying before."

"You have now!" added the Flight-Sub.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### Disabled in Mid-air

Ross climbed agilely into the observer's seat, and, at his flying companion's suggestion, buckled a broad leather strap round his waist. At his right hand was the wireless transmitter, together with a pair of prismatic glasses and map. The latter was held in a transparent celluloid case, while the glasses were secured by a cord sufficiently long to enable the observer to use them in any direction. Everything was attached to the sea-plane so that in the event of the machine having to "loop the loop" nothing would be lost.

The Sub, who for the present was to act as pilot, took his place in the forward part of the body. Giving a few preliminary touches to the mechanism, he announced that everything was in order.

The self-starter was released and the motor fired, causing the twin propellers to buzz smoothly and powerfully.

Ross waved his hand to his chum as the sea-plane glided away from the *Capella*, and from that moment his whole attention was centred upon the work on which he was engaged.

For nearly a hundred yards the sea-plane "taxied", rising lightly over the waves; then almost imperceptibly it glided upwards with an even motion. Ross could hardly believe he was flying until he saw the sea apparently receding from him.

"All right?" asked the Sub through the telephone that formed the only audible means of communication between pilot and observer. "Not feeling giddy?"

"Not a bit," replied Ross. Without experiencing the faintest sensation of vertigo, he found himself able to lean over the side of the chassis and look down at the scene two thousand feet beneath him.

The sea-plane was rising in a direction diverging obliquely with the coast. She was, in fact, almost over the line of empty transports that looked little bigger than a fleet of toy boats. Farther away could be discerned the *Capella* and her consorts, moving with apparent slowness upon a perfectly calm sea, for at that altitude the waves were merged into a flat surface. Small splashes of white—the spray thrown up by falling shells—could be seen all around the patrol-vessels, which, in obedience to a signal, had now taken up a position rather nearer to the monitors.

Presently the Flight-Sub, having gained the desired altitude, moved the steering-plane ever so slightly. Quickly the machine answered her helm, swinging round until she pointed towards the land.

Three minutes later Ross found himself immediately above the British monitors. The sea-

plane was now pitching slightly in the disturbed air, for the concussion of the heavy weapons was distinctly felt even at seven hundred yards above the bombarding ships. Although the roar of the concerted cannonade was deafening, Ross heard not a sound of it. To all intents, as far as he was concerned, the guns might have been fired with silencers attached to their muzzles. The whirr of the sea-plane's motor and the rush of air past his ears out-voiced every other sound.

Five miles beyond the line of monitors, could be discerned the Belgian coast, composed for the most part of undulating sand-dunes dotted with clusters of buildings.

As the sea-plane approached the land Ross could, with the aid of his binoculars, distinguish other objects—wavy lines, dotted with ant-like figures bunched together round something that looked like stumps of a lead pencil. The lines were the German trenches, the "ants" grey-coated artillerymen, and the "stumps" the heavy howitzers.

"That's our pigeon!" spoke the Flight-Sub through the telephone. "The battery a hundred yards to the north of that ruined church tower. Our fellows haven't knocked it out yet. Wireless them; fifty yards over."

Ross sent the desired information. The sea-plane, having flown over its objective, turned, describing an elongated figure eight. As she swung round, Ross noticed a mushroom-like cloud of white smoke a short distance beneath, and to the left of the fuselage. Then another a hundred feet immediately in front. At each "mushroom" the sea-plane curtsied. Something zipped close to the lad's ear. A wire snapped, the severed portions circling themselves into erratic spirals. A fragment of fabric from one of the main planes flew past him, like a scrap of tissue-paper in the grip of a boisterous wind.

Then Ross tumbled to it. Those silent mushrooms of smoke were shrapnel shells bursting unpleasantly close. For a moment, the young observer felt himself seized by an almost irresistible impulse to take refuge under the coaming surrounding his seat. He uttered an involuntary exclamation of unwelcome surprise.

"What's up?" asked a voice in his ear. It was the Flight-Sub, to whom the telephone had transmitted Ross's exclamation.

"Nothing," replied the lad.

"Thought so," was the laconic reply. "Don't worry."

Reasoning with himself, Ross came to the decision that the advice was thoroughly sound. Worrying would not help him in the least; neither would cowering inside the frail body of the sea-plane. Twice within a very short space of time he had experienced a sensation of "funk". Twice he was surprised to find how quickly he recovered; for, at the next shot from the monitor for which he was "spotting", he found that the sensation of "cold feet" had given place to one of exhilaration when he was able to record a "direct hit".

By this time the initial operations were terminating. The German fire had almost ceased to be troublesome. Most of the big howitzers and long-range guns had been knocked out. A few were still firing, but very erratically.

At a signal from the senior officer, the monitors drew out of range, and steaming at the maximum speed—a bare 11 knots—kept a course parallel with the shore, accompanied by the patrol-vessels and transports.

Well above effective shrapnel range, the squadron of sea-planes headed for Zeebrugge. A number of aviatiks, which were flying over the German new sea base, hurriedly turned tail. Previous experience had taught them that naval air-craft could hit hard, in addition to carrying out observation work.

There were, however, plenty of evidences that the Germans were rushing up thousands of troops in order to deal with the supposed landing in force. Train after train made towards the town, crammed with soldiers.

The sea-planes let the trains pass unhindered. It was not their purpose to stop Germans from pouring into Zeebrugge. Once the troops were there, then would be the time to cut their lines of communication.

Again the monitors opened fire. Their reception was hotter than it had been in the neighbourhood of Ostend, for, in spite of frequent and destructive molestation, the Germans had succeeded in throwing up numerous heavily armed and cleverly concealed batteries.

At almost extreme range the British ships maintained a rapid high-angle fire. In a few minutes fires had broken out in several places. Fifteen-hundred-pound shells dropped in the canal basin, blowing to atoms several submarines that were in the process of fitting out. The harbour works were swept by the huge projectiles. The long curved breakwater suffered heavily. Huge gaps appeared in the solid masonry. Everything lying afloat in the enclosed water was either set on fire or sunk. In an hour the havoc wrought at Zeebrugge had wiped out the work of months.

Ross had little time to notice the work of destruction. His particular business was to observe the fire directed upon a large redoubt to the north-east of the town. The first shell from the monitor fell short, blowing an enormous crater in the grass-grown dunes. The second fell beyond, completely demolishing a house. The third dropped fairly in the centre of the redoubt, causing a terrific explosion that was not due solely to the lyddite bursting-charge. The magazine had exploded.

Skywards rushed an enormous cloud of black and yellow smoke. Caught by the blast of the violently displaced air the sea-plane rocked, then began dropping like a stone.

For the moment Ross imagined that the end had come. He was no longer afraid. A sensation of intense curiosity as to what the machine and its occupants would look like seemed to obsess his mind.

Then, with a jerk that reminded the midshipman of the sudden starting of a lift, the sea-plane "flattened out" and began to climb out of the enveloping cloud of smoke.

The Flight-Sub turned his head and grinned broadly. His manner could not do otherwise than inspire confidence. Although not a pilot, he was master of the frail machine. Side-slips and nose-dives troubled him but little, provided he was flying at a safe altitude.

"A jolly good wipe-out!" he exclaimed. "There won't be many Bosches left within half a mile of that battery, I'm thinking. Now watch when the next shot lands: that will give you the objective."

A sharp buzzing in the receiver attached to Ross's flying helmet announced that the monitor was "calling up" her observer. Quickly the lad seized the pencil, and gave the signal that he was ready to take down the message.

The Morse signal, when translated into writing, was as follows:—

"Register Position 47."

"Good!" exclaimed the Flight-Sub when Ross had telephoned him the message. He consulted his map, which was similar to the one at the observer's disposal "Position 47: that's a railway junction."

In the course of their work of fortifying Zeebrugge, the Huns had constructed a double-track railway, passing within a few yards of the Dutch frontier for several miles before heading straight for the new submarine base. Two miles from Zeebrugge the line joined the existing railway, the junction being recorded on British airmen's maps as Position 47.

The time was now ripe for the monitor which had successfully demolished the redoubt to attempt a similar exploit, namely, to destroy the junction.

