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Author: Wolston B. C. W. Forester

Editor: Elspeth Lascelles Forester

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FROM SNOTTY TO SUB.

BY

THE AUTHORS OF "FROM DARTMOUTH TO THE DARDANELLES"

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

London: William Heinemann, 1918

FOREWORD

[vii]

IN the writing of this little book so many difficulties have arisen that, but for the repeated requests of a generous public for further news of the Midshipman whose earlier adventures are recorded in "From Dartmouth to the Dardanelles," we had been tempted to defer publication until the advent of that longed-for time which "Tommy" speaks of as "Good old après la guerre!"

Naval officers on active service are not allowed to keep diaries, and this narrative has been compiled solely from rough notes of conversations with my son, hurriedly set down on the rare occasions during the last two and a half years when we have had the good fortune to be together. Much of the material eventually available we have omitted from motives of discretion. Still more has been eliminated by drastic but absolutely necessary censorship. What remains makes but a slender volume. Nevertheless I trust it will prove not wholly uninteresting to all those unknown friends in England, Australia, India, New Zealand, and last, but by no means least, the United States of America, who have taken the trouble to write me such exceedingly kind letters in respect of the former book. Let me here gratefully assure them that their sympathy and the generous impulse which prompted its expression has done *much* to help me through years naturally heavy-laden with anxiety and suspense.

[viii]

Thanks, above all, to my American correspondents: theirs was a difficult and delicate position in view of the loyalty they owed to their country's neutrality; but while yet certain issues were in doubt their letters seemed to whisper: "Only wait—trust us—we shall yet be with you in deed as we are with you in heart."

To-day that prophecy is gloriously fulfilled. Sacrifice and sacrament are consummated: the Stars and Stripes are unfurled in the cause of true liberty, and Old Glory waves side by side with the banners of the Allies! Who dares doubt the end?

[ix]

A word of explanation as to the title of the book may be desired by readers unacquainted with naval slang. "Snotty" is a dreadful word of, I am sure, libellous origin! But it is pure navalese. "Middy" is not a Service term at all, and the curly-haired "Middy" so dear to writers of fiction and comic opera has no existence in fact—he is a regular "Mrs. Harris"!

For all their youth, our Snotties are men in the best sense of the word, and right loyally do they cling to every tradition—written or unwritten—of that splendid Service to which it is their pride and privilege to belong.

HIS MOTHER

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CHAPTER I

[xii]

OF A PICNIC AND A TRAGEDY

[1]

ON August 26, 1915, I went up to the Admiralty for medical survey, was passed fit for active service, and on September 1 I received my appointment to H.M.S. *C—*, a super-Dreadnought in the Grand Fleet. Although I knew her to be a very fine ship, I was nevertheless disappointed, as I had been hoping to again see service in a T.B.D.—the few weeks I had spent in one of those craft in the Dardanelles after my last ship was sunk having convinced

me that the life was far freer and more exciting than that in a big ship.

However, the Powers had decreed otherwise, and so on September 2 I left home and the same night went straight through from King's Cross to Inverness. Arrived in that town I duly reported myself to the Senior Naval Officer at the Admiralty Office, and was told to return at 9 A.M. the next morning. I thereupon took the first train I could catch to Dingwall, and went up to call upon some friends at Tulloch. I had the good luck to find them at home, and they very kindly invited me to stay the night and so saved me from a dull evening alone at an hotel. I spent a very cheery time with Mr. and Mrs. D—, and the next morning got up at 7 A.M., had an early breakfast, and motored down to the station and caught the 7.35 train back to Inverness. On my reporting at 9 o'clock to the S.N.O. he gave me a railway pass to —, and told me to proceed thither by the 11.15. The name of my destination it would not, at this time, be permissible for me to mention. Enough that in company with some other N.O.'s with whom I had travelled I eventually reached it, and the mail steamer took us alongside H.M.S. —, the Fleet mail ship, where we waited until one by one my fellow-travellers were taken off by various odd craft—varying from drifters to picket-boats—which conveyed them to their respective ships. I was the last left aboard the — and lunched there—and a very nasty lunch it was too! At about 2.39 a drifter came alongside to fetch the mails for the First Battle Squadron, and having transferred myself and gear to her she took me to H.M.S. —, alongside which ship she remained for a good half-hour before a picket-boat from my new ship turned up, called for her mail, and conveyed me to my final destination. [2]

On my arrival I found coaling just finished and washing down still in progress. On my way forward to report to the officer of the watch I met some Snotties just going ashore, and among their number I was glad to recognize several of my old term mates at Osborne and Dartmouth, with whom I exchanged greetings. After I had duly reported myself, the Snotty of the watch showed me the way down to the gunroom, where he left me to make the acquaintance of some half-dozen of my new messmates, who, not being on duty, were variously occupied in "caulking" (a naval slang term for dozing), reading, writing letters, etc. [3]

The — boasts a fairly large and roomy gunroom. Down one side of it is the long narrow mess-table covered with a red and black cloth, and on the left centre a stove with an open fireplace, before which is placed a settee sacred to the use of the senior members of the mess, and woe betide the presumptuous junior who ventures to make use of it without express permission. True, it is a battered piece of furniture, having suffered severely in many a guest-night "rag," and its springs recall the story of the British matron who, after seating herself majestically in a Paris fiacre, jumped up with the agonized cry: "Cochon! Cochon! Arrêté! Arrêté! Sortez-moi! Vos printemps sont cassé!" Nevertheless it is symbolical of the privileges of seniority, and as such to be regarded and treated with respect. Almost equally sacrosanct are the two deep arm-chairs flanking the fireplace; the remainder of the furniture consists of a motley collection of other chairs, a sideboard in which the Mids keep their private stores of jam, potted meat, etc., some hanging bookcases, and a funny little old piano. The whole is lighted by three large scuttles or port-holes. [4]

Presently, his watch over, the Senior Midshipman came down again and I went with him to see the Commander—commonly known as "The Bloke." After asking me a few questions about my previous experiences, he took me to see the Captain, who received me very kindly and also inquired about my active service adventures. These interviews over, I returned to the gunroom, where I was told the name of my servant, and how to get hold of him when wanted. I was given the usual twenty-four hours in which to "sling my hammock," or, in other words, settle down to the customary routine, and I was not expected to enter on my new duties until the following day. So I sent for the bandsman who had been told off to valet me and arranged with him where my gear, etc., should be stowed. Tea in the gunroom followed, after which the Senior Snotty showed me round the ship. [5]

That night I slept with five others in the Chief of Staff's cabin, which, not being in use at the moment, had been allotted to us as a school place and sleeping apartment.

The next morning dawned calm and misty. The others went up at 6.45 to turret drill in accordance with usual routine, but as I was still "slinging my hammock" I was not required to turn out until 7, when I repaired to the bathroom, had a bath, dressed, and subsequently joined my messmates at breakfast. I may here admit that I felt a bit "out of it" at first, as most of the mess had been working together for the best part of a year, and the position of a newly joined Snotty is not unlike that of a new boy at school. However, I soon settled down and adapted myself to the rigid discipline prevailing.

After breakfast we got under way and steamed over to the northern shore to carry out some gunnery tests.

In the afternoon I went ashore with some of the others and visited the little town of —, which is the only approach to civilization of which this wild and remote spot can boast. [6]

An account of the following weeks' routine would be of little interest to any but Service readers, and the majority of these will be already but too intimately acquainted with the same. The monotony was pleasantly broken on the fourteenth, on which day the Captain gave a picnic to the gunroom. We all, with the exception of the Acting Sub-Lieutenant, who had to keep the afternoon watch, "cleaned" into picnic rig, which consisted of sea-boots, flannel trousers, sweaters, and various forms of weird and unorthodox headgear. ("Cleaning" is naval phraseology for shifting and is always used even when the said shift is into coaling rig.) Having supplied ourselves with [7]

large quantities of cigarettes and tobacco, as well as pistols and shot-guns, fishing tackle, etc., we embarked in the cutter, in which the hampers provided by the Captain had already been placed, and so, at about 1 P.M., set sail for a point on the shore previously decided upon. As soon as we were well clear of the ship, those who had fishing tackle put out their lines, while the rest settled down in the bottom of the boat, and pipes and cigarettes were soon in full blast. Several mackerel were caught on the way over, and half an hour after leaving the ship we grounded. Then every one jumped out, and we anchored the cutter in the shallow water by the shore. [8]

Scattering in various directions we ragged about until tea-time. Some tried their hand at tickling trout in a small stream; some bathed; others set up targets of bottles and practised shooting. When the time came to open the hampers it was found that Captain ——'s hospitality knew no bounds. They proved to contain sandwiches of every sort and description, also cakes, sardines, chocolates, and an unending variety of other delicacies, as well as some tins of superlatively good cigarettes such as rarely fall to the lot of the notoriously impecunious midshipman.... Such a blow-out was not conducive to any more active exercise, and most of us relapsed into the slumber of repletion. [9]

At 4.30 we began to pack up, and by 5 had collected all our gear into the cutter, weighed anchor, and set sail for the ship. More mackerel were caught on the way back, and we eventually drew alongside just as the Acting Sub. was setting off in the picket-boat with confidential papers for sundry ships in the Fleet.

We gave him a commiserating hail, for the wind had shifted to an evilly inspired quarter, and it looked like being rather a dirty night, and then we went light-heartedly below to have our baths and shift into proper uniform.... How little we dreamed then that the joyous memory of the Captain's picnic was destined to be linked for ever in our minds with the saddest of tragedies.... We never saw poor De B. again.... While he was away a heavy sea got up, and when the boat drew alongside again he was found to be missing. All the coxswain could tell was that half-way through the return trip and when about a mile and a half from our ship, he had come up to speak to him for a few minutes, and then, as he (the coxswain) supposed, returned to the stern-sheets. It can only be assumed that a sudden lurch of the boat caused him to miss his footing and so fall overboard. Of course in heavy sea-boots and overcoat he would have little chance in a roughish sea. It was pitch-dark, and no cry was heard, and the crew never even suspected that anything was wrong until the boat came alongside and it was found that he had disappeared. [10]

All our searchlights were immediately switched on, and we made a signal to the neighbouring cruisers, telling them to switch on theirs and sweep the sea all around. All boats were called away, and a minute search was instituted, but it was of no avail, and at midnight had to be reluctantly abandoned as hopeless. Next morning boats were sent out to sweep for his body and search the neighbouring shores; but no trace was discovered until a week later, when H.M.S. —— picked up his cap. [11]

The picket-boats, in which so much essential work is done, have neither stanchions nor rails, and the space between the top of the cabin and the side is so narrow that if there is a bit of a sea on the chance of such an accident as happened to poor De B. is obvious—though naturally the Service never gives it a thought—it is all in the day's or the night's work. But should these lines ever be read by his people, let them for their comfort remember that he died for England as surely as if he had passed in the crash and roar of battle ... and his shipmates hold him for all time in honoured and regretful memory....

"On him be the Peace and the Blessing; for he was great-hearted."

CHAPTER II OF A HOSPITAL SHIP AND SICK LEAVE [12]

THREE days after that picnic and its sad ending we weighed and returned to the winter anchorage. Of the weeks that followed there is little to tell, as of the few incidents which broke the monotony of ordinary routine discretion forbids mention.

Some time in November we proceeded to ——, which same, although a very one-horse place in ordinary circumstances, was a step beyond the more northerly district in point of civilization. But we had only been there about two weeks when I was knocked out by a chill which refused to yield to ordinary remedies. My previous winter, spent mainly in tropical climes, had rather unfitted me for the semi-arctic conditions obtaining in the North Sea. [13]

After a couple of days spent in the dignified seclusion of a cabin, the Fleet Surgeon packed me off to the hospital ship *China*. This was real jam, for I was not so ill but that I was able to highly appreciate the comfort and luxury provided by a paternal Government for the sick N.O. Moreover, the Captain of the hospital ship proved to be an old acquaintance who had often entertained me and my former messmates on his ship when she and the *Goliath* were lying together at Mombasa a year before. I was put into the officers' ward, which was empty at this time, and the nurses were most awfully kind and attentive. One does appreciate feminine ministrations after living for so long in the exclusive society of the mere man.