The sea-plane's appearance was the signal for a furious fire from the numerous anti-aircraft guns mounted in the vicinity of the station.

At six thousand feet the risk of being hit was small, while the height did not prevent the observer making a fairly accurate register of the hits.

It was a very long range, but the monitor's 14-inch guns did excellent work. Seven shells sufficed to reduce the station to a heap of ruins and blow whole sections of the line to atoms.

Again came a wireless order:

"Sea-plane to proceed to Zwilhuit. Attempt destruction of bridge across canal."

Once more the Flight-Sub smiled. This was work that suited him immensely. For the nonce "spotting" was finished with. The sea-plane had to drop her cargo of bombs upon an important strategic position.

"All right!" exclaimed the Flying officer. "Keep a cool head. When I give the word, press that pedal under your right foot. Bend down and you'll find a safety pin just above the floor. Remove it, but be jolly careful not to touch the pedal until I give the word."

Underneath the fuselage were six bombs hanging from an inclined steel rod. These were released by means of a ratchet operated by the pedal to which the Flight-Sub had alluded. To prevent a premature release the pedal was "locked" by a safety device. When this was removed, each depression of the pedal would result in the liberation of a potent missile of destruction.

The sea-plane was not alone on her errand. In her wake flew two more, for the actual bombardment had now ceased, and the air-craft were at liberty to engage upon a raid several miles inland.

The Huns had not constructed their strategic railway close to the Dutch frontier without a cunning reason. Extreme care had to be exercised by British airmen, since it was an easy matter for a bomb to drop across the border. Nothing would please the Germans better, for at once there would be a case of violation of Dutch territory. On the other hand, the Huns had no scruple

in mounting a battery of anti-aircraft guns, training them in such a manner that the earthward flight of spent shrapnel would assuredly fall upon the Dutch village of Venterloos, which was separated from Zwilluit by a distance of less than four hundred yards.

In twenty minutes the sea-plane's objective came in sight: a broad line of railway crossing a canal by means of a steel bridge. It was evident that the Germans meant this base to be a permanent one, for the bridge was of massive construction, strong enough to bear the transport of the heavy 42-centimetre guns, and yet sufficiently high above the waterway to admit the passage of large lighters with towering deck-cargoes.

"Stand by!" cautioned the Flight-Sub. "Keep cool. Do as well as you have already done, and everything will go like greased lightning."

Volplaning at an acute angle, the sea-plane swooped down upon her quarry. Shrapnel shells burst over, in front, behind, and underneath her. It seemed impossible that such a frail object could escape destruction.

At five hundred feet the Flight-Sub checked her downward course.

"Now!" he ordered. "And again!"

Two puffs of white smoke marked the points of explosion of the powerful bombs. One had fallen fifty yards short of the bridge; the other had burst almost at the junction of the railway lines.

Round spun the sea-plane. As she turned Ross could discern the second of the aerial raiders gliding down, while the third was still at a great altitude. Before the one in which Ross was flying could again soar over its target the second sea-plane had dropped three of her missiles. All fell close to the bridge. The work of demolition was accomplished, for when the smoke and dust cleared away the substantial fabric had been precipitated, a mass of twisted steel, into the canal.



**"THE WORK OF DEMOLITION WAS ACCOMPLISHED"**

"Two more on the station and then we've finished," exclaimed the Flight-Sub. "Ready?"

"Ay, ay!" replied Ross.

He turned his head to watch the progress of the other sea-planes. One was still maintaining a terrific altitude, and showed no signs of making a volplane.

The other was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps it was as well that the midshipman had not



noticed what had befallen her, for a few seconds previously a shrapnel shell had burst close underneath the chassis. The explosion had communicated itself to the remaining bombs, with the result that utter annihilation had overtaken the plucky British airmen in the moment of their triumph.

Ross's companion had witnessed the catastrophe. More, his trained eye had discerned half a dozen small specks in the western sky. Quickly he brought his binoculars to bear upon them. No mistake now; the specks revealed themselves as German aviatiks intent upon cutting off the retreat of the two remaining British air-craft.

Not until Ross had dropped the remaining bombs did his companion speak.

"We've a bit of a shooting match on," he announced. "Get that rifle ready. It's under the coaming on your right hand. Sight at three hundred yards, and let rip when I give the word."

Ross took up the weapon almost as a matter of course. After the excitement of bomb-dropping and being shelled by shrapnel, the approach of a fleet of Zeppelins would hardly disturb his equanimity.

Already the third sea-plane, having gained a favourable altitude, was making straight for her numerous opponents.

The Flight-Sub now began to speed his machine up, climbing in short spirals, so as to gain what was equivalent to the "weather-gauge" in the sea battles of Nelson's days.

Ross unslipped the rifle. Mechanically he set the back-sight, and jerked open the bolt-action to assure himself that the magazine was charged. As he did so he became aware that the cartridges were bent and buckled. A piece of shrapnel, passing through the side of the fuselage, had lodged in the magazine of the rifle. In addition, although it was possible to withdraw the bolt, the striking-pin had jammed. As a weapon the rifle was useless. By stopping the shrapnel bullet the rifle had saved Ross from a serious and perhaps mortal wound.

The midshipman was on the point of reporting the disablement of the weapon, when the motor gave vent to a peculiar cough and abruptly stopped. Unknown to the pilot the petrol-tank had been pierced almost at its lowest point. The remaining petrol had been used up during the spiraling process. The sea-plane was now at an altitude of three thousand feet; propulsion, except under the force of gravity, was no longer possible.

The Flight-Sub was quick to act. Before the hitherto climbing air-craft began diving tail downwards, he regulated the elevating planes, and a long volplane ensued. The sea-plane was bound to come to earth, but it was not on hostile soil that the airman hoped to alight. His goal was the ground beyond the seemingly endless line of barbed wire that marked the frontier between Belgium and Holland.

The anti-aircraft guns had now opened fire, blazing furiously away at the rapidly descending sea-plane. The rapidity of her descent saved her, for, before the time-fuses could be altered to suit the ever-varying range, the air-craft was well below the bursting-point of the missiles. Nothing but a direct hit—a most difficult matter—could harm her now.

At a thousand feet she passed the border-line. Still the Archibalds barked. Ross could see the Dutch frontier guards bolting for shelter as the hail of bullets fell on neutral ground. Not until the sea-plane was well over the boundary did the guns reluctantly cease fire.

The earth appeared to leap up and meet the descending machine. It looked as if a terrific smash were inevitable. A sea-plane alighting upon solid ground has a thousand chances against her, for, being unprovided with landing wheels, she is not adapted to withstand successfully the impact with the earth.

Cool and collected, the Flight-Sub "flattened her out" to a nicety. At forty miles an hour the floats struck the ground. For twenty yards the sea-plane skidded, then with a rending crash the floats and a network of struts and tension-wires gave way under the abnormal strain. The next instant Ross found himself sprawling on the sandy soil, the sudden jerk tearing his securing-belt from its fastenings.

He sat up. A multitude of dazzling lights seemed to flash before his eyes. He was dimly aware of a tangle of wreckage, out of which a practically undamaged plane rose at an oblique angle, lumbering the ground quite twenty yards from where he found himself. Men were hastening towards the wrecked sea-plane from all directions, but, thank Heaven, they did not wear the uniform of the Hun.

With his head still whirling, Ross was supported by two Dutch soldiers, while a third poured a quantity of raw spirits down his throat. Blood was streaming from a gash on his forehead, and his knees, grazed and discoloured, were visible through rents in his trousers.

Of what happened during the next quarter of an hour, the midshipman had but a very hazy idea. The men had laid him on the ground, propping him against a large stone. He felt horribly sick. The pain across his chest, caused by the strain upon the leather belt, was acute—far worse

than the wound on his forehead which the kindly soldiers were bathing with handkerchiefs dipped in water.

The men were talking excitedly. He could not understand what they were saying. He felt inclined to tell them to shut up. They irritated him beyond measure; if only they would go away and leave him in peace he would be deeply grateful.

Suddenly it dawned upon him that he had been in an awful smash. The wrecked sea-plane had not hitherto led the train of his thoughts to the subject of the accident. Now he realized his position.

"Where's my companion?" he asked, "Is he knocked out?"

"Do not yourself fret," said a voice that sounded far away. "He is hurt, but badly not at all. We him have carried away. I am a doctor. You quiet must be, and zen recovery rapide will be."

The doctor—a Dutch army surgeon—ran his hands lightly over the lad's limbs.

"Goot!" he ejaculated. "Nodings broken is."

He gave directions to the men in attendance. A stretcher was laid on the ground beside the lad. Two men lifted him gently upon it. Even as they did so, Ross gave a low groan and passed into merciful oblivion.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### Not on Parole

"Ver' goot. I understan' you no give parole?"

"No, sir," replied the Flight-Sub firmly.

"An' you, mynheer?"

"I am in the same boat, sir," replied Ross.

The camp-commandant smiled—a hearty smile, bordering on a laugh.

"Goot, I understan' also," he reiterated. Then, shaking a podgy little finger, he added: "Same boat, ah? English idiomatic expression? Ver' well, it is so; but if you make escape, do not let me you catch. Zat is all."

A week had elapsed since the involuntary descent of the sea-plane. Both officers were making rapid progress towards recovery, for, in spite of the violence of the impact, neither of them had received anything worse than contusions and bruises.

After three days in hospital at Utrecht, the interned aviators were transferred to a small concentration camp at the village of Koedijk, a short distance from Alkmaar. A few miles to the westward, and beyond an expanse of sand dunes, was the North Sea. The temptation to refuse to give their parole was not to be wondered at, with the call of the sea so near at hand. It was, indeed, rather remarkable that the two officers had not been sent to the large internment camp at Groningen, where so many of the ill-fated Naval Brigade languished, if not in captivity, in a state of enforced and tedious detention.

"We'll have to be doubly careful now," remarked the Flight-Sub. "The mere fact that we have declined to give our parole will put the commandant on his guard. Our best plan will be to mark time for a bit."

"Marking time is always an unsatisfactory business," protested the energetic Ross. "Nothing rusts a fellow like inaction. It wouldn't be much of a task to tunnel our way out."

The Flight-Sub shook his head.

"Tunnelling's not much good in this water-logged country," he declared. "We are not water-rats. Patience, my festive: where there's a will there's a way."

Their quarters consisted of a long, two-storied building. The only other occupants beside the guards, were three British Naval officers rescued from a mined trawler that had managed to reach Dutch waters before foundering. Two of them had broken legs; the third was down with double pneumonia, the legacy of many a cold, stormy night in the North Sea.

Surrounding the house was a high brick wall, on which had been recently placed a triple row

of barbed wire. At the entrance, an archway about ten feet in height, stood a wooden sentry-box, where a soldier with rifle and fixed bayonet kept guard in the leisurely manner of the stolid Dutch menfolk. One could imagine him, a picturesque figure in baggy trousers and coat of fantastic cut, smoking his pipe on the quay at Volendam. The blue uniform did not form a fitting mantle for his corpulent form.

The sentry was one of a type. The rest of the guards—middle-aged men called up on mobilization—were much of the same build and demeanour. Their innate love of gossiping tempted them to be on most friendly terms with the interned officers. One and all were violently pro-British. They had reason to dread the German menace, for they were level-headed enough to realize that, with the Central Powers triumphant, the independence of Holland would be a thing of the past.

Adjoining the grounds were the quarters occupied by interned seamen, to the number of about sixty. They were strictly guarded; a formidable double fence of barbed wire, between which armed sentries patrolled, enclosed the premises. For discipline, the men were under the orders of their own petty officers.

"Jolly good luck to you!" exclaimed one of the wounded officers, to whom the two new-comers confided their intention of escaping. "If we three weren't crocked we should have been across the ditch by this time."

He pointed seawards as he spoke. From the upper windows of the building the sunlit sea could be seen. Beyond the "ditch", as he termed it, was England and freedom.

"It's no use trying to break out," he continued. "German spies as thick as blackberries along the coast. The most benevolent-looking mynheer might, as likely as not, be a cultured Hun. You have to be smuggled out. Try your blandishments on old Katje."

"Old who?" asked the Flight-Sub.

"Katje, the old vrouw who calls for the washing. She comes every Tuesday and Friday with a cart drawn by dogs, and a basket big enough to stow the pair of you. You'll want plenty of palm oil. There are the sentries to be squared, and the fellow who provides you with a suit of 'mufti'. Wilson, our Lieutenant-Commander, got clear about a month ago. He made his way to Ymuiden."

"Wasn't there a row about it?" asked Ross.

"Naturally," replied the wounded officer. "We had a pretty strenuous time after it—certain privileges withdrawn and all that sort of thing. However, when we heard that Wilson had succeeded in making his way to England we didn't mind that, and things have now recovered their normal appearance."

On the following Tuesday, Ross and his companion anxiously awaited the arrival of Vrouw Katje. At length the old lady—she was nearly eighty—drove up in style, shouting shrilly to her dogs from her perch on top of an enormous wicker hamper.

"More washing for you, Katje," announced one of the crippled officers. "Two more of my countrymen. They will be very pleased to see you."

Without further ado, Katje ascended the stairs and hammered violently upon the door of the sitting-room.

Her knowledge of English was good, for earlier in life she was the wife of the skipper of a bolter that made regular voyages to Hole Haven at the mouth of the Thames, where a large eel trade was in the hands of the Dutch fishermen.

"Very well; but I must ask permission of the Commandant," replied Katje, in perfect good faith, when the Flight-Sub had broached the subject of being conveyed from the internment camp.

"No, no," protested the young officer in alarm; "that won't do."

"Why not?" persisted the washerwoman. "Mynheer the Commandant is very kind."

"Undoubtedly," replied the Flight-Sub. "But we would much rather that you wait until we are away from the place before you ask him. See, here are five English sovereigns. They are yours once you get us clear."

The vrouw shook her head.

"I do not care to," she replied firmly; then without a pause she continued: "My son-in-law, Jan van Beverwijk, will. I am sure he will. Next Friday he will come instead of me. He is mate of a steamship that takes the bulbs from Holland to England. He returns to-morrow, and sails on Saturday from Ymuiden."

"That sounds excellent," commented the Flight-Sub.

"It is excellent," agreed Katje. "It will cost you each twenty English sovereigns."

"But we haven't ten between us."

The vrouw smiled till her weather-beaten face was one mass of deep wrinkles.

"You English have a proverb about a road," she remarked.

"'It's a long lane that has no turning?'" quoted the officer; but Katje shook her head.

"'Where there's a will there's a way'," suggested Ross.

"Ah! That is it. I knew it was something about a road or a lane. Way, you call it. Very well; by next Friday you will find a way."

"Artful old baggage!" exclaimed the Flight-Sub when Katje had taken her departure. "She's mighty keen on the rhino. We'll have to have a whip round, Trefusis, and give a note of hand."

Their brothers in adversity willingly responded to the call, and before the eventful Friday a sum in English and Dutch coinage, equivalent to forty pounds, was ready to be handed to Jan van Beverwijk.

"I wouldn't pay cash on the nail if I were you," suggested the crippled officer who had been so useful in advising them before. "Half down, and the rest when you land in England. Jan might object, but he'll give in. No Dutchman of his standing would shut his eyes to twenty in hard cash."

At eight o'clock on Friday morning Katje's dog-team romped up; but, instead of the old vrouw, a lean, leather-faced man with a long coat reaching to his heels and a flat-topped peak cap strode beside the cart.

At the gate he stopped, and spoke at considerable length with the sentry. There was hardly any expression on the faces of the two men as they talked. Whether the soldier fell in with the suggestion, Ross, who was anxiously watching from the window, could not decide.

Presently Jan stooped to fasten the strap of one of his *klompen*, or wooden shoes; then shouting to the dogs he came towards the house. Before he had gone very far, the sentry bent and picked up something that was lying on the spot where Jan had been attending to his footgear.

"Palm oil!" remarked the Flight-Sub laconically.

"Heavy wash to-day," was Jan's greeting as he deposited his heavy basket in the corridor. "Spot cash, down on the nail."

"Your knowledge of English is remarkable," said the Flight-Sub affably.