It was with great glee that from my luxurious idleness I watched the Fleet depart once more for

the northern base, hugging the knowledge that the medical powers had decreed that I was to go south in a few days' time. [14]

On December 2 I said "good-bye" to the staff of the *China* and embarked in a drifter for the beach. On arrival I walked to the station and there waited for the ambulance with the doctor and the other patients. When they turned up, I strolled up and down with Dr. — for about three-quarters of an hour until the hospital train came in. This train was magnificently appointed, with big coaches—rather like Pullman-cars, fitted up with swinging cots. The officers' sleeping compartment consisted of one of these cars divided by a curtain from the men's half, and containing about six cots. For some four hours—except when the two medical officers attached to the train staff came in to bear me company—I had this compartment to myself. When the train stopped at Queensferry I was joined by a Sub-Lieutenant R.N. and a Sub. of the R.N.R.—both "sitting cases," i.e. not very seriously ill. As soon as we got under way again, dinner was served, and about 9 P.M. we all turned in. Personally I slept very soundly, only waking up once at some station—York, I think—where a gunner who was a "stretcher case" was put aboard. [15]

At eight next morning we arrived in London, where we stopped for some hours, and from whence we proceeded to Chatham. Here a Lieut.-Commander—also a "sitting case"—was added to our party, and at four o'clock in the afternoon we started back to London again, and there we once more spent a long time waiting for—Heaven knows what! On the following day we arrived at Devonport, where the Lieut.-Commander left us. By this time the journey had begun to assume the vague irresponsibility of a dream, and, as in a dream, there seemed to be no reason why it should ever come to an end. We seemed destined to just go on—and on—and on—wandering around the various railway systems of England and Scotland, and stopping aimlessly for an indefinite period at whatever spot caught the engine-driver's errant fancy! But it really did not matter, for it was very warm and comfortable in the train, so—let the dream go on! [16]

However, it ended at Portsmouth at 6.30 P.M. on the third day of my journeying. Portsmouth was my final destination as well as that of all the other cases in the train. Large ambulance cars were in waiting, and these eventually deposited us at Haslar Hospital about seven o'clock. Here our first interview was with the matron, then we proceeded to the doctor on duty for the day, who took down particulars of our respective maladies. Dinner in the officers' mess followed, after which we again saw the matron, who then told us in which cabins we were billeted. Mine was situated in B Block, and a long way from the officers' mess, and so, as the R.N.R. Sub. who had been one of my fellow-travellers was also located in that block, as soon as I had settled my gear in my cabin I went along to his and smoked and chatted with him for about half an hour before turning in.

Next morning I had my breakfast in bed, and had to remain there until I had been visited by the doctor, after which I got up. By the time I was dressed my spirits had drooped to a very low ebb. The cabin was a most comfortless apartment, sparsely furnished and with its only window giving on to a gloomy enclosed courtyard where the rain pattered dismally down from a leaden square of sky. I felt as though I was in prison "doing time" for some sordid and wholly uninteresting crime. [17]

However, about four o'clock came a joyful surprise in the shape of a telegram from my mother, saying that she was coming over to see me and would arrive next day. On the moment depression vanished, for I felt certain that she would devise some means to relieve the tedium of my confinement. Sure enough, as soon as she arrived she interviewed the doctor and soon persuaded him that I was quite well enough to go home, and after she had signed the requisite form undertaking to be responsible for any further medical treatment I might require, she returned to Portsmouth, where I joined her on the following day. [18]

That night, December 8, we crossed over to our island, and I recollect a rather funny episode on that journey. Some swollen-headed Jack-in-office in the passport department at Southampton said he could not pass me because I had no document from the hospital authorities showing that I was on sick leave. The Lord only knows if the fool thought I was a deserter, or if he was merely a confirmed obstructionist making trouble for the fun of the thing. Anyway he was sullenly obstinate, entrenched in his "little brief authority," and declared that he could not and would not pass me! It looked like being a pretty muddle, for it was 10 P.M. and raining cats and dogs. Then mother came to the rescue with a perfectly gorgeous piece of "bluff." Declaring that she had not the smallest intention of remaining indefinitely at Southampton, or of going on without me, she calmly requested him to ring up the *Admiralty*, when she would get him orders from headquarters. He could not have looked more amazed if she had demanded a trunk call to Heaven. But she was as firm as if she knew she held a royal flush to his pair of knaves, and so he hurriedly climbed down, and said he would take the responsibility of passing me, and we proceeded in triumph aboard the L.S.W.R.'s steamer which was lying alongside the quay, and so reached home the next morning without further incident. [19]

I may here remark that I was perfectly certain that the man was wrong, for if any such document had been really required, the hospital authorities would have provided it. The Navy does not neglect detail.

I had been granted sick leave to extend over Christmas, which was a tremendous stroke of luck, but the time passed all too quickly, and on January 4, 1916, we went to London for my medical survey. I was passed fit on the 5th, and expected to have to rejoin at once. However, to my intense surprise and delight, I ran into one of our Snotties in Bond Street that afternoon, and he told me that our ship was in dock and they had all been granted ten days' leave, so I had that extra time in London, where we did some theatres and enjoyed ourselves royally. [20]

CHAPTER III

[21]

FOG

When the water's countenance
Blurs 'twixt glance and second glance;
When our tattered smokes forerun,
Ashen 'neath a silvered sun;
When the curtain of the haze
Shuts upon our helpless ways—
Hear the Channel Fleet at sea;
Libera nos Dominie.

When the treble thickness spread
Swallows up our next ahead;
When her siren's frightened whine
Shows her sheering out of line;
When, her passage undiscerned
We must turn where she has turned,
Hear the Channel Fleet at sea:
Libera nos Dominie.

KIPLING

IT was on January 15, 1916, that I finally rejoined my ship. She was then in floating dock at ——. That night the dock was flooded, and next morning we warped out and proceeded to our billet in the harbour. About a week later we left ——, and once more the northern mists closed down upon us. [22]

The deadly monotony of the work of the Grand Fleet will probably never be fully realized by any but those whose fate it was to wait day after day, and week after week, for the longed-for encounter with the enemy. Only that ever-present hope carried us through that dreary second winter of war. An occasional interval at sea for manoeuvres was the sole relief, and such was our cursedness that even these were greeted by most of us with moans and groans, for we were reduced to a state of irritability and boredom which only the prospect of "action" or "leave" could mitigate. Perhaps, however, to the non-Service reader, an account of one of these periodical trips may not be too uninteresting.

After a period of swinging at anchor at the northern base, we received the customary signals preparatory to going to sea, and about 6 P.M. on the same day we weighed and proceeded in the wake of the Second Battle Squadron. That particular month I had been detailed for a course of engineering instruction and consequently did not have to take any night watches—a stroke of luck since night watch in mid-winter in the North Sea is not a job to be coveted by even the most enthusiastic. The weather was quite calm and no change seemed imminent, although it is not really possible to tell in these latitudes what conditions may obtain from hour to hour. As a proof whereof, the next morning showed a rapidly falling barometer, accompanied by a rising sea, which increased to such an extent that it was not possible to carry out any exercises with the Fleet in the forenoon. However, we held on our course in hopes that the weather would mend, but by lunch-time the sea was running so high that we were forced to turn for home. The main deck was already six inches deep in water, in which floated the usual medley of debris: the gunroom skylight was leaking like a sieve; and even the engine-rooms and boiler-rooms held their unwelcome quota of sea water, which poured down the ventilating shafts. [23]

At one time the Flagship made a signal for all destroyers to close in on her, and of course a rumour started—as rumours will—that she had been mined or torpedoed. But it was happily a totally false alarm, and her signal was only a precautionary measure to enable the C.-in-C. to keep an eye on the small craft, which were making very heavy weather of it indeed. Even our 20,000-ton Dreadnought was creaking and groaning under the impact of the waves, and fenders and life-buoys had broken loose and were sweeping back and forth across the decks, and crashing against the turrets and superstructures. [24]

Suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon, a destroyer sighted a mine and hoisted Numeral I flag. (It must be understood that when signals such as these are mentioned, the numbers given are fictitious, as for obvious reasons we cannot give the correct hoists.) Now Numeral I pendant denotes a mine in sight, but Numeral I flag denotes "Flag officers have time for the next meal." ... Of course the signalman in his haste had muddled his flags, and had intended hoisting Numeral I pendant, but "Flags" (the Flag Lieutenant), seeing in the incident a momentary chance of lightening the prevailing boredom and gloom, at once asked the Admiral's permission to inquire sarcastically by signal whether the meal referred to was lunch or tea, and the destroyer's signalman, in obvious confusion, hauled down his signal and substituted the correct hoist. The C.-in-C. then detailed the light cruiser —— to go and sink the mine. It being now some distance astern, she turned 16 points to starboard and steamed towards it. We all watched for the explosion, and as time went on wondered why she had not opened fire. She seemed to be circling round it; but the mystery was explained when her searchlights flashed out the message: [25]

"Supposed mine is a Reindeer buoy." She was then ordered to resume station.

Trivial enough, I admit! But oh, you readers who imagine the sailor's life in war-time as one continuous round of blood-curdling excitement, try to realize something of its almost unmitigated dullness—a dullness so overwhelming that even such an incident as the above is welcomed as a slight relief. [26]

In the evening the violence of the storm abated, and when I woke the next morning there was scarcely any motion on the ship at all. When I went up on deck I found that there was a thick haze on the water which almost hid the ships on either side of us. By ten o'clock this fog had so increased in density that it completely blotted out our next ahead, and, to his great disgust, the Snotty of the watch was ordered forward to the fo'c'sle head to keep lookout. The fog continued to thicken until the bridge was scarcely visible from the eyes of the ship. (The eyes of the ship means right forward in the bow.) On all sides the sirens kept up a dismal wail of warning. Presently the Snotty of the watch noticed that we were passing along the bubbling wake of another ship which must have been perilously close, and shortly afterwards the stern of a destroyer loomed ahead and scarcely a hundred yards away. Through his megaphone the lookout reported: "Destroyer right ahead." We instantly slowed down and at the same moment the T.B.D., seeing her danger, put her helm hard over and rapidly drew away into the mist to starboard. [27]

The fog did not clear away until the afternoon, but we anchored at our base late that evening, and coaling was soon in progress.

Of all the dangers and inconveniences with which sailors have to contend, fog is perhaps the most trying and exasperating. I remember an occasion when Campbell and I were bidden to dine in H.M.S. —, and as "Torps" happened also to be dining out, though in another ship, we managed to get a steamboat to convey us to our respective destinations, but "The Bloke" could not give us one to bring us back. We therefore arranged with various other Snotties that a gunroom whaler's crew should come and pick us all up about 9.30. As we were the junior officers they called first at the ship where we had been dining, and came inboard for a few minutes for a drink and a cigarette. We eventually shoved off about 9.40, arriving alongside the ship which was entertaining "Torps" some five minutes later. As he was not quite ready we went inboard for more drinks and smokes. When we finally embarked for our own ship we found that a thick fog had come down. The inference that will here be drawn by the evil-minded, if logical, is incorrect! The fog in question was *not* in our heads, but very much upon the water! In a very few seconds H.M.S. — had vanished from our sight and we found ourselves shut in by a dense white wall, with nothing but the fog-bells to guide us. After pulling hard for what seemed like a considerable time we sighted a ship dimly outlined upon our starboard bow, but she proved to be not, as we had fondly expected, our happy home, but the hospitable vessel we had left ten minutes before. So we turned our boat round, carefully took our bearings, and set out anew. After another quarter of an hour or so we sighted H.M.S. —, but she was not our objective either; and so the game of blind man's buff went on until there really seemed no reason to suppose that we should ever succeed in finding our own ship. Finally, however, by dint of strenuous effort, sheer pertinacity, and a blind clutching to the skirts of happy chance, we made her at last, after more than an hour of heavy pulling. [28]

"Torps," in common gratitude, invited the weary crew into the wardroom and administered refreshment in various forms, after which we repaired to our own quarters and thankfully turned in. [29]

CHAPTER IV NAVAL THEATRICALS

 [30]

His Majesty's ship —, suddenly seized with the hospitable desire to entertain her sister ships, decided forthwith on theatricals. Nothing so banal as any already familiar piece by a "pukka" playwright was contemplated.... A combination of fertile naval brains produced the book of the words crammed with topical and cryptic allusions; the music was borrowed from the latest comic operas and revues, and the actors were recruited mainly from the ranks of junior officers. Then in due course the following signal appeared in our gunroom: "Captain and Officers of H.M.S. — request the pleasure of the company of Flag Officers, Captains, and Officers of the 4th B.S. at their Theatricals on board *Gourko* at 2000 (8 P.M.) to-night. Boats to be alongside at 2130 (11.30)." [31]

Gourko was the ship in which all such entertainments were held, and the above was the usual form of invitation issued to the Grand Fleet.

Accordingly at 7.45 that evening two "G's" sounded, indicating that our boat was ready alongside to take such of us as were off duty to the show in question. About a dozen were able to avail themselves of the invite. The night was cloudy and a stiff breeze was blowing when we embarked. It was not at all the sort of evening when dwellers on the "beach" would be tempted to set out in open picket-boats to witness an amateur theatrical performance, but from long experience the Navy is inured to climatic conditions which would prove decidedly damping to the enthusiasm of their brethren ashore. As Hamlet says: "The play's the thing"—and Gott strafe the weather!

In about five minutes we drew alongside the gangway of H.M.S. —, and having boarded her with due ceremony we were escorted down to her gunroom and there hospitably entertained with [32]

cigarettes and liquid refreshment until the time appointed for the fun to commence. Then we were piloted across to the *Gourko*, which was lying alongside. The forward hold of this ship serves as a theatre for the Fleet. A stage is erected at its after end, immediately in front of which are placed the arm-chairs sacred to Flag Officers and Captains. On the left is a small dais occupied by the band, and behind the arm-chairs are several tiers of very hard benches on which the less exalted ranks are accommodated.

When we arrived, the auditorium was already more than half filled with N.O.'s of varied ranks, and the atmosphere was thick with tobacco smoke. The band was playing selections from a well-known revue, and a confused buzz and drone of conversation greeted our entrance.

As soon as the Admirals and four-stripers (Captains) had taken their seats, the band stopped playing and the curtain went up revealing the stage occupied by an agitated Lieutenant (he was a Midshipman in real life) pacing up and down what apparently represented the smoking-room of a very second-rate hotel, and anathematizing the exploits of a German spy, who, it would seem, laboured under the appalling cognomen of Stinkenstein! [33]

Presently the Lieutenant was joined by his sweetheart—a lady designed to be beautiful—but the illusion was somewhat marred by the deep bass voice and blue shaven chin of the Snotty who had been cast for the part—presumably with more regard for his histrionic ability than for his physical fitness. In the best traditional stage manner the distracted lover confides his troubles to the sympathetic ear of the beauteous (?) maiden, with the additional information that he must shortly leave her and vanish once more behind the northern mists. Thereupon she informs him of her fixed determination to follow him, if needs be to the world's end—and in the meantime to obtain a position as V.A.D. in the officers' tea pavilion situated on one of the islands at the northern base! He greets this heroic resolve with a singular lack of enthusiasm, but the lady is not to be turned from her purpose, so they proceed to sing a highly sentimental duet, after which they leave the stage with arms lovingly intertwined. [34]

Enter from the wings a smartly dressed marine, who informs the audience that he is on ten days' leave—and then from the left centre advances a lady's maid. They, too, prove to be lovers and promptly fall into each other's embrace. More sentimental business follows, until they are driven from the stage by a number of sandwichmen, who sing an amusing part-song about "Jenks's Vegetable Compound." Enter their foreman, who hustles them off to work, and the marine and lady's maid reappear and resume their amatory intercourse. They are soon again disturbed, this time by the Lieutenant's fiancée, who is also the lady's maid's mistress. Covered with confusion, the marine endeavours to hide under a quite inadequate arm-chair, while the maid mendaciously explains that he is merely a man come to hang pictures. Seizing this clue, he proceeds to remove all the pictures from the walls with much zeal and clatter, and then exit. [35]

Now the lady confides to her maid her plan for keeping in touch with her lover, and invites her co-operation. The maid jumps at the idea, for is not the marine—by happy chance—in charge of those same ridiculous and preposterous tea-rooms! And the curtain falls on the first act.

After a short interval the stage is once more revealed, and now shows the aforesaid island at dawn. The tea-house is on the left, and in the foreground a group of pirates of the good old-fashioned melodramatic kind are lying noisily asleep. Their sentry goes around waking them by vigorous kicks. Then they breakfast on rum, and a heated argument takes place over the question of calling their formidable Chief. He, it appears, is afflicted in the morning hours with a shortness of temper highly dangerous to the health of any one to whose lot it falls to arouse him. Eventually one of them undertakes the job, and, having carefully removed a gigantic knobkerrie to a safe distance from his Chief's side, deals him a resounding smack on the most prominent part of his person. The pirate springs to his feet with a volley of strange oaths, kicks every one within reach, and shouts for his breakfast of rum. Refreshed and soothed thereby he calls for his Chief of Staff, Cuthbert Cut-throat, a lanky, pasty-faced villain, and together they go through a list of booty captured that month. This comprises many weird items, and its recital invokes roars of laughter from the audience. Then the pirate calls for his children, and there enter from the wings a Marine Lieutenant fearfully and wonderfully arrayed in a short, light blue pinafore, revealing bare and unmistakably masculine legs. This vision wears a tow-coloured wig and has its face heavily painted in imitation of a cheap doll. It is followed by an exceedingly small boy in a sailor suit, and also with bare legs, and we are given to understand that this is "her" twin brother. The Pirate Chief greets them with loud smacking kisses, but soon becoming bored with his prodigious offspring, he once more summons Cuthbert Cut-throat, and to him discourses in maudlin sentimentality of the virtues and graces of his last wife, whom he apparently murdered about a month before! Life without a wife he declares to be impossible, and announces his intention of filling the vacancy with the first likely looking "little bit of skirt" he comes across. Then the pirates strike camp, and disappear into a cave on the right of the stage. (No explanation forthcoming!) [36]

(Isn't it silly! But it amuses us vastly all the same!)

ACT III. *Same Scene*

Two naval Captains (Midshipmen in real life) are discovered seated at a table in front of the tea-house. From their conversation we gather that four important personages have arrived on a visit of inspection to the Fleet. They are the Rev. Reuben Reubenstein, and three Eastern Potentates—namely, the Jam of Butteria, the Nabob of Nowhere, and the Maharajah of Marmaladia! [38]

Now enter two golf maniacs, in one of whom we recognize the Lieutenant of the first act. After the maddening manner of their kind they proceed to play their game over again, stroke for

stroke, in conversation, to the infinite disgust and boredom of the naval Captains. Presently they shout for tea, and are served, to the utter dismay of her lover, by the beauteous fiancée. On recognizing her he completely loses his head, upsets the tea-table, reproaches her in agitated whispers, refers to the Captains as "silly old fools," and commits various other stage indiscretions. She wisely retires—and he continues to walk around soliloquizing, and apparently appealing to the audience for help and advice in the awkward predicament in which the too ardent lady has placed him! Finally he goes out, after having several times saluted the Captains first with one hand and then with the other.

[39]

Enter the Eminent Divine—a lanky, meek-looking person in spectacles. He is closely followed by the Eastern Potentates in flowing white robes. One of them wears a head-dress of bastard Turkish design; another has his face blackened and surmounted by a pointed black hat, rather like a witch's; and the third is crowned by a Parisian (?) confection profusely adorned with feathers. They greet the Captains with weird salutations, presumably Oriental in origin, and jabber to them in unintelligible tongues, and finally with them retire, apparently in complete agreement.

The stage is left to the Rev. Reuben Reubenstein, whose soliloquy soon reveals him as the Spy Stinkenstein. After indulging in a "Gott strafe" against England he yodels "Life in the Alps," and dances a breakdown in fine style, finally in his frenzy smashing his umbrella and both the tea-tables! Curtain.

ACT IV. *Same Scene*

[40]

Evening: the lady is discovered sitting outside the tea-house with her maid. After a few moments of desultory conversation the maid is dismissed, and the lady awaits her lover.

Enter Stinkenstein, singing. The lady does not take the trouble to look round, but assumes—quite unwarrantably and regardless of grammar—"That's *him*." Stinkenstein comes up behind her, puts his arms round her neck, and is about to embrace her, when she discovers her mistake, and proceeds to tell him in nervous English exactly what she thinks of him.

Pirates emerge from the cave and surround them. The maid rushes out to rescue her mistress and is also captured. The pirates drag them into the cave. Enter the Lieutenant with a landing party to capture the pirates. He finds his fiancée's handkerchief on the ground, and asks Ordinary Seaman Gorbimey, in charge of landing party, if he has a detective among his men. A Hostility O.D. with a huge black moustache steps forward, lights an enormous pipe, and demands an overcoat and a bowler hat. Producing a gigantic magnifying-glass he detects stains of rum on the ground and deduces—*pirates!* The landing party then storms the cave with drawn cutlasses, and a fierce fight ensues, in which, of course, the sailors are triumphant and the pirates are captured. The sweethearts are reunited, and the Lieutenant recognizes Reubenstein as Stinkenstein the spy. The pirates are then liberated on the score of having been instrumental in the capture of Stinkenstein, and the leaders are decorated by the C.-in-C.! Grand finale to the tune of "The Bing Boys are here." Prolonged applause. Curtain.

[41]

The audience stands to "Attention" as the band plays "God Save the King"—and the show is over.

Then we all return to H.M.S. —, where in wardroom and gunroom refreshments are provided. By this time it has turned out a very dirty night, a nasty sea is running, and it is too rough for picket-boats. Presently the stentorian voice of the quartermaster is heard in the officers' messes: "Fourth Battle Squadron's drifter alongside." And out of the warmth and light we all troop to the dark and cold upper deck, and make our way over to the theatre ship. Several drifters are alongside, and these are groaning and creaking under the impact of heavy seas. Icy spray is flying before the wind, and there is only a rope ladder to descend by. Time after time our drifter parts her securing lines and is blown away from the ship's side, or crashes into another astern. At last every one is safely aboard, but there is no shelter from the wind and spray, and ours is the last ship to be called at. Wet and shivering, we curse the weather, and question ruefully if it was really worth while to have gone to the show at all. But at last the drifter draws alongside and we hastily scramble up the rope ladder and make a bolt for the gunroom. A raid on the pantry results in a tin of mixed biscuits, for which we all scramble, and then, very thankfully, turn in.

[42]

[43]

Well, there you are! How would *you* like to go out to an amateur theatrical performance in an open picket-boat in wind and rain, and return in a drifter through raging seas in a full gale? What a life! Never mind! There's a good time coming, and as A. M. M. says in *Punch*:

When the war is over and the Kaiser's out of print,
I'm going to buy some tortoises and watch the beggars sprint;
When the war is over and the sword at last we sheathe,
I'm going to keep a jelly-fish and listen to it breathe.

.

When the war is over and the battle has been won,
I'm going to buy a barnacle and take it for a run;
When the war is over and the German fleet we sink,
I'm going to keep a silkworm's egg and listen to it think.

.

When the war is over and we've done the Belgians proud,
I'm going to keep a chrysalis and read to it aloud;
When the war is over and we've finished up the show,
I'm going to plant a lemon-pip and listen to it grow.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND

[44]

Youth's passion, manhood's fierce intent,
With age's judgment wise,
They spent, and counted not they spent,
At daily sacrifice.

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Refraining e'en from lawful things,
They bowed the neck to bear
The unadornèd yoke that brings
Stark toil and sternest care.
Wherefore through them is Freedom sure;
Wherefore through them we stand
From all but sloth and pride secure,
In a delightful land.