"It has to be," rejoined the Dutchman stolidly.

"We have only twenty pounds," declared the Sub. "That we will give you as soon as we are on board and in English waters. The balance Mr. Brown will give you on your return, on receipt of a note from us to the effect that we are safely home."

"It cannot be done," said Jan.

"Then the deal's off," remarked the Flight-Sub coolly; but he ostentatiously poured the coins from his right hand into his left before returning them to his pocket.

The Dutchman capitulated.

"Very good," he said. "I can trust an English Naval officer, although many a time have I been done in London. Get in, one of you."

"But the other?" enquired the Sub.

"I am strong, but I am not a Hercules," replied the Dutchman with a shrug of his shoulders. "One I can carry to the cart. To-day is a heavy wash, so I must return for a second load. You twig?"

"In you get, Trefusis," ordered his companion, in a tone that would brook no refusal.

By dint of hunching his shoulders and bending his knees, Ross managed to get into the basket. The lid was shut, and Jan, assisted by the Sub, lifted the heavy load on to his shoulders.

Jolting over the cobble-stones, the cart proceeded at a rapid pace for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then Jan called to the dogs to stop. The lid was thrown back and Ross told to get out.

He found himself outside a small cottage by the side of a canal. Katje was on her knees washing a bundle of clothes; the operation assisted, with disastrous results to the interned officers' effects, by means of two large stones with which she pounded the saturated garments. Without even turning her head to watch the midshipman's exit from the basket, she proceeded

vigorously with her task.

Jan led him into the cottage and pointed to a heap of clothes.

"Put these on you," he said. "I will now go for your friend."

Before the Flight-Sub rejoined him, Ross was rigged out as a Dutch youth, in voluminous trousers, long coat, stock, tall cylindrical hat, green stockings, and wooden shoes. His companion had to look twice before he recognized him.

"Now you come with me to Mynheer Guit," said Jan. "He is a bulb merchant, and lives just outside Ymuiden. You will then go on board a barge that brings the boxes of bulbs from Mynheer Guit's warehouse to the ship. I will be with you. The men in the barge will say nothing. Before to-night you will be safe on board the *Hoorn*."

Jan was as good as his word. That night the fugitives slept comfortably in the cabin of the mate of the steamship *Hoorn*; and at tide-time, early on Saturday morning while it was still dark, the vessel glided between the breakwater of Ymuiden, and shaped a course for the mouth of the Thames.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### Almost Recaptured

"What's that light, Jan?" asked the Flight-Sub.

The *Hoorn* was now well beyond the three-mile limit. Ross and his fellow-passenger were standing aft, sheltering from the keen south-westerly wind. The mate of the vessel was with them, the skipper being on the bridge.

"Those lights?" corrected Jan. "They have been visible all the time. They are the two white leading-lights to Ymuiden harbour."

"No, I don't mean those," said the Flight-Sub. "Away to the south'ard, quite a mile from the harbour. See, it's showing again."

From the dunes a white light blinked thrice and then disappeared.

"I do not know," answered Jan gravely. He thought for a moment and then said: "Half a mo'. I will speak to the skipper."

"Hanged if I like it," muttered the Flight-Sub. "I say, Trefusis, that light blinking away looks very fishy. It would mean a fifty-pound fine in England; but here, apparently, it is not objected to."

The skipper and the mate were talking rapidly. Both men were leaning over the after side of the bridge-rails, with their eyes fixed upon the dark shore from which the mysterious light flickered at regular intervals.

"Light on the port bow," reported the helmsman. Both of the *Hoorn's* officers turned just in time to catch sight of a steady white light before it disappeared. Whatever its meaning, it was remarkable that from that moment the shore light ceased to blink.

"Put out our navigation lamps, Jan," said the skipper. "Someone has betrayed your English friends. Nevertheless I will do all in my power to aid them. We'll steer south-west for an hour. Perhaps we may outwit yon craft, whatever she may be, before dawn."

Ross and his companion were quick to note the alteration of helm. They knew, too, that the removal of the steaming-lights was for the purpose of baffling what must be, to a dead certainty, a German craft—a submarine, or perhaps a torpedo-boat, since the latter frequently ventured out of Borkum and crept stealthily towards the Schelde, keeping close to the Dutch territorial waters in order to avoid being snapped by the vigilant British destroyer flotilla.

Slowly the wintry day dawned. Anxiously the British officers scanned the horizon. The low-lying Dutch coast was now invisible. All around was a waste of grey, tumbling waves, unbroken by a sail of any description.

The *Hoorn* was ploughing her way at a modest ten knots. Short, beamy, and deep-draughted, she was pitching heavily, sending a frothy bow wave far to leeward each time she dipped her nose into the steep seas.

"I'd give a fiver for the sight of a good old White Ensign at the present moment," remarked the Flight-Sub anxiously. "Good heavens, what's that?"

Ten seconds later he laughed mirthlessly.

"Nerves going to blazes," he muttered. "A bit of wreckage gave me the jumps. By Jove, don't we look a pair of comical objects?"

They had discarded their grotesque head-dress. Ross had a woollen muffler wrapped round his head, while his companion had been given the loan of a red stocking-cap, but they still retained the weird garb in which they had made their journey down the ship canal.

Suddenly Ross gripped his companion's arm and pointed with his right hand to a spar-like object projecting a few feet, close to the waves, at less than a cable's length on the port quarter.

"A periscope!" ejaculated the Flight-Sub.

"Let's hope it's one of our own submarines," said Ross.

"We'll soon find out," added his companion. "It's forging ahead. Whatever it is, they've got us under observation."

Jan, who was now on the bridge, had his attention called to the disconcerting fact. He beckoned to his two passengers.

"You had better go below and stow yourselves away," he suggested. "We will be boarded before long."

"Not I," replied the Flight-Sub. "They've marked us already. If they do take us they won't have to dig us out of a coal-bunker."

The submarine was emerging. At a pace that more than held its own with the *Hoorn*, she shook herself clear of the water, although green seas were breaking across the flat deck as far aft as the conning-tower.

Then muffled forms clambered through the hatchway; a young, yellow-bearded officer appeared on the navigation platform and hailed the *Hoorn* in Dutch to heave to instantly.

Even then the tough old Dutch skipper was not going to give in without a protest.

"For what reason?" he shouted back. "This is a Netherlands ship."

"That I do not doubt," rejoined the officer of the submarine. "But you have two Englishmen on board who have broken their parole——"

"You lie!" interrupted the skipper vehemently.

"Not a word more!" exclaimed the German fiercely. "Heave to, or we sink you!"

Reluctantly the "old man" gave the order to stop the engines. Jan, sliding down the bridge ladder, communicated to the British officers the text of the conversation.

"Some rascal of a German spy has betrayed you," he added. "If I could lay my hands upon him ——"

There was a look on the Dutchman's face which showed that his anger was genuine.

"All right, Jan," said the Flight-Sub. "It's the fortune of war."

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"Deucedly rotten morning," remarked Sub-lieutenant Fox as he greeted the officer of the watch, whom he was about to relieve.

Eccles, the Lieutenant, who had been on the *Capella's* bridge for four long and dreary hours, merely nodded sleepily. He was thinking, with feelings of satisfaction, of the hot coffee and fragrant bacon and eggs awaiting him below. Three minutes had to elapse before eight bells. Wearily he rubbed his salt-rimmed eyelids with a heavily gloved hand.

"*Taurus* wirelessly twenty minutes ago," he reported, as the two officers entered the chart-room. "She was then at the extreme limit of her northerly course. You ought to sight her very shortly. Here's our course"—he indicated the pencilled line on the chart. "Nothing to report: there never is when I'm officer of the watch. It's this infernal monotony that plays havoc with a fellow's nerves."

Noel Fox nodded sympathetically. Although the *Capella* had been only six days on her new station—keeping a watch on the Dutch coast between the Texel and the North Hinder Lightship—he, too, was mightily "fed up" with the task of "treading on the tail of Germany's coat".