KIPLING

ON Tuesday, May 30, 1916, we were at our northern base lying quietly at anchor, when in the course of the afternoon a signal was received from the Flagship ordering steam. From this we presumed that we should shortly depart for one of our periodical trips to sea for the purpose of executing manœuvres. [45]

An hour or so later some of the light cruisers got under way, and on our ship the bugle-call "Special Duty Men" was sounded off. The first part of the watch on deck went on to the fo'c'sle to shorten in to three shackles: that means to heave in the port or starboard cable, as the case may be, to three shackles, preparatory to weighing anchor.

The Second Battle Squadron having got under way, we weighed and proceeded to sea in their wake. It was a calm evening: my first watch (8 to 12 P.M.) was uneventful, and when it was over I turned in. Next morning I had my bath at 6.45, and when dressed repaired to the gunroom in the hope that my seven-bell (naval phraseology for 7.30) breakfast, which I had ordered overnight, would be ready for me.... Vain hope triumphing over experience, and doomed to disappointment. As usual the said breakfast did not materialize until five minutes to eight, which left me exactly two minutes in which to consume it ... very bad for digestion and temper! [46]

That hurried meal over, I went up to the bridge to relieve the officer in charge of submarine lookouts for the morning watch. It was a glorious day, with a foretaste of summer in the air. The sea was calm, and visibility rather below normal. The Fleet was proceeding leisurely in usual formation. In accordance with custom, at 9.15 "General Quarters" was sounded off by the bugler, and the succeeding two and a half hours at control stations passed without incident. This over, the Commander (N.), i.e. navigator, sent down a chit to the Senior Midshipman, which chit read as follows: "I consider this a good opportunity for all Midshipmen to take sights." This, of course, raised a moan, but collecting our sextants we paired off and went up to the signal deck. On this occasion I was paired with Campbell.

"After you with the deck watch," I said to the Snotty who was using it. He handed it over to me a minute later, and my partner and I compared it with my watch, and then took up a good position for taking a sight. I levelled my sextant at the sun. "Got it?" queried Campbell. "No, blast the beastly thing. Why on earth do they provide us with upside down telescopes. I can't get it—half a mo' though, there it is." [47]

I moved the arm of the instrument along the arc to bring the sun down to the horizon—in doing

so, lost old Sol again about three times, but eventually got it down, and then the horizon was promptly obliterated by smoke from our funnels. No sooner had that cleared off than the ship altered course to starboard, so the elusive orb once more disappeared, this time obscured by the funnel, and we had to change to the other side of the deck and start all over again. At last I managed to get my reading, and after my partner had got his, we went off to the gunroom to have lunch. That meal disposed of, we set to and worked out our sights. Mine proved to be miles out, so after reworking it three times, I came to the conclusion that there must be something wrong with my sextant. I took it down from the shelf, and going to the scuttle, proceeded to check all the usual errors. The index adjustment was all right, but there were about three degrees of side error in the instrument. I tried to take it out, but only succeeded in putting in about double the amount of index error. After spending a considerable amount of time in fiddling about, I shouted for help from any one who felt capable of giving it. Campbell promptly volunteered, and we went up on deck, where we began to try and adjust the sextant. We had only been up there a few minutes when I saw a two-flag signal flutter to the yard-arm of the Flagship.

[48]

"Hollo," I cried, "there's an *action* signal from the Flag," and picking up one of the telescopes belonging to the sextant I tried to make out the hoist. It was—well, let us call it "X Y" since it would not be permissible to give the real letters—and it indicated "Raise steam for full speed with the utmost dispatch."

We wondered considerably what so unlooked for a signal might portend, and after waiting a few minutes to see if anything more was coming through, we went down to the gunroom to give the news to the others.

[49]

The more energetic spirits at once dashed up on deck to see if anything further had transpired, and shortly afterwards returned with the thrilling information that the signal "B N" had been hoisted.

Here was news indeed, for that signal meant that action with the enemy was imminent, and this was the first time during the war that the Grand Fleet (as distinct from the Battle Cruiser Fleet) had hoisted it.

There was, however, no time for discussion just then, as "Control Parties" was immediately sounded off, and we all hurried to our appointed "action" stations.

I was stationed in the conning-tower with a Lieutenant and two other Mids, and here also were the chief quartermaster, who manipulates the wheel in action, a telegraph operator, and one or two other seaman ratings. Presently a signalman came down and showed us a signal which read: "Commodore T. [the Commodore in command of all unattached torpedo craft] in the light cruiser — reports in touch with the enemy light forces."

[50]

This naturally caused some excitement, but, in our long months of monotonous watching and waiting, hope had been so often deferred that we had grown sceptical of ever having the good fortune to really engage the enemy. By this time the whole Fleet was proceeding at 18 knots, great clouds of smoke pouring from all funnels. This smoke, however, ceased as soon as the fires had been made up sufficiently to give the necessary head of steam, and as in our modern battleships with their marvellous turbine engines vibration is practically non-existent, only the swift rush of the wind through the slits in the conning-tower enabled us to realize the speed the Fleet had now attained.

About twenty minutes later (3.45 P.M.) a signal came from the Vice-Admiral commanding the battle cruisers, stating that he was in action with the enemy Battle-Cruiser Fleet. This was shortly followed by another which said that he was now engaging the enemy High Sea Fleet in latitude —, longitude —. The position indicated was barely fifty miles on our starboard bow. On receipt we further increased speed, holding on our original course, as the engaging ships were proceeding in a north-westerly direction. All this being eminently satisfactory, we then went to tea.

[51]

That is to say, half of our number went, the rest remaining at their posts until the first batch had finished. The foretop and conning-tower's crews being told off to relieve each other for meals, and the senior officer "Guns" being in the foretop, they went first, and as usual took more than their fair share of the allotted time. When they had at last satisfied their voracious appetites and our turn came, we found nearly all peace lights out between deck and in the gunroom mess. During tea much speculation was rife, but we dared hardly hope even now that we should indeed get into touch with the enemy.

[52]

We stayed below as long as we possibly could, and eventually returned to our "action" stations about five o'clock.

Encountering the Yeoman of Signals just outside the conning-tower, I asked for the latest news, but nothing fresh had been received.

Half an hour later we sighted a sailing ship right ahead. She seemed to draw near with uncanny speed, and when we were able to make out her colours she proved to be Norwegian. It was when she was nearly abreast of us that we first heard the dull far-away boom of guns. The sound rapidly increased in volume and intensity, but as yet nothing could be seen of the action taking place just beyond the horizon, and the sailing ship gliding quietly along, her canvas, spread to the summer breeze, and the wide expanse of still blue water together formed a picture so emblematic of all the peaceful, everyday things of seafaring life that it seemed almost impossible to realize that within so short a time we should be in the thick of the greatest naval battle the world had ever known.

[53]

But scarcely had the Norwegian passed astern when the yellowish haze on our starboard bow was broken by lurid red flashes, while here and there the sun glinted momentarily on the pale grey hulls of the battle cruisers which loomed up like great ghosts in the midst of the cordite smoke.

Now our light cruisers and destroyers dashed ahead belching forth clouds of black smoke, the water churning and foaming in their wake. The battle cruisers, by this time a bare half-mile away, the bow waves raised by their swift passage creaming to their fo'c'sles, were firing rapidly with all guns. From the deck of their Flagship, just abreast her foremost turrets, a thin wisp of blue smoke and little flickers of greenish flame showed where an enemy shell had found its mark. Under her 'midship funnel a gaping rent was torn in her side, revealing a mass of twisted metal where another projectile had burst. One gun of her 'midship turret, thrown out of action, drooped towards the deck licked by hungry tongues of flame—but her remaining armament was still firing doggedly. [54]

Away to starboard the enemy's guns flashed continuously through the battle haze. Our light craft swung 8 points to port, heeling right over under pressure of the helm. Close beside us a small cruiser of the — class lay hove to and awaiting a chance to dash through the lines. She was so close that we could see her crew standing laughing and joking round their guns—plainly exulting in the longed-for chance of action.

A moment later the enemy opened on our destroyers, their shells flinging columns of white spray high in the air—but, as yet, our ships held their fire.

Now the Flagship hoisted the signal:

"Remember the glorious First of June and avenge Belgium."

This was passed down to all quarters with the added message from our Captain:

"Keep calm. Remember the traditions of the British Navy." [55]

Now our Admiral and his staff came down to the conning-tower. First came the Flag Lieutenant, followed shortly by the Admiral's legs. But here, I regret to say, a slight hitch occurred, for his "lammy" coat so hampered his usual agile movements that the remainder of his person stuck fast in the manhole, and he was left incontinently suspended in mid-air. From above the Captain pushed vigorously at his shoulders, while "Flags" hauled at his august lower limbs. It was a comic interlude, but the combined efforts of his subordinates finally prevailed, and a few seconds later he stood safely on the deck.

In a very few minutes the Captain found that the conning-tower did not give him a sufficiently comprehensive view of the proceedings, and, disdaining this place of comparative safety, dashed away to the bridge, in which exposed position he remained for the greater part of the action.

Now the air filled with the drone and shriek of shells of every size which began to burst round us. One huge projectile—a ricochet—went lolloping over our fo'c'sle head, its yellow colour and the dark bands on its body being plainly visible. [56]

The blast from our first salvo swept the Admiral's cap from his head, and confusion reigned in the crowded area of the tower while "Flags" pursued the errant headgear, finally retrieving it, and handing it back politely to his Chief, who rammed it resentfully down over his eyes. But at the next salvo it again flew off, this time disappearing through a slit in the conning-tower and landing on the deck outside, where it remained till the end of the action. "Flags," who seemed to feel in some obscure way responsible for its vagaries being thereby reduced to absolute frenzy!

Another of the enemy's funnels went overboard ere the mist closed down and hid her. But we had the satisfaction of seeing that she was stopped, and on fire fore and aft.

Some time later, there being no more enemy craft in sight, I left my instrument and went to one of the slits in the conning-tower to see what there was to be seen. [57]

Close on our starboard beam the British destroyer — could be seen with a jagged shell-hole in her starboard quarter, another on her port bow, and one of her 4-inch guns dismantled and lying on the deck with dead and wounded all around. A portion of her crew was busy getting out the collision-mats, but paused in their work to give us a cheer as we forged past. Her gunner (T.), who had only been transferred to her from our ship a week before, waved and shouted greetings to us from her quarter-deck. Away on our port beam could be seen the stern and bow of a big ship which had been split clean in half. A destroyer was lying off ready to rescue survivors, but only three figures were visible standing on the stern of the wreck just by the huge propellers.

About this time I recollect that the C.-in-C. made the signal to turn two points towards the enemy together. By now the whole of our main armament was firing at the Hun destroyers, and they, finding it a good deal too hot for them, turned away. One had already been blown up, and as I watched another was sunk by our fire. [58]

H.M.S. —, having got somewhat out of station, was firing across our fo'c'sle, which made things very unpleasant in the conning-tower, as we got the full benefit of the blast from each of her salvos. One of her shells severed our forestay and it fell on the head of the Snotty on the forebridge, causing him to express himself in sanguinary terms, but not really injuring him at all.

At this juncture there came a yell from "Torps": "Look. There's a d—d great Hun Dreadnought over there!" And, sure enough, there emerged through the fog the bow of a huge ship not more than 8000 yards away.

Hurriedly we got the main armament trained on her, and instantly opened fire. She had already

opened on us. Through the glasses of my instrument I could plainly see every detail of the German's hull and superstructure—she was of the *Derflinger* class. Our first salvo was "over," and no sooner had it fallen than I saw the right gun of every one of her turrets fire simultaneously. There was an anxious moment as we waited for the fall of the shells. In about twenty seconds came a roar and a crash of rending steel, accompanied by a vivid green flash. For a moment the heat in the conning-tower was intense, and it filled with the stifling fumes of the high explosive. On our gun deck a fierce fire flared up, followed by a cry for stretcher parties and water for the wounded, and the Torpedo Lieutenant was dispatched to endeavour to extinguish the blaze. Two of the enemy shells had hit us, but one did no harm bar taking the sounding platform overboard. [59]

Our next salvo hit—and gaping rents appeared in the Hun's sides. However, this apparently did not seriously affect her fighting efficiency, as she instantly fired at us again, but now, happily, her range was out and the shells pitched short, bursting on the water and enveloping the fore part of our ship in a cloud of spray. [60]

A few minutes later "Torps" returned, having with the aid of the guns' crews successfully dealt with the fire, and he reported to the Captain that all danger from that cause was now over.