Not so much as the periscope of a hostile submarine had been sighted. The German torpedo-

boats that occasionally sneaked southwards from Borkum were taking an enforced holiday. Perhaps it was in sympathy with the "High Seas Fleet" skulking in the Kiel Canal. In any case, the six motor craft of the *Capella* class had a full share of wintry conditions in the North Sea without any compensating adventures to mitigate the monotony.

As Eccles descended from the bridge, a great-coated muffled-up figure, followed by a large dog, swung himself up the ladder.

"Morning, Haye," was Noel Fox's salutation, as he stooped to pat Shrap, the chartered libertine of the *Capella*. "Dash it all, it is cold! Makes a fellow wish he were a sheep-dog. Here, Shrap, off you go and get your whiskers trimmed. I can see Tomkins waiting for you."

The dog needed no second order. Every morning just after eight bells Shrap would be taken over by the watch below. Every man took a delight in combing the animal's long hair, until Shrap's coat was the pride of the *Capella's* crew and the envy of the rest of the flotilla, whose mascots never aspired to be more than a tame rat, parrot, or canary.

"Sail on the port bow, sir," bawled the look-out.

The Sub and the midshipman promptly levelled their telescopes. A small cargo-steamer was pitching and rolling as she forged slowly ahead on a westerly course. Although she was fairly discernible against the pale grey of the eastern sky, it could be taken for granted that from the Dutchman's bridge the neutral-grey-painted *Capella* would be practically invisible.

"She's slowing down," declared Vernon.

"What on earth for?" enquired the Sub. "She couldn't possibly have spotted us. Starboard your helm, quartermaster. Good! Keep her at that. We'll get her to make her number, if nothing else."

Again Noel Fox levelled his telescope. Then he thrust it into a rack on the side of the chart-room, and bellowed:

"Turn up, both watches. Action stations. Submarine ahead."

His quick glance had discerned the after part of a large unterseeboot as she ranged alongside the Dutchman, whose high sides screened most of the submarine from the *Capella*, and conversely prevented the Germans clustered amidships from noticing the approach of the swift British patrol-vessel.

For the next few minutes, all was bustle and orderly confusion on board the *Capella*. Taking three steps at a time, Captain Syllenger gained the bridge, closely followed by Eccles, to whom the sudden interruption of a hearty breakfast came as a welcome call.

At a terrific pace the sleuth-hound of the sea tore towards the *Hoorn*, for such she was. Rounding under her squat counter, and reversing engines, the *Capella* brought up within fifty yards of the submarine before the astonished Germans could realize their precarious plight.

"Surrender, or I sink you!" roared Captain Syllenger.

The grim muzzles of the *Capella's* 4.7's, trained at a point-blank range, were a conclusive argument. Without waiting for orders, the majority of the unterseeboot's crew held up their arms. For a brief instant did her Kapitan hesitate.

"Me surrender," he replied.

"Very good; I accept your surrender," replied the *Capella's* skipper. "But understand, any attempt to open the sea-cocks will mean that no quarter will be given. Order all hands below, and leave the hatchways open. You will oblige me by proceeding on board His Majesty's ship *Capella*."

By this time the *Hoorn* was forging ahead, since she was in danger of drifting down upon the captured submarine. In the excitement of the capture, no one on board noticed two grotesquely garbed men on the *Hoorn* whose antics resembled those of a pair of demented creatures; nor was the presence of a couple of dejected German lieutenants and five seamen, stranded on board the Dutchman, observed, as the Huns frantically besought the obdurate skipper of the *Hoorn* to steam as hard as he could towards the Dutch coast.

It was Vernon Haye's duty to take the cutter and board the prize. It was a hazardous piece of work, for the sea was now fairly high, and breaking under the effect of tide against wind; but, with the exception of a broken top-strake, the boat managed to lie sufficiently close alongside the submarine to enable the midshipman and five seamen to board.

Already the German crew were below. Hatches were lowered and secured, with the exception of the one in the after side of the conning-tower. This could be left open without fear of the submarine being swamped, while, to prevent the captured crew closing it and making an attempt to dive, the steel cover was removed from its hinges and secured on deck. The Black Cross flag was hauled down and rehoisted under the White Ensign, and preparations were made to take the

prize in tow.

It was some time before a grass rope, to which a stout wire hawser was bent, could be veered from the *Capella's* quarter and taken on board the submarine, but eventually the hawser was made fast.

"Now, sir," said Vernon, addressing the German Kapitän. "Will you please step into that boat? Where are the other officers?"

"In that ship," replied the Hun sullenly, as he pointed towards the *Hoorn*. "They will not welcome you, but there are others who will."

Not knowing what the German meant, Vernon indicated that he should get on board the cutter.

"There are two German officers on board that vessel, sir," reported the midshipman, as the boat came alongside the *Capella*. "Am I to bring them off?"

Captain Syllenger hesitated before replying. It was a knotty problem. To remove by force the subjects of a hostile nation from a neutral ship was contrary to international law. However much the Germans violated the "right of search", it was not Great Britain's policy to engage upon reprisals. Holland, although a third-rate Power, had to be treated with due courtesy.

"It's all the same in the long run," replied Captain Syllenger. "Board that vessel, Mr. Haye, and see what those fellows are doing there. If the Dutch skipper objects to their presence on his hooker, then bundle them into the boat. If, on the other hand, he protests against their removal, let them remain. They will be collared as soon as the ship enters our three-mile limit."

The *Hoorn* had once more come to a dead stop, at two cables' length from the British patrol-vessel.

As the *Capella's* cutter came alongside, Vernon agilely scrambled up the "monkey ladder" and gained the deck.

"Hulloa, old man!" exclaimed a well-known voice.

Vernon looked at the speaker. He knew the voice, but for a moment he failed to recognize in the oddly garbed youth his chum Ross Trefusis. Then he grinned broadly.

"My word!" he exclaimed. "You do cut a pretty figure."

Had they been of any nationality but British, the lads would have fallen on each other's necks and perhaps kissed each other. Instead, they stood a yard apart and laughed—but their mutual joy was none the less genuine.

"So you've come to fetch the German Leutnant and his boat's crew," said Ross, after Haye had been introduced to the Flight-Sub. "He's somewhere below. You'll recognize him right enough."

"Eh?" asked Vernon incredulously.

"Rather!" declared Ross emphatically. "You'd never guess. It's our old pal, Hermann Rix, late of U75. No wonder he's tearing his hair, for he must have broken his parole. He knew me directly he came over the side, and didn't forget to rub it in. You should have seen his face when, in the midst of his beastly gibes, the old *Capella* came snorting up."

With Jan acting as interpreter, Vernon put his case before the Dutch skipper, who seemed only too delighted at the way events had turned. His satisfaction at getting rid of his Hunnish visitors was evident, in spite of the stolidity of his manners.

"I want no pirates on board the *Hoorn*," he said. "Take them and welcome!"

While the Flight-Sub and Ross were "squaring up" with the good-hearted Jan, Vernon rounded up Ober-leutnant Rix and his boat's crew. Finding that their protests to the Dutch skipper were of no avail, they sullenly gave in.

"Look here," said Ross, taking his chum aside. "I don't want to crow over that fellow. It isn't cricket. You might take him to the *Capella* and come back for us. You'll have a pretty good load as it is."

"Two British officers, escaped from an internment camp, on board the *Hoorn*, sir," reported Vernon, as he delivered his cargo of German prisoners on board the *Capella*. "They would like to be taken off."

"Carry on, then," replied Captain Syllenger.

As the cutter returned from her second trip to the *Hoorn*, the *Capella's* crew awaited with undisguised curiosity the arrival of the men who had contrived to escape from irksome detention



in a neutral country.

Presently Shrap, who was sitting up on the quarterdeck, gave a bark of delight.

"Good old Shrap!" said Ross. "He knew me in spite of my rig-out."

"Blow me, if it ain't Mr. Trefusis!" exclaimed one of the men.

The next instant the first of three hearty cheers burst from the throats of the crew, with whom Ross was a great favourite. The Dutchmen, too, joined in, to the accompaniment of a prolonged blast upon the *Hoorn's* siren as she resumed her interrupted voyage.

"It's like being home again," declared Ross, after Captain Syllenger and the other officers had congratulated him. "But, I say, can anyone lend me a decent suit of togs?"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### Bound for the Baltic

A fortnight had elapsed since the day on which H.M.S. *Capella* towed the captured unterseeboot into Harwich harbour. Since then she had been attached to a base on the East coast of Scotland, her sphere of usefulness in the English Channel being a thing of the past.

The German blockade had fizzled out like a damp squib. Absolutely afraid to risk the remaining boats in operations that would certainly end in their being unceremoniously conveyed to Davy Jones's locker, the German Admiralty had dispatched them to the Mediterranean, where, under the Austrian flag, they attempted, at first with a certain degree of success, to terrorize merchantmen by their "frightfulness".

So the *Capella* had been ordered to Cromarty Firth, pending the completion of arrangements for sending a fleet of swift destroyers and patrol-boats to operate in conjunction with the British submarines in the Baltic.

Almost the first duty Ross had to undertake upon arrival was to draw money for the ship's company from the Paymaster's office at Invergordon.

Accompanied by six seamen, wearing their side-arms and carrying three canvas bags, the midshipman landed, and proceeded to the office. Leaving the escort "standing easy", Ross entered the building and found himself confronted by a door on which was painted the words, "Accountant Officer". Underneath was a piece of cardboard on which was written: "Don't knock—walk in".

The midshipman accepted the invitation and entered. It was a large room. Against one wall were three knee-hole desks, at which were seated naval "writers"—petty officers detached for clerical work. Two more were bending over a large tray, studiously engaged in "putting the money up", or placing wages in the compartments of the tray in order to facilitate the forthcoming payment to the civilian workers attached to the establishment. At a large desk was an officer, with his head almost touching a litter of papers. His back was turned, but Ross could see by the gold-and-white band that he was an Assistant Paymaster.

Hearing footsteps behind him, the A.P. broke into a torrent of abuse:

"Of all the scatter-brained idiots that act the giddy goat, this strafed lunatic takes the proverbial ship's biscuit!" he exclaimed. "Just look here, Carruthers; did you ever see such a piece of arrant tomfoolery——"

He turned his head, and saw it was not Carruthers.

"Sorry," he said apologetically. "Thought it was someone else. You must have imagined that I was off my head. It's a wonder I'm not. Look at this: here am I up to my eyes in work, and I get this sort of thing fired at me."

Ross looked at the tendered document. It was headed: "Queries in the Store Ledger", and the gem to which the harassed A.P. had referred was as follows:—

"4 oz. tin-tacks. Please say if these are synonymous with 'tacks tinned'."

The midshipman laughed. The A.P. glared.

"Some rotten idiot drawing five hundred a year evidently doesn't realize it's war-time," he growled. "Now, what can I do for you?"

At length the midshipman received the necessary coin. He was about to leave the officer when he found himself face to face with John Barry, now a Lieutenant-Commander, R.N.R.

"Bless my soul, Trefusis!" exclaimed Barry cordially. "I am glad to see you. I heard the new *Capella* was ordered round. How's everyone? Thanks, I'm top-hole. In a deuce of a hurry! Look here, come on board and see me to-night. The *Hunbilker* is lying off Cromarty. Can you manage it?"

"I think so," replied Ross.

"Very good; bring Hays with you. I'll send a boat at seven bells."

Captain Syllenger readily gave the midshipmen permission.

"It looks as if it might blow a bit before very long," he added. "If so, remain on board until morning. It's no joke making a five-mile trip in a steamboat on a pitch-dark night with a sea running."

The lads were delighted at the prospect of the visit. They were both awfully keen on John Barry; besides, they were rather anxious to see what sort of command he had. The ship's name was enough to excite their curiosity. She had evidently arrived later than the *Capella*, for there was no sign of a craft bearing that name when the patrol-vessel passed Cromarty on the previous afternoon.

Punctually at seven bells a grey motor-boat dashed up alongside the *Capella's* gangway. Shrap, whose instinct told him that his young master was leaving the ship, anticipated him by making a prodigious bound from the side into the waiting boat, alighting upon the shoulders of the coxswain, much to that worthy's astonishment.

"Never mind, sir," replied the man, in answer to Vernon's apologies. "I've a dog myself at home, very much like this one."

"Let him come with us," suggested Ross. "He'll kick up an awful row if you don't."

So Shrap, coiled up in the stern-sheets, had his way.

Having received the midshipmen, the boat turned and threshed its way in the teeth of a strong easterly breeze.

"Yes, sir, that's the *Hunbilker*," replied the coxswain in answer to Vernon's query, as a large grey shape loomed through the twilight.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Ross, absolutely taken aback. "She's a whopper. Old Barry's got a battleship. If she isn't a sister ship to the *Tremendous*, I'm a——"

Fortunately for him, Ross refrained from saying what he might be, for as things turned out he was wrong. The *Hunbilker* commenced her career as a 6000-ton merchantman, but no one would recognize her as such.

In all probability, but for the war, she would have ended her career as such. But the Navy required her for a certain purpose, and loyally the old tramp stepped into the breach. When, after a lapse of nine weeks, she emerged from the repairing basin, her disguise was complete. She looked to be what she was not. It is, therefore, no cause for wonderment that the two midshipmen were deceived by the enormous outlines of what appeared to be a formidable unit of the British Navy. The *Hunbilker* was, in short, a maritime ass in lion's skin, but her role was none the less a responsible one.

"I was rather doubtful whether you would turn up," remarked Barry. "The glass is dropping like billy-ho, and there's a brute of a sea tumbling in."

"We need not return to-night," announced Ross.

"That's capital," rejoined the Lieutenant-Commander. "I'll get the hands to hoist in the boat and trice the accommodation-ladder up. We roll like a barrel in a sea-way."

"You've got a big command this time, sir," said Vernon.

Barry smiled.

"Yes," he replied. "Plenty of room, but the lighting 'tween decks is rotten. All artificial, you know, except the little we get in through the quarter-deck skylights. I'm expecting young Jolly; he's the A. P. you saw ashore at Invergordon. Not a bad sort of youngster when he's clear of his work. Would you like to look round before we go below?"

"Of course the Germans know all about our dummy battleships," continued Barry as he led the way. "They jeered at the scheme in the papers as far back as last November twelvemonth."

"Then what's the object?" asked Ross.

"It muddles them up. They can't distinguish the *Tremendous* from this packet, especially in hazy weather. They've got to guess which is the substance and which is the shadow. From actual results we know now that the costly experiment has more than justified the expenditure."

The Lieutenant-Commander and his young guests continued to talk shop until it was time to go below. From that moment, conversation drifted into other channels of more or less personal interest.

Presently a loud whistle was heard from without.

"That's Jolly," declared the Lieutenant-Commander. "It's the last boat to-night, I fancy."

A few minutes later the A. P., having divested himself of his dripping oilies and sou'wester, was ushered into the cabin. Separated from his duties as Accountant Officer, he was much the same as other men. Ross could hardly believe that the jovial officer—for he did not now belie his name—was the same explosive man who had figuratively lost his head over four ounces of "tacks tinned".

Dinner over, the four officers drew their chairs close to the fire and yarned incessantly. Even the laboured rolling of the ship, the howling of the wind overhead, and the *chouf chouf* of the waves as they slapped against the sides, failed to remind them that they were afloat and in an exposed anchorage.

"Heard from your sister recently?" enquired Barry, addressing the A. P. He tried to ask the question in a natural tone of voice, but the midshipmen were quick to perceive a deepening of the tan in the Lieutenant-Commander's weather-beaten face.

"Had a letter only this morning," replied Jolly; "a fairly long one, too. I suppose things have quieted down a bit after the rush. My sister's a double one, you know," he added, turning to Ross and his chum.

"A what?" asked Ross.

"She's my sister, and she's a nursing sister at a naval hospital," explained the A.P. "There's a very quaint little bit. I must read it to you."

He produced an envelope from his pocket.