By this time we had twice fired again and secured several more hits on the enemy and a dull red glow appeared in the holes in her sides, showing that fire was getting a hold on her vitals. Great clouds of smoke and long tongues of flame shot up from her quarter-deck. Most of her guns appeared to be out of action, but a few still fired spasmodically.

Now some German destroyers hurried up and made a smoke-screen between us and our prey as she turned eight points to port, and listing heavily fled into the mist.... But we knew she was done for.

The visibility on our bow had now slightly increased, and we could see the whole of the High Sea Fleet steaming on a course parallel to our own and firing at our battle line. We at once got the guns trained on their leaders and gave them a few salvos, but they were too far away for our shooting to be effective. The sun was already sinking below the horizon, and, whereas we were silhouetted against the western sky, the enemy were fast disappearing in the gathering twilight, and in another five minutes they were entirely lost to view.... It is maddening to think of what we might have achieved had Fate but granted us another hour of daylight. As it was, our part in the battle here ended. [61]

Periodical bursts of firing were still audible from ahead, where our battle cruisers were harrying the rear of the fast retreating enemy.

We remained at our action stations for another half-hour, and then "Hands to Night Defence" was sounded off. After packing up in the conning-tower we all rushed off to see what damage the ship had sustained.

After my look round I went to the gunroom and managed to get a glass of very flat beer, a hunk of bread, and a piece of pressed beef. This was the only food I had between tea and breakfast the next morning. Then I went up on to the bridge, and had not been there long when the lights of some strange ship were sighted on our port bow. The 4-in. guns' crews immediately closed up, but as we drew nearer the suspect proved to be nothing but an inoffensive trawler. [62]

This incident over, I went aft to my night defence station—a little platform screened by canvas, barely six feet square, and a good fifty feet above the water-line. It is commonly known as the "Eiffel Tower," and in this small space a party of eight had to spend the night. Obviously there was no room to lie down, and, further, it was bitterly cold.

All night the Hun destroyers tried to press home an attack on the Battle Fleet, but our light craft continually beat them off, sinking many in the process. At intervals the whole sky was lighted up with a lurid glare as one or other of the enemy ships flared skyward and crashed to her doom. All around the eastern horizon the flash of guns was distinctly visible, only dying away in one quarter to blaze up in another. Had I been less busy—or less cold—I might have thought of Tennyson's lines in "The Revenge": [63]

Ship after ship the whole night long
With her battle-thunder and flame,
Ship after ship the whole night long
Drew back with her dead and her shame.
For some were sunk and many were crippled
And so could fight us no more.
God of Battles! was ever a battle like this in the world before?

But, as a matter of fact, nothing was farther from my mind than poetry.

The sounding off of "General Quarters" at 2.30 came with a mighty relief, as this meant that we could return to our more comfortable "action stations," and our spell at "night defence" was over.

About 4 A.M. we sighted a Zeppelin, which passed over astern of us. Those ships within range opened fire on her, but at every flash from the salvos she dipped, dropping about 200 feet, and thus avoided the shells. For a long time she was visible—a dark body against the eastern sky—but she finally disappeared in the direction of Heligoland just as the sun was rising. [64]

At six o'clock next morning, Friday, June 2, we entered harbour and dropped anchor without further incident.

Coaling started immediately, and as soon as the collier had shoved off we were invaded by dockyard "mateys," and the cracked boat booms were shored up. We had hoped that the necessary repairs would take long enough to ensure our getting some leave, but in this we were disappointed, for the damage we had sustained in the battle was not considered sufficiently serious to necessitate docking. As we were the only ship in the Grand Fleet that had been hit, we were naturally an object of great interest, and very proud of ourselves in consequence. We really had marvellous luck, for although about seven of the ship's company were wounded—one poor chap having his arm shattered—we did not lose a man.

So here ends my personal experience of the famous Battle of Jutland. It will be readily understood that it is only a fraction of the whole. As is now well known the Fifth Battle Squadron and the Battle-Cruiser Fleet did their job so efficiently that the Germans fled to their base—thus robbing the Grand Fleet of the chance to win a decisive victory. [65]

The Huns, with that genius for mendacity which they have exhibited throughout the war, claimed to have defeated the British Navy—a claim based presumably on the idea that "he who fights and runs away will live to fight another day." Subsequent events must have convinced even their own people of the fallacy of that claim, and there remains the proven fact that with their whole forces in action they refused to face more than a quarter of our Fleet.

CHAPTER VI

"AND AFTERWARDS ... WHAT THEN?"

... They leaped at the sun
To give it their loving friends to keep;
Naught man could do have they left undone,
And you see their harvest, what they reap.

In triumphs, people have dropped down dead—
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?"—God might question; now, instead,
'Tis God shall repay:—They are safer so.

(With apologies to Robert Browning)

THOSE whose men took part in the Battle of Jutland may forgive—I think they can never forget—the way in which England received the first tidings of that heroic fight. It is the custom in many quarters to blame the Admiralty for the wording of their first published report; but, as my son wrote to me: "They only said that there had been an engagement, and that we had lost certain ships. Why should people jump to the conclusion that the enemy's losses were less than ours?" [67]

Why indeed! It showed, not only a complete lack of imagination, but a singular want of faith in the efficiency of the Navy, in which they had always proclaimed such unbounded confidence. It would appear that the great majority of the British public had not the faintest conception of the magnitude of the sacrifices involved in a naval battle fought under conditions of modern warfare. Were the people so dazzled and blinded by the century-old memory of Trafalgar as to forget the fact that at Trafalgar there were neither submarines, nor mines, nor aircraft, nor 15-inch guns to contend with? It would seem incredible—if it were not true—that men landing from the ships with the knowledge that by almost superhuman courage and endurance they had won the greatest naval fight in the history of the world, were yet greeted by the public with cold looks—in some cases even with hisses—and by the Press with a cynical pessimism which could only ask why they had not done more!—and this, remember, at a moment when they were on the rack of mourning for so many gallant friends and comrades who had bought Victory with their lives. [68]

Well, it taught the Navy, if not a new, certainly a very hard lesson: the lesson that although "in the performance of plain duty man mounts to his highest bliss," yet the consciousness of duty done to the uttermost must be its own reward. From the "man in the street," the Service may in time win an understanding gratitude and recognition, but it seems that they are to be denied that instant generous appreciation which would do so much to atone for the tragic sense of personal loss inseparable from even the grandest victory.

Shortly after the battle, one of the greatest of their leaders wrote to a friend as follows: "Our sacrifices were great, but they were worth it.... Those who died, died gloriously, in a spirit of great exaltation, and supremely happy.... And, even if nothing else had been gained, there is the knowledge that the Old Sea Spirit still lives in the English Navy—an absolutely unconquerable Spirit, strongly manifested on the 31st of May." [69]

How much was gained we know to-day. Lest I be betrayed to unbridled speech, such as they would be the first to deplore and resent ... let me leave it at that.

CHAPTER VII OF VARIOUS INCIDENTS

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THE only damage affecting her fighting efficiency which our ship sustained in the Battle of Jutland was the damage to her boat booms. This was repaired within the week, and, had the necessity arisen, we could have again gone into action seven days after our return to the northern base. But the Huns were far too busy licking their wounds to trouble us further at this time. Gradually and grudgingly they were forced to admit the great losses which they had at first so strenuously denied and ignored. It was a dilatory and undignified performance, by no means redeemed by the "military reasons" (!) which they adduced in excuse, and it certainly did not tend to increase their prestige in the eyes of the watchful neutral nations. There being, therefore, no immediate need for our services, we remained in harbour enduring with what grace we could command the nerve-racking clamour set up by the dockyard mateys as they meticulously made good all our minor damages.

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On the afternoon which saw their work complete down to the last bolt and rivet, we received the usual signals preparatory to going to sea, and some time in the first dog watch proceeded out of harbour.

The following day dawned calm and fine, the visibility remaining good throughout the day. At 9 A.M. we went to "Divisions" on the upper deck, and were just about to march forward to the quarter-deck for prayers when H.M.S. — on our port beam opened fire with her secondary armament on a Zeppelin which had suddenly appeared from behind a small cloud. The shells did not take effect, but the Zepp turned tail and fled at top speed.

Immediately after prayers we went to "Control Parties" for an hour in order to be ready in case any more airships materialized. However, nothing occurred and at about 10.30 the "Secure" was sounded. I went on the bridge at 11 o'clock, as it was my submarine lookout watch, and there heard that the light cruiser —, operating some miles ahead of the Fleet, had hit a Zeppelin which had subsequently disappeared over the horizon, badly down by the nose, and apparently about to descend to the water. We were told to keep a sharp lookout, but no sign of her was seen.

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After lunch "General Quarters" was sounded off and every one went to their "action" stations.

Commodore "T." had reported some time before that he was in touch with the enemy's heavy forces.

The battle cruisers were now just in sight on the horizon on our starboard bow, and we rejoiced to think that this time they would not be able, as at Jutland, to keep nearly all the fun to themselves. We all strained our eyes ahead for the first glimpse of the "Hoch See Flotte," but the minutes flew by and at 2.30 there was yet no sign of them. Then a second communication was received from Commodore "T." saying that the enemy was flying at full speed towards Heligoland, and at 3 P.M., as we were getting among the Hun mine-fields, we had to reluctantly abandon the chase and turn for home.

[73]

Rumours of that "leave" to which we were all so eagerly looking forward had been flying about since the beginning of August, but it was not until September 10 that the Flagship hoisted the signal for us to raise steam. We weighed at 6.30 P.M. and steamed out to sea, and the next morning at 8.30 we dropped anchor in —. Getting under way again at noon we proceeded into dock, and as soon as the caisson had been floated into place and sunk, we were free to go on "leave."

I caught the 3.30 dockyard train to Edinburgh, and on arrival there fell in with the Captain of Marines, the dentist, and one of the R.N.R.A.P.'s, and had dinner with them at the North British Hotel; after which I embarked on the 10.30 train for London, where I arrived at 8 o'clock the next morning.

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This was the first leave, other than "sick leave" that he had had since leaving Dartmouth on August 2, 1914, and it is not surprising that he declared it to be the best he had ever spent. Details would, however, be of little interest to the reader, and so I will only add that I had the great pleasure of taking him down to my bank, and there opening an account for him with the first cheque received from the publishers on account of "royalties" for "From Dartmouth to the Dardanelles," which had appeared the previous June. I remember I gave many fussy maternal injunctions as to the necessity of keeping "tally," and begged him not to emulate the example of that naive lady who, on receiving a courteous intimation from her banker that her account was overdrawn, replied indignantly that that was quite impossible, because she still had several cheques left in her cheque-book!

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On Thursday, September 21, leave was up, and in company with most of our officers I travelled that night to Edinburgh, arriving in that town at 7.30 the next morning.

We changed into the special train for —, where our ship was in dock, and arrived there at 10 A.M. We had considerable trouble with our luggage as no vehicles were available, and we had to lug our traps along as best we could until we met a cart proceeding in the required direction, the

driver of which—for a financial consideration—consented to relieve us of our burdens.

On reaching the ship we found our quarters still absolutely uninhabitable. Dockyard hands were working all over the place, and all gangways and flats were encumbered with a mad medley of iron plates, stray fittings, and the usual collection of filth which a ship always manages to accumulate in the course of a refit. After wandering forlornly about for an hour with nowhere to go and nothing to do, we got leave from the Commander to quit the ship until 9 A.M. the following morning. Campbell and I promptly made tracks for the dockyard gates, where we had the luck to pick up a taxi, which drove us to the nearest station, and we returned to Edinburgh. On arrival Campbell telephoned to some of his relations who lived in Ayrshire, and hearing that they were at home, departed thither by the 1 P.M. train. About half an hour later the rest of the gunroom mess turned up with the information that "leave" was granted until the morning of Monday, the 25th.