"You remember Marjory May?" he read. "She's had her wish. She joined here as a probationer, on the day after that terrible destroyer affair. We had most of the cases. One of the patients was a stoker, who had been knocked about by a shell exploding in a bunker (whatever that is—it sounds like golf). Marjorie had her first task—to wash him before the doctor could operate. I went to see how she was progressing, and found the poor girl on the verge of tears. 'Oh, sister!' she exclaimed; 'I've been scrubbing him for ten minutes, and I can't get him clean!' It was rather dull in the ward, so I switched on the light. Then I saw the cause of Marjory's distress. The poor stoker was a half-caste."

"By Jove!" ejaculated the A.P. as a particularly savage gust laid the ship well over. "It isn't half blowing!"

"Yes, my festive friend," agreed Barry; "it is! Fortunately you are not due back to-night. If you were it wouldn't signify, for I wouldn't order a boat away on a night like this. To-morrow, if it hasn't moderated—and the worst is yet to come—we'll weigh and stand up the Firth into smoother water."

There was a pause in the conversation. The din without was now terrific. One of the worst of the winter gales was approaching its climax—a furious nor'easter.

"Come in!" shouted Barry as a knock was heard at the cabin door.

"Wireless message, sir," announced one of the ship's boys.

"Very good," replied the Lieutenant-Commander. Then, after the messenger had backed out, he started to his feet.

"I say, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish: 'Flag to *Hunbilker*. Proceed to sea at once. Rendezvous Lat. 5° E., Long. 57° 30' N.' That means, whether you like it or whether you don't, you're bound for the Baltic."

## The Affair off Kiel

Clad in their oilskins over their greatcoats, the two midshipmen accompanied Barry to the bridge. The A. P., on second thoughts, decided to remain below. He had a rooted objection to getting his glasses smothered in spray if it could be avoided.

Steam had been raised a week ago, when the *Hunbilker* left Newcastle for Cromarty, so there was no delay on that account. Already the steam capstan was clanking dolorously as fathom after fathom of chain crept with seeming reluctance through the hawse-pipe.

It was a night. Towering seas, sweeping in from the exposed Moray Firth, surged madly into the more sheltered inlet where the dummy battleship strained at her cable. The air was thick with sleet. Overhead, black clouds scudded rapidly across the moon.

Even though the ship was partly under the lee of the projecting ground, the midshipmen knew that it would be hopeless to attempt to lower a boat. For good or ill they were bound to remain on board.

"Suppose it's all right," remarked Ross. "We may get a chance of doing something, far more so than if we were on board the *Capella*, now this submarine blockade fiasco is finished. At any rate it's not our fault we're here."

"But our good fortune," added Vernon. "Evidently there's a big affair coming off, though I can't quite see what this vessel's going to do in it."

For fifteen hours of darkness the *Hunbilker* plodded steadily onwards. No lights were shown, yet it was a known fact that at least thirty vessels of various types were converging upon the rendezvous.

Captain Barry never once quitted the bridge. Although his lofty post was constantly deluged by clouds of icy spray, and the weather side of the bridge-rail canvas was inches deep in sleet, he braved the elements through watch and watch, snatching a hasty meal of cocoa (which was cold by the time it reached him) and biscuits under the lee of the chart-house.

Day dawned at last. Ross and Vernon, who had gone below to snatch a few hours' sleep, came on deck to find the *Hunbilker* at the rendezvous. She lay in the midst of a fleet. There were the great battle-cruisers, Dreadnoughts and their replicas, light cruisers, and a galaxy of torpedo-boats—the latter swept from stem to stern by the waves.

Without any appreciable weakening of the Grand Fleet, this maritime force had been assembled for particular service—presumably in the Baltic, although no orders to that effect had yet been received.

All that short January day the fleet steamed slowly eastward, while signal flags fluttered incessantly. No hostile submarine put in an appearance. Either the Germans feared the swift destroyers that encircled the large vessels, or else they were in ignorance of the presence of the British within four hours' steaming of their shores.

It was not until night that the *Hunbilker* received her orders. She had to proceed in advance of the destroyers, and under cover of darkness pass through the Great Belt. Having done so, she was to be run aground on a shoal between the Danish island of Laaland and the Prussian island of Fehmern, the latter being within forty miles of the stronghold of the German Navy at Kiel.

Then she was to await developments. If attacked by submarines, the British destroyers would dash in; but what the British Admiral fondly hoped was that the hostile battleships or armoured cruisers would not be able to resist the temptation of sallying forth from Kiel to give the supposed Dreadnought her *coup de grâce*. In this case our submarines would "chip in", and possibly the battle-cruisers might score with their deadly and accurate long-range salvos.

"It's not so risky as it looks," commented Barry as he explained the tactics to the midshipmen. "You see, they can torpedo us as much as they like, and blow the dummy sides of the ship to bits piecemeal. We can't sink, since we'll be hard aground. We can't take fire—at least, it would be quite a job to get any part of her to burn without being able to keep the flames under control. Gunnery, of course, puts a different aspect on the subject. If the enemy start shelling us with their heavy guns, then the sooner we abandon ship and clear out the better, and leave our big cruisers to mop up the Huns."

Grey dawn was breaking when the *Hunbilker*, having made the passage through the Great Belt, ran gently aground at the spot indicated in the Admiral's orders. Away in the sou'west, a glare in the sky that was rapidly fading with the growing morn indicated the search-lights of the Kiel defences. Eastwards, two huge grey shapes loomed ghost-like in the half-light. Whether they were British cruisers or decoys, or even German battleships, Ross could not determine.

The *Hunbilker* lay with a slight list to starboard. All around her the sea was covered with drifting ice. An utter stillness brooded over everything. The silence was in keeping with the scene of desolation.

Suddenly the deafening blast of the *Hunbilker's* siren rent the air. It was the prearranged signal that she was in readiness; it was also her challenge to the Kiel-tied German fleet.

Ten minutes later a lurid flash, followed by a dull booming noise, came from the nearest of the two vessels Ross had previously noticed.

"Either mine or torpedo," remarked Barry casually. "It doesn't signify. They won't sink her in a hurry."

"What is she, sir?" asked Vernon.

"Our opposite number, the *Snark*," replied the Lieutenant-Commander. "See, she's steaming northwards, without any apparent injury. It will be our turn before very long."

At frequent intervals the siren shrieked, as if calling to the rest of the squadron for assistance. Then out of the rising mist, for with the break of day a thin pall of vapour rose from the ice-flecked water, leapt two German torpedo-boats.

"Port side, all hands!" roared Barry.

Officers and crew put the greatest possible distance between them and the side of the ship exposed to the hostile craft. Without slackening speed, the torpedo-boats described a sharp curve. Their officers must have wondered why they were not greeted by the stranded battleship's quick-firers. As they turned, two gleaming objects flopped ungracefully from their decks and disappeared with a splash beneath the surface. Each boat had fired a torpedo from her broadside tubes.

From the place where the midshipmen stood, they were not able to follow the track of the formidable missiles; but they had not long to wait. Both torpedoes struck almost simultaneously—one abreast of the for'ard dummy turret, the other fifty feet farther aft.

High in the air rose a column of water mingled with fragments of iron plating; while in their place of hiding the two lads were smothered with cork-dust and blackened cotton that had been blown from the space betwixt the outer and inner hulls.

"It's lucky for us that they didn't use their quick-firers," remarked Barry. "They would have pulverized us before our destroyers romped up. By Jove, Haye, that dog of yours looks as though he likes it! Hulloo! There you are!"

The Lieutenant-Commander pointed to the southward. A rift in the mist disclosed a two-masted, two-funnelled armoured cruiser about two miles off.

"The *Prinz Heinrich* or the *Fürst Bismarck*," declared Barry. "We've turned 'em out. Hope to goodness our little lot will be in time to snap them up. Unless I'm much mistaken, there are two more astern of her."

Almost as he spoke, a spurt of flame rent the dull sky. Then, to the accompaniment of a vivid flash and an ear-splitting detonation, a 5.9-inch shell burst against the for'ard dummy turret of the *Hunbilker*.

When the smoke had cleared away, guns, turret, and conning-tower, together with a portion of the bridge, had vanished.

"All hands abandon ship!" ordered Barry, as a salvo of light projectiles flew round, over, and through the decoy.

It was quite time. Several men had been hit, since there was nothing to afford complete protection from the hail of shells. The difficulty was to find a boat that was seaworthy, since these suffered almost at once from the flying fragments of metal.