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This intelligence I wired to Campbell, and then repaired to lunch at the North British Hotel. After lunch, finding that I had run out of cash, I bethought me of Messrs. Gieves, naval outfitters, and ever-ready friend in need to the stranded N.O., and repairing to their Edinburgh establishment explained my dilemma, and requested them to cash a cheque for me. This, with their unvarying courtesy, they promptly did, and with a financial crisis thus happily averted, I returned to the hotel for tea.

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I was awfully bored at the thought that I actually had two days of precious leave on my hands and nowhere decent to spend it, and I was wondering if in spite of the expense it might not be worth while to go south again, when I got a wire from Campbell asking me to join him in Ayrshire, which invite I joyfully accepted. But as there was no train that night I had to defer my departure until the next morning.

Campbell's relatives proved most kind and hospitable, and after spending a very pleasant weekend I returned with him to the ship on the morning of the 25th.

We had hardly arrived before the Captain, who was always great on sport and exercise, ordered us all to go out hunting with some local basset hounds. This order was received with a regrettable lack of enthusiasm. Still, an order is an order, and so at 12.30 I started out with two of the others. Unfortunately we had omitted to ascertain the whereabouts of the meet, and when, after walking several miles and making many fruitless inquiries, we eventually discovered the kennels, it was only to find that hounds had gone and no one could tell us their destination. Disconsolately we wandered about for hours, but never a sign of the hunt did we see.

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At 4 P.M. we spotted three of our Snotties in a motor-bus returning from their equally unsuccessful search, and so we joined them and went back to the ship. The only three of our mess who succeeded in finding hounds turned up very cross, footsore, and weary at about 8 P.M., and accused us—most unwarrantably—of shirking!

By 9 A.M. next morning we were out of dock, and coaling started at 11.30 and finished at 2 P.M.—not a very good average. After coaling we found the bathroom in a disgusting state—no lights, no water, no steam. Eventually we managed to procure a mere dribble of cold water with which we had to remove the coal-dust from our persons as best we could.

After "General Quarters" next morning a hideous rumour arose that we should be required to go basseting again that afternoon, but mercifully other affairs intervened, and furthermore it began to rain, so to our great relief basseting was declared off.

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Most of the gunroom mess went to Edinburgh again, but I stayed on board and spent a quiet hour or so writing letters.

CHAPTER VIII

SUBMARINES

[80]

The ships destroy us above
And ensnare us beneath;
We arise, we lie down, and we move
In the belly of Death.

The ships have a thousand eyes
To mark where we come ...
And the mirth of a seaport dies
When our blow gets home.

From "Fringes of the Fleet,"
by KIPLING

ON January 15, 1917, we left the base where we had spent Christmas and proceeded northward again, but nothing worthy of note occurred until some six weeks later. Then one day we were going to sea for manœuvres, and soon after we had cleared the harbour some of us Snotties at the time variously occupied in the gunroom were startled by blasts from the siren.

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We promptly rushed up on deck to find the ship rapidly altering course to port; at the same moment the forward 4-inch guns fired a salvo, and we saw the shells fall about 3000 yards away,

just short of the conning-tower of a U-boat awash on the surface. Apparently until we fired she had been unaware of our approach, for she immediately submerged, and made no attempt to fire a torpedo at us.

Notwithstanding the fact that submarine warfare has become almost a commonplace of naval existence, the knowledge of the near presence of an invisible foe never fails to produce a considerable thrill and a tightening of the nerves, half hope and half apprehension. This doubtless is intensified in the case of those who have already been through the unpleasing experience of having their floating home sunk beneath their feet. In addition to my own midnight adventure in the Dardanelles on May 13, 1915, three of the others in the gunroom had already undergone that ordeal when the *Hogue* was torpedoed. However, this particular U-boat must have been suffering from nerves, for, so far as we know, she made no attempt to attack us. Perhaps the near presence of our watchful destroyers suggested to her that it was a case for discretion rather than for valour. Barring this incident manoeuvres on that occasion passed off uneventfully.

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I regret that this chapter cannot justify its title. On mature consideration I have come to the conclusion that to dilate further on the very interesting subject of submarines would be indiscreet.

A week or two later the Vice-Admiral evolved a scheme for alleviating the monotony of our lives, and requested the C.-in-C.'s permission to send each division of his squadron over to the northern shore of the anchorage for three day's complete rest from routine and in order to provide officers and men with a chance of getting ashore.

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Permission having been duly granted we anchored one evening, having previously dispatched a working party consisting of A.B.'s, carpenters, etc., to prepare a field in which to hold some athletic sports.

The next day dawned fine and clear. Owing to the flow of the Gulf Stream, the temperature in these latitudes is much warmer than dwellers in the south would imagine, and in this month of April 1917 we were certainly much more fortunate than our fellows in less northerly districts.

At 9 A.M. I landed in company with a Lieutenant and two other Snotties, and we decided to walk the eleven miles to the nearest township in preference to watching the sports. We reached our destination shortly after midday, somewhat footsore and weary from the unaccustomed exercise, but with fine appetites for lunch, which we had in a very decent little hotel much frequented in piping times of peace by ardent anglers. Later on we inspected the curious old distillery which is the chief object of interest in the town. Then we did some shopping, and started on our return tramp at about 2.30. We got back at 5, had an excellent tea at a farmhouse, and returned on board our ship at 7.30, feeling much the better for the change and exercise.

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Next morning, to our great disgust, we were detailed to exchange some ammunition, which occupation took up all the forenoon and robbed us of time which could have been spent more pleasantly on the beach. However, by 1.30 I was free and went ashore with another Snotty. Close by was a high hill which had long been a painfully familiar landmark to us by reason of range-finding exercises, carried out, with the pole on its summit as object, while the ship steamed round the land-locked anchorage in endless monotonous circles. Up this hill we climbed, passing on our way little groups of officers or men lying about on its lower slopes, and smoking and chatting in the pale sunshine, the while they luxuriated in the brief change from shipboard: only a very few of them emulated our youthful energy and reached the top, from which a splendid view of our base and its surrounding islands was obtained.

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As the afternoon wore on, various fires sprang up, resulting from the action of careless smokers, and these spread so rapidly that shortly after we got on board again a call came for volunteers to extinguish them, since it was feared that if damage to the countryside resulted, future "joy stunts" in that district would be prohibited. There was no lack of recruits forthcoming, for this was just such a job as the "matloe's" soul loves, as it gives him ample scope for the indulgence of his twin passions of dressing-up and roaring lusty and ribald choruses to popular tunes! To the dreamy melody of "Keep the' Ome Fires burning—I *don't* fink," the fire party embarked in the picket-boat with launch and cutter in tow, all chock-a-block with men of diverse ratings. Their costumes were varied and heterodox, and they were all heavily armed with broomsticks, swabs, etc., with which to combat the flames. When we reached the pier the men fell in, and Commander "T." who was in charge divided them into three parties and detailed one party to deal with each of the main outbreaks.

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The party officered by Wilson, Laurence, and myself ran the first mile at breakneck speed, but the pace flagged when we got among the bogs at the bottom of the hill, for here every few yards we floundered up to our waists in mud and water. To our disgusted disappointment, when we arrived at our special objective it was only to find that we had been forestalled by a party from another ship and the fire was already out.

It was a weird scene: from all over the hill-side different parties were signalling with flash-lamps, and bursts of song came from every quarter. On the summit a group of men from H.M.S. — were lustily yodelling "Life in the Alps," and altogether it was a fair old beano for the ships' companies engaged.

When all the fires had been adequately "strafed," we returned on board, an uncommonly dirty but

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very merry crew.

That night the gunroom was entertaining some officers from one of our submarines which happened to be alongside, and on our entry we were met by a fog of tobacco smoke you could have cut with a knife, and a chorus of song which made up in volume what it lacked in melody. Clamouring for instant drinks, we joined the throng, and only a few minutes later who should blow in but Commander —, no less dirty and dishevelled than the rest of us. Evidently he had found the staid decorum of the wardroom little to his taste, and with that sublime indifference to his "exalted rank" which characterized him when "off duty," he joined in our gunroom "rag" with as much zest as the youngest Snotty—to whom, notwithstanding his decorations and three stripes, he was in point of age not more than a dozen years senior.

The uproar was at its height when the ship's corporal came to report in reproachful tones that "lock up" was long overdue, and I shall not easily forget his face of amazed dismay when he saw the Acting Commander (the Commander was away on leave) hobnobbing with the gunroom in democratic disregard of overwhelming seniority.

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CHAPTER IX OF EXAMINATIONS

[89]

FROM the view-point of the Grand Fleet the summer of 1917 was uneventful, but for me and for my contemporaries in the gunroom, the months of June and July held a peculiar and rather apprehensive interest. Having completed just on three years' service as Midshipmen, we were faced with the ordeal of exams, which must be passed before we could get our stripe, i.e. be advanced to the rank of Sub-Lieutenant.

In May we had one of our rare and brief spells of "leave"—just ten days from the ship—and on our return we suddenly realized with dismay that a bare four weeks remained to us in which to work up the five essential subjects. These are gunnery, torpedo work, navigation, seamanship, and engineering—rather a formidable list. The time for intensive preparation was further curtailed by a three days' "rest cure" on the northern shore, such as has been described in the preceding chapter.

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We could not forgo this much-prized opportunity for exercise and recreation, but once it was over we settled down in grim earnest to "swot" at the subjects referred to, and thenceforward our highly technical conversation and absorption in abstruse problems became a source of unmitigated boredom to those of our messmates whose horizon, by reason of their shorter service, was as yet unclouded by the prospect of such an ordeal as loomed upon ours.

Now, in peace-time, in order to "ship one's stripe" it is only necessary to pass an oral examination in navigation, and an oral and written examination in seamanship. This accomplished, the newly fledged Acting Sub. automatically retires to the "beach," where he passes through gunnery, navigation, and torpedo schools undistracted by any of the executive duties of shipboard life, and able to concentrate his whole attention on each subject in turn. How beautifully simple! But in time of war it is a very different proposition. A Midshipman having served his full term in that rank must pass both oral and written exams. in all five subjects, and his hours of study may by no means be allowed to interfere with executive routine. In other words, he must snatch them how and where he can.

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Naturally this involves a considerable strain, and much burning of midnight oil.

It may also be noted that to a Snotty the luxury of solitude and silence is unknown, for he sleeps in a hammock in an echoing steel-walled flat, has no cabin to retire to, and his only study is the gunroom, which he shares with some fifteen or twenty boisterous "young gentlemen."... The gramophone may be in full blast—stewards bustle about with materials for meals—messengers hurry back and forth—and in this uneasy atmosphere he must learn to concentrate on the highly difficult tasks before him. Well, it must require, as our American Allies would say, some concentration!

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About the middle of June our Admiral and his staff were transferred to other scenes of activity, and to our great regret the Admiral took in his train, as Flag Lieutenant, L. F., best of Subs., who had been our gunroom leader for two years.

On the day following this exodus—in a dismal drizzle of rain—we were all lined up on the quarter-deck awaiting the arrival of our new Chief. Presently the barge was seen approaching, and we congratulated ourselves on the fact that the reception ceremony would soon be over and we would be able to return to the shelter of the gunroom. But as the barge drew nearer we saw that she was flying the "negative," which indicates that the Admiral is not on board. This was unexpected, but the comment passed round that in all probability the crew of the boat had forgotten to ship the "affirmative." Perhaps we should here mention that the "negative" is—in fact—a flag used in the naval signal code, but in the case of an Admiral's barge it consists of a round painted disc having on one side the same markings as the "affirmative," and on the other those of the "negative" flag. This disc is shipped in a small bracket on the foremost side of the funnel, with the object of indicating to officers of the watches, etc., that the Admiral is on board, so that they may be prepared to pay the proper marks of respect as he passes the ships.

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However, there was in this case no forgetfulness on the part of the crew, for as the barge drew alongside it proved to be conveying only Admiral —'s steward, in charge of his luggage and furniture. These safely deposited on board, the barge shoved off again and departed ... presumably to fetch the Admiral.

Still we waited. Still the rain drifted down from leaden unsummer-like sky to leaden unsummery sea.... Then a dingy picket-boat was seen to be coming alongside. More furniture? More luggage? we queried wearily.... But, no! To our infinite astonishment, out stepped the Admiral himself, unattended by Flag Lieutenant or Secretary, and shaking hands with the Captain he went forward to his quarters. [94]

The Commander passed the word for all officers to proceed to the Admiral's lobby, and there we waited until one by one, in order of seniority, we were called into his cabin and presented. We juniors of course came last, and on our return to the gunroom there was much speculation as to what the Admiral would do for a Secretary and Flag Lieutenant. Presently the Captain sent for C —, one of our mess, and to our amazement he returned shortly afterwards with the announcement that until the Flag Lieutenant arrived he had been ordered to perform the customary duties of that officer! Realizing that he was somewhat deficient in knowledge of the necessary routine, C — promptly sent for the Yeoman of Signals and demanded instruction. Thereafter, and during his tenure of office, the gunroom was fairly littered with signal-pads, signals, and confidential books; and he was excused all other duties by the Snotties' Nurse (i.e. the officer—usually the Navigator—told off for the general supervision of Midshipmen). [95]

When on the following Sunday the Admiral, on a tour of inspection, arrived aboard the other ships, accompanied by a Snotty, duly equipped with telescope and signal pad, to act as Flag Lieutenant, the surprise of the Captains and officers of the division may be better imagined than described!

C — found his temporary promotion no sinecure, for, among other duties, he had to be continually on the alert to hear the pipe which indicated that an officer of Captain's rank or above it was coming over the gangway, as it was his part to receive all such visitors with proper ceremony and conduct them to the Admiral's cabin. However, in due course the genuine article arrived in the person of Lieutenant X, and C —, relieved of the onerous task, which he had really performed uncommonly well, was once more relegated to the obscure position of a mere Snotty. [96]

And now the fateful moment for candidates for promotion was imminent.

On the Sunday preceding the first ordeal we decided to take a complete rest, for we were feeling like a species of Strasburg geese, owing to the enormous amount of varied information with which we had stuffed our brains during the preceding month. A relief from the process of intensive culture was clearly necessary if we would rightly assimilate even a portion of the stupendous mass of fact and theory we had absorbed.

It was a splendid blue day, and in the afternoon most of the members of the gunroom, and the younger and cheerier people from the wardroom, manned the pinnace, and, equipped with various baskets of provisions, set sail for a neighbouring island. Once clear of the Fleet we hoisted the Jolly Roger, and, after a little persuasion from all hands, the R.N.R. Lieutenant started on his long repertoire of sea songs, in the choruses of which we all joined lustily, if not tunefully. [97]

On reaching the spot selected for landing the anchor was let go, and we veered the pinnace astern on her cable until we could leap ashore. As soon as all the provisions had been taken out, those of the party who rather fancied themselves in a culinary capacity retired to a sheltered corner, and there set to work to build a fire as a preliminary to the frying of "bangers" (sausages) and the scrambling of eggs. The rest of us flopped down on the heather at the top of the cliffs and began to smoke and talk. It was not long before some restless person suggested bathing. "I say, what about a bathe? Who's coming for a swim?"

Some one else cautiously: "You go in first and tell us what it is like."

"No! I'm d—d if I'll go in unless some one comes with me."

"Well, I'll go if you will." Then the original proposer: "I don't know if it will be worth it. It's beastly cold, I'll bet." [98]

"There you are, backing out of it again! I've a jolly good mind to lead the way myself now." ... And so on, until at last one brave spirit takes the plunge, and most of the others follow suit.

The shirkers could not possibly resist the temptation to indulge in some game at the expense of their fellows, so they formed themselves into a society for "the prevention of bathers regaining their clothes"! To this end they collected large piles of peat, and no sooner did the unfortunate swimmers appear, scrambling naked and shining over the rocks, than they were greeted by a spread salvo of dirt and earth! Casting lurid reflections on the manners, characters, and antecedents of their assailants, they fled to cover. From above came the challenge: "Out of your dugouts and over the top, or we'll storm the Hindenburg line!" and another salvo of peat burst in and about the funk-holes, driving the bathers once more into the open ... Braving a withering fire they scaled the cliffs, only to be promptly chased all over the island in their birthday suits! [99]

Fortunately there were no inhabitants to be scandalized by this spectacle of "British Naval Officers at Play!" The amusement was only brought to an end by cries of "Tea ready!" from the cooks. Then the bathers were allowed to resume their garments and soon all were doing full justice to the good fare provided.

The menu consisted of sausages, scrambled eggs, potted meats, tinned crab, sardines, oranges, chocolate biscuits, and anything else indigestible that you can think of.... After a brief interval allowed for assimilation, trench warfare was instituted and a furious combat raged up and down the island until both sides were utterly exhausted.

At 6 P.M., pleasantly tired, and very dirty, we all embarked, weighed anchor to the strains of "Blow the Man down," and still singing set sail for the ship, and drew alongside to the tune of "When you come to the End of a Perfect Day," which seemed to us singularly appropriate. [100]

At 9 o'clock the next morning we embarked in the picket-boat and proceeded to H.M.S. —, on which ship the seamanship oral exam. was to be held. As soon as we got aboard we were taken down to the school place, and there told to wait until summoned. The only seating accommodation consisted of two hard wooden benches, and some of the candidates from other ships were already assembled, busily studying seamanship manuals and signal-books: they *looked* quite as dejected and apprehensive as we *felt!*

Presently Captain —, President of the Examining Board, came in and summoned the three seniors to his cabin. I was due to go in with the next three, but it was more than an hour and a half before we were sent for, and as the minutes crawled by we became more and more downcast and miserable as we realized the enormous number of questions the examiners must be asking. At last our time came. There were three officers on the Board, and I went first to Commander —. He questioned me on the duties of officers of the watch in harbour and at sea; and then passed on to the handling of ships; boat work, anchor work; ships' stores and construction. [101]

Next I went to our own Commander, who put to me queries about rigging and more anchor work. Last—and worst of all—I went to the Captain, who was examining in signals. Luckily he did not himself know very much about the subject, for there is a lot of specializing in the Service, and not even a Captain can be a specialist in every branch of naval work, so he used a printed list of questions and answers made out by the Yeoman of Signals.

Then, however, he played us a nasty trick, for he had the Chief Yeoman of Signals down to his cabin to give us Morse and semaphore exercises, and remained watching us all the time instead of, as is usually done, sending us up to the bridge. Of course, in the latter case, if the Chief Yeoman is at all a decent sort, he does the exercises very slowly, and if you wish him to do so repeats any one you may miss. I did not get a single word in Morse—and precious little in semaphore—and I went down to the gunroom ready to bet any money that I had failed. [102]

The Sub. of H.M.S. —'s gunroom was one of those giddy pessimists who always predict disaster: "Expect you'll all be Snotties for another month," was his cheerful verdict! However, he gave us an excellent lunch, and at 12.30 the boat arrived to take us back to our own ship. Three of our number were still on the rack, so we went back without them.

Like myself, G— and C— were gloomily certain that they had failed, and we fairly dreaded the arrival of the boat which would bring the Commander, our two remaining candidates, and—the result of the examinations. They did not arrive until 2.30, and then, to my infinite relief, I found that all but one of us had passed, and—glory be!—that one wasn't me!

(Note by a captious mother: From which remark we may safely assume that grammar was not included in the examinations!) [103]

So far, so good—but the end was not yet.

On the following day the navigation oral was due, and as this did not take place until the afternoon, we spent the whole morning poring over navigation manuals. But we might just as well have spared ourselves the trouble, for you can't get a quart into a pint pot, and we had already absorbed all the knowledge on this subject that our brains seemed capable of holding.

When we arrived on board the ship where this particular exam. was being held we found that candidates from other ships were still in the throes and so we had to wait. But this was all to the good, for in the brief pauses between their interviews we were able to glean from them some valuable tips as to what kind of question to expect.

When at last our turn came I was sent first to the officer who was examining in chart work. He handed me a chit on which was set out a problem dealing with the finding of a ship's position when in sight of land, and left me to tackle it while he questioned another candidate on chart markings, etc. The problem was as follows: To find the noon position of an imaginary ship, somewhere in the Channel, her true course being (so far as I can remember) S. 70° W. From the ship in question the bearing of Dungeness Light-Vessel at 10.30 was N. 10° E., and of Owers Lightship at 11.15, N. 35° W. true. The deviation of the ship's compass was 9° E., and the tide was setting S. 75° W. true. [104]

Having worked it out as I thought correctly, I asked Commander — to look at it. He did so; and then asked me to demonstrate the steps I had taken to obtain my result. Then I at once perceived that in laying off the course I had applied the variation the wrong way, and consequently my explanation took this rather ludicrous form: "Well, sir ... I laid off the course here.... Oh no!... I see that's wrong ... it should have been here.... Then I transferred to ... Oh no! That's wrong again.... I cut the wrong line.... Then I laid off the tide to this point ... but I see that I should have laid it off to that...." And so on, correcting myself all along the line. However, by these peculiar methods I apparently satisfied him that my knowledge of the subject, if badly expressed, was sufficiently sound, and he eventually passed me. [105]

My next examiner was one of those splendid people who somehow contrive to put a question in such a way as to closely suggest, if not actually to convey, the answer, and so I got through

without much difficulty. In all we were examined in navigation by five different officers, but met with few real stumbling-blocks, and in pleasing contrast to the previous day returned to our ship in a very optimistic frame of mind.

The whole of the succeeding day was devoted to gunnery. In the forenoon, turret and 4-inch-gun drill—at which I fear we did not distinguish ourselves; but the knowledge that the Snotties from another ship, who were examined with us, had done even worse, gave us some slight consolation. [106]

In the afternoon came control, ammunition, etc., and for these we had to repair on board the ill-fated *Vanguard*, which, but three days later, fell a victim to that disastrous explosion which destroyed her and so many of her gallant crew. The only one of her officers on the Board was her Gunnery Commander, who, I am glad to say, was among those who were saved. Thanks to him, this examination, although commonly held to be one of the most trying, was rendered comparatively easy, for he was one of those officers—alas, but too rarely met with in the Service—who do not believe in expecting too much from a Snotty, and are inclined to judge him rather in the kindly light of future promise than in that of present performance.

Two more orals were still before us, namely, torpedo and engineering. The former was held on board our own ship, and the latter in that in which the seamanship had taken place. Our Commander, "T.," was President of the Torpedo Board, and doubtless his verdict was based on our everyday work as he knew it, rather than on the immediate result of the examination, for he let us down lightly. [107]

The engineering again was not very stiff, for since it is obviously a subject for specialization, only a fairly wide general knowledge was required of us.

I will not enlarge further on a theme which, although of such vital importance to us Snotties, will probably be of little interest to the general public. The written exams. which succeeded the oral occupied four days, and then there remained only to await the results.

From various unofficial sources we soon learned the names of those who had qualified in four subjects—but the navigation was still in doubt. Although I was fairly confident of success in everything else, on this subject I was very nervous, as we already knew that in it four of us had failed, and I greatly feared that I was included in the number. In fact, I became so pessimistic that I laid the odds against myself to the tune of a sovereign, and further promised a friend to stand him a bottle of champagne in the event of my forebodings being falsified. However, on July 31, the official information reached the ship, and to my intense relief I found I had lost my bet.... Never did loser pay up more willingly! [108]

On August 2 the Captain sent for Campbell, our senior Snotty, and after having a final "strafe" at him in that capacity, informed him that he and I had been rated Acting Sub-Lieutenants. Five minutes later Campbell burst into the gunroom proudly sporting on his sleeves the newest and brightest of gold stripes, and, on hearing the joyful news, I promptly dashed off to my chest to don the coat which I, too, had had prepared in anticipation of this blissful moment! Our jubilation was only marred by our sympathy with the disappointment of our two messmates who had not had our luck, and whose promotion was in consequence deferred for another two months. [109]

CHAPTER X OF SHADOW AND SUNSHINE

 [110]

The wrecks dissolve above us, their dust drops down from afar ...
Down to the dark, to the utter dark, where the blind white sea-snakes are.
There is no sound, no echo of sound, in the deserts of the deep,
Or the great grey level plains of ooze where the shell-burred cables creep.