"Hurrah, sir!" shouted one of the men. "There are our destroyers."

He was right. Seven British destroyers were tearing through the water, intent upon giving the Germans the punishment that they had boasted to inflict upon the strafed Englishmen—a hussar stroke.

Instantly the galling fire ceased. The German cruiser had all her work cut out to endeavour to beat off her wasp-like antagonists.

The *Hunbilker* was doomed. In spite of elaborate precautions against fire, she was burning furiously. Her fo'c'sle was a mass of flames, generated by the intense heat of the first shell that had struck her. Smaller fires, too, had started in other parts of the ship.

But help was at hand. One of the covering destroyers had witnessed her plight. Adroitly manoeuvring, she came right alongside the burning ship.

"Jump, men!" shouted Barry.

There was no time to be lost. The danger of the flames communicating with the shells and war-heads on the destroyer's deck was to be taken into consideration.

"Come on, old man!" exclaimed Ross, as his chum looked anxiously about him.

"Where's Shrap?" asked Vernon. "He was here a minute ago."

In the confusion, occasioned by the rush of men to leap upon the destroyer, the dog had vanished.

Without a word Vernon ran towards the companion leading to the half-deck. Above the roar of the flames and the hissing of steam, he had heard the well-known bark of his pet.

"Silly ass!" muttered Ross; but he, too, followed his chum.

Wreaths of thin smoke were issuing from the companion as Ross gained the head of the ladder. Putting his muffler round his mouth, he groped his way down. 'Tween decks the air was full of smoke. He could hear Shrap's insistent bark, and Vernon's voice as, amidst fits of coughing, he called to his canine companion.

"Whatever is the matter with the brute?" thought Ross, as he fought his way along the half-deck.

A gaping hole in the ship's side admitted sufficient light to enable him to discern his comrade backing from one of the cabins. Shrap was preceding him, while Vernon was dragging something limp and heavy. It was the body of the luckless A. P.

Without a word, for the atmosphere was hot and choky, Ross bore a hand. Stumbling and slipping, the two lads bore their burden to the companion, and by dint of much exertion carried Jolly on deck.

"Is he dead?" asked Ross, after he had refilled his lungs with less smoke-laden air.

"I don't think so," said Vernon. "It was good old Shrap that found him."

The A. P. was below when the salvo from the German cruiser struck the ship. He had gone to the cabin temporarily allotted to him to obtain some small but cherished belonging. A fragment from one of the shells had inflicted a nasty scalp wound, stretching him senseless upon the floor.

Had it not been for the sheep-dog, whose sagacity made him recognize that Jolly was a friend of his master's, the A. P. would have ended his career in the burning hull of the *Hunbilker*.

"Hurry up!" exclaimed Ross. "Let's get him aboard the destroyer."

Between them they carried the insensible officer across the quarter-deck, but as they reached the side abreast the wreckage of the superstructure they came to an abrupt halt.

The destroyer had sheered off and was out of sight.

"Now what's to be done?" asked Vernon, aghast at the latest turn of fortune.

They laid the A. P. on the deck and looked over the side. Still made fast to the falls was a whaler, with her keel ten feet above water. When the order had been given to abandon ship, the boat had been lowered, but the appearance of the destroyer had done away with the necessity of having to make use of her.

"Lower away!" ordered Ross.

Checking the descent by taking a turn round the cleats, the lads allowed the whaler to reach the water. To their satisfaction they found that she leaked but very little. Oars and crutches were already on board, together with mast and sail.

"Down you get," said Ross. "Let go the after disengaging gear, then stand by. I'll let Jolly down to you."

Vernon quickly swarmed down the falls, while his chum carried the A.P. to the now empty davit. Taking a few turns with his strong muffler round the chest of the unconscious man, Ross engaged the hook of the lower block, and slowly lowered him into Vernon's arms. Shrap followed in a similar manner, since the drop was too great for him to leap without risk of limb. Then Ross climbed down and gained the boat. He was not a minute too soon, for the flames were drawing nearer and the heat was becoming almost unbearable.

Placing Jolly in the stern-sheets, the lads stepped the mast and hoisted sail. Nothing else was in sight, although the rumble of heavy firing was still audible.

"I'll steer north," declared Ross, who had taken the helm, while Vernon attended to the A.P.'s ugly wound. "If we are not picked up by one of our own boats, we are almost bound to hit one of the Danish islands."

There was but little wind. What there was, blew from a couple of points abaft the beam, so that the little craft was able to lie comfortably upon her course.

At length Jolly opened his eyes. Somewhat to his companions' amusement his first words were:

"Dash it all! Where did I leave my glasses? Hulloo! I've been plugged. Where am I?"

He attempted to sit up, but promptly subsided upon the gratings in the stern-sheets, and in a very short time he began to talk incoherently, and finally dropped off into a fitful slumber.

The fog had now increased in density, so that it was no longer possible to see more than a hundred yards ahead. Several vessels moving at high speed passed within hailing distance, but no reply came to the lads' shouts.

"There's a hail!" exclaimed Vernon.

Again came the sound of a human voice. It was a call for aid, and was uttered in German.

"Steady!" cautioned Vernon, as Ross put the helm down. "We don't want to run alongside a cargo of Huns."

"There's only one, I should imagine," replied his chum. "At any rate we'll have a look. If there are too many, we'll sheer off."

Guided by the repeated calls for assistance, the midshipmen came in sight of a disabled boat. It had been holed, and was kept afloat only by some of its air-tanks which had escaped damage. The gunwales, jagged by shell-fire, were showing only a few inches above the water. The stern was almost awash, but the bows rose sufficiently high for the forefoot to be seen. Crouching on the for'ard thwart was a German officer. He was bareheaded. The collar of his greatcoat was turned up. His face was blanched by the intense cold. As the whaler approached and he saw that it was a British one, he held up his hands in token of surrender.

Dropping to leeward, Ross luffed smartly. The whaler lost way almost alongside the waterlogged boat.

Awkwardly the German clambered over the gunwale, for his limbs were numbed. Then, as soon as he was safely on board, he drew a revolver from the pocket of his greatcoat and fired twice in quick succession.

Ross saw his chum throw up his arms and pitch across the centre thwart. The next instant he felt a stinging pain in his shoulder, as if it were pierced by a red-hot needle.

"The brute has plugged me!" was the thought that flashed through his mind, as he subsided heavily upon the grating by the side of the A. P.

He was still conscious, although everything seemed misty. Up to a certain point he remembered exactly what happened, for with a sudden spring Shrap flew at the treacherous Teuton's throat.

Again and again the German fired, wildly and in the air, for the sheep-dog had him fixed in his unyielding jaws, shaking the fellow like a rat. Unable to move a limb, Ross remained conscious until the issue was decided and victory rested with the devoted Shrap; then his head dropped upon his chest and everything became a blank.

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Ross Trefusis recovered consciousness to find himself in hospital on the East coast. In the next cot was Jolly, cutting a sorry figure with his head swathed in surgical bandages. Vernon was in an adjoining ward, making a promising recovery from the wound caused by the cowardly German's bullet that had passed between his ribs, fortunately just missing his lungs.

It was not until a week later that Ross heard of the manner of his rescue. The whaler had been picked up by a destroyer. In it they found the three wounded British officers, and a dead German with his throat fearfully lacerated. Not only had Shrap saved the situation, but he had helped still further to save his master's life, for it was owing to the warmth of the dog's body that Vernon was saved from death by exposure.

One of the first of visitors to Ross's bedside was John Barry, now Commander Barry, R.N.R., D.S.O.

"And how did the scrap come off?" asked Ross.

"Fairly well," replied the Commander. "We bagged a cruiser and a couple of destroyers. The old *Hunbilker* justified her existence, you see."

"I'm afraid Hays and I are out of the running," remarked Ross disconsolately.

"Not a bit of it," replied Barry in his breezy way. "Not a bit of it. You'll both be as fit as fiddles

in a couple of months. The Navy's pushing on with the job all right, Ross, but it's slow and sure. You'll be at it again long before the end."

Ross gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"Sounds promising, sir, doesn't it?" he exclaimed.

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