KIPLING

ALTHOUGH the disaster to the *Vanguard* took place when we were in harbour, and the ill-fated ship was lying only about four cables from us, I personally was not a witness of her sad end, for it took place about 11.30 P.M., at which time I was asleep in my hammock, and—strange as it may seem—I was not even aroused by the noise of the explosion. However, next morning one of my messmates gave me the following account of what he had seen. He had been just about to turn in when he heard the detonation, and dashed up on to the fo'c'sle to see what had happened. Flames were leaping up to an incredible height, and the air was thick with fragments of red-hot metal. [111]

Climbing down on to the quarter-deck, he observed that some of our ship's company were lowering a whaler, but as there was no officer in charge he jumped in, took the tiller, and headed for the scene of the disaster. No trace of the *Vanguard* was to be seen, but where she had lain the sea was ablaze with burning oil, and there seemed but little hope of rescuing even such of her crew as might have survived the explosion. Although the flaming waters were strewn with debris of every description, they saw no single sign of humanity save only the scorched and blackened corpse of a stoker, which they lifted into the whaler and later handed over to a trawler.

On an island, some half a mile away, numerous fires had sprung up, started apparently by fragments of burning cordite, and such had been the force of the explosion that a cutter, weighing over two tons, had passed right between the masts of the next ship in the line. [112]

Our boat remained in the vicinity of the disaster for some time, but could find no survivors to pick up, and so they had sadly to return to the ship.

When next morning I was awakened by Campbell and told of the tragedy which had taken place while I slept, I could hardly believe it. Leaping out of my hammock, I ran up on deck to see for myself.... Alas, it was too true, for where only last night the *Vanguard* had lain, nothing was now visible but a few patches of oil floating on the calm surface of the harbour.

Collecting my gear, I went down to the bathroom, where I found five members of her gunroom, who, having been at one of the Fleet Theatre shows the night before, had escaped the disaster, and had been sent to us pending the holding of a court of inquiry. They were naturally the centre of an excited crowd, who all seemed to expect them to be able to give some information, in spite of the fact that as they were in another ship, and more than a mile away at the time of the explosion, they had both heard and seen rather less than ourselves. [113]

That afternoon they were sent off to an auxiliary cruiser, where they were confronted with the melancholy task of trying to identify such portions of human bodies as had been recovered along the foreshore and floating in the sea. It is not to be wondered at that they returned in the evening in a very dismal and morbid frame of mind.

During the day, parties from many of the ships were detailed to search the neighbouring islands for the log, ledger, and other registers kept on board H.M.'s ships, as these may sometimes afford a clue to the cause of an accident, and in any case it is obvious that such highly confidential documents as wireless and signal books must not be allowed to fall into unauthorized hands. [114]

In the afternoon I saw piled on our quarter-deck a quantity of salvage, among which were an officer's overcoat, two seamen's bags, an empty small arms ammunition box, and some Service books; the latter were so scorched and so covered with oil fuel as to be practically undecipherable, as was the case with nearly all papers recovered. Divers were sent down to inspect the wreck, of which, however, little remained to afford a clue to the cause of the disaster. Of masts and funnels there was no sign, and only two turrets, minus roofs and guns, were found at some distance from the rest of the debris. It was discovered that all magazines except one had blown up.

There was universal rejoicing when some two weeks after the tragic end of the luckless *Vanguard*, and about a week after the conclusion of exams., the whole Fleet moved to another base. Here we were much more in touch with civilization, for a large town with quite respectable shops was within reach. [115]

On the first opportunity I went ashore, and, in wilful disregard of the proverb which warns us not to count our chickens before they are hatched, invested in a nice new pair of gold stripes, and got the ship's tailor to sew them on to the sleeves of one of my coats, in hopeful anticipation that I might shortly be entitled to wear them. One day, before we had received the official intimation of our promotion, Campbell and I met another of our term who, having already heard of his success, was duly invested, so to speak. Evidently suffering from swollen head, he greeted us with the offensive remark: "Hallo! you *Snotties!*" ... But when we received the joyful news, we too swaggered into town, feeling as conscious of our arms as though we had been newly vaccinated and taken well, and hoping to encounter some of our less fortunate fellows to whom we could pass on that swanky greeting!... But no luck!

After the exams. we had become Super-Snotties, and as such not required to do any of an ordinary Midshipman's duties, but the Commander would not put us on to watch-keeping until we had actually "shipped our stripes," so we had, in the graceful lingo of the gunroom, absolutely "stink all" to do for nearly three weeks, and could go ashore every day if we pleased. Now, however, this blissful period was at an end, and we had to begin watch-keeping. After our slack time we thought this dreadfully hard work, although we only had to keep two watches a day for two days running, and then had three days off—and no night watches at all! In reality this was, of course, very light work, and I looked back on it with rueful regret when some two months later, for three solid weeks, most of which were spent at sea, I had to be on the bridge for twelve hours out of the twenty-four. [116]

It had long been my cherished ambition to be appointed to one of the smaller craft, in which my work would be much more varied and responsible than that of a junior officer in a big ship. So, shortly after receiving promotion, I applied through the Captain to have my name forwarded with a view to being appointed to the *Vernon* for the torpedo control course, which same is the usual preliminary to work in a destroyer. [117]

On September 1 I duly received my appointment, and I finally left H.M.S. — on the 5th.

I arrived in Portsmouth on the 9th, having spent the previous four days on leave in London. Some dozen other Subs. were about to undergo the torpedo course, which commenced on the following morning, and we found that we were to be billeted at the Central Hotel. We were all delighted at the prospect of living on the "beach," for we foresaw plenty of opportunity for going to theatres, etc.

H.M.S. *Vernon* comprises three old wooden hulks—relics of the days of Nelson—and they are moored at the head of Portsmouth Harbour, and connected bow to stern by broad gangways. These ships collectively form the torpedo school of the Navy, and nearly every N.O. at some period of his career undergoes a course of instruction here. [118]

When next morning we arrived on board we had to traverse the whole length of the three ships to reach the bows of the farthest, where the torpedo control room is situated. A fairly extensive knowledge of torpedoes is necessary in order to pass for Sub-Lieutenant, and so we already knew all about a "mouldy" as they are called in naval vernacular. However, this first forenoon, a Chief Petty Officer was detailed to run through the main essentials in order to refresh our memories, but most of us, relying on our recently acquired knowledge, settled down in comfortable corners and dozed until lunch-time. The course proper commenced in the afternoon. Much to our disgust, about 2 P.M. a signal was received saying that all officers undergoing torpedo control course were to be billeted in the *Redoubtable*, a very old battleship, moored at the northern end of the docks, and used as a depot ship.

At 3.20, work being over for the day, we caught the 3.30 boat to the beach, and set about transferring our gear to our new temporary home. We were, however, much relieved to find on inquiry that the *Redoubtable's* last boat did not run until 11.30 P.M., so after all our liberty would not be much curtailed. [119]

CHAPTER XI

OF MY FIRST EXPERIENCES AS A SUB.

[120]

Where the East wind is brewed fresh and fresh every morning
And the balmy night-breezes blow straight from the Pole,
I heard a destroyer sing: "What an enjoyable
life does one lead on the 'Channel' Patrol.

.

"We warn from disaster the mercantile master
Who takes in high dudgeon our life-saving rôle,
For every one's grouching at docking and dowsing
The marks and the lights on the 'Channel' Patrol."

.

So swept but surviving, half drowned but still driving,
Watched her head out through the swell off the shoal,
And I heard her propellers roar: "Write to poor fellers
Who run such a hell as the 'Channel' Patrol!"

KIPLING

THE course in the *Vernon* lasted for one week, and when it was finished we were free to go on leave till we received our new appointments.

After about seven days' leave I was appointed as second in command of H.M.S. *P—*, based at Portsmouth, and arriving in that town on the evening of October 1, in accordance with instructions I reported myself at the R.N. barracks. [121]

It appeared that nothing was known there as to the movements of ships, and I was referred to the Commodore's office. There I could glean little more information, but was advised to go down to Boat House Jetty, where *P—* was always berthed when in harbour. However, at the moment she was not there, so I returned to the Commodore's office to ask where I could be billeted for the night. They told me I could get a bed at the Navigation School, and that the first thing in the morning I should go down to Captain "D.'s" office, as all patrol-boats and destroyers being under his direct orders, his secretary would be able to give me definite information as to when my ship was expected in. Accordingly at 9 A.M. next morning I made my way to the said office and reported. The A.P.R.N.R., who was Captain "D.'s" secretary, informed me that *P—* was out, but would probably be in that afternoon, and advised me to return about 4 P.M. This I did—but found I had missed her again, for though she had come in at three o'clock she had only stayed for half an hour. [122]

That evening I got a note from the Sub. of another boat saying that if I would come aboard his ship at 11 A.M. next morning I should there meet the First Lieutenant of *P—*, whom I was relieving. I wondered what on earth he could be doing on another boat when his own was, I knew, at sea, but on meeting him I learned that she had unexpectedly received immediate sailing orders while he was on short leave ashore and had to leave without him. Having thus missed her (at Devonport), he had hurried round by train to Portsmouth—only to miss her again!

I lunched on board with the two Subs., and afterwards went with M— to the pay office in barracks to draw a month's pay which was due to the ship's company of *P—*. When we returned, we found that she had come in, and was lying at a buoy in mid-stream. We made a signal for a boat, and shortly afterwards a skiff arrived, with my new Skipper, Lieutenant —, R.N.R., in the stern-sheets. After I had been introduced to him by the Sub. I was relieving, he went off to Captain "D.'s" office to get sailing orders and confidential papers, and M— and I embarked in the skiff and proceeded to *P—*. [123]

I had left my gear on the "beach," intending to fetch it later, but very soon the Captain returned with immediate sailing orders, and I had to go off without it.

M— and I kept the first watch on that night, which looked like being quite a dirty one.

The bridge was by no means water-tight, and the spray that poured through every crack and cranny penetrated also up our sleeves and down our necks, so that we were soon soaked to the skin. The ship rolled so violently that presently the topmast snapped off short and came down with a crash on the chart-house, waking up the Captain, who had been trying to get some sleep. He at once came out on to the bridge and took charge, while he ordered us to go and see that the watch secured the mast as well as possible and refixed the wireless. This was no easy job in half a gale, and with the boat rolling and pitching to every point of the compass, but in the end it was accomplished fairly satisfactorily—although, with the broken mast sticking out at an acute angle, the ship must have presented rather a drunken appearance. Then we returned to our post on the bridge, and the Skipper was able to resume his interrupted slumbers. [124]

All went well until midnight, when we were relieved by the Gunner, and went aft to try and snatch some sleep before 4 A.M. when we should again be required to go on watch. Getting aft was a matter of some difficulty, as waves were sweeping green over the deck, and we had to cling tightly to the life-lines to avoid being washed overboard, and by the time we reached the wardroom hatch we hadn't a dry stitch on us. Even when we got below we had to hang on for dear life to prevent ourselves from being thrown violently from one bulkhead to the other. [125]

I did not get a wink of sleep that night, for my whole attention was concentrated on the frantic effort to remain in my bunk. Boots and other articles slithered back and forth on the deck in a slimy ooze of oil fuel and sea water, and more than once I had to jump out and rescue my clothes from the mess. Pandemonium was loose! At one moment the bath broke away from the three hooks by which it was suspended from the deck above, and landed with a crash in the narrow space between the chest of drawers and the bunk.

Altogether it was with positive relief that I greeted the burly dripping figure in oilskins and sea boots who came to call me for the morning watch; and shoving on as many clothes as I could over the pyjamas I had borrowed from the Sub., I once more made my way on to the bridge.

About an hour later the dawn broke grey and dismal, and I could just distinguish the faint line of the French coast.... Our mission accomplished, we set our helm hard aport and proceeded to batter our way back to Portsmouth with wind and sea full in our faces. [126]

At 8.30 A.M. the Gunner again relieved us, and we went down to the wardroom in search of breakfast. Here, amid a mad medley of cutlery, crockery, and cruets, we found a nasty-looking piece of cold bacon skidding giddily over the table in company with a loathly-looking loaf of bread. Presently the steward appeared juggling with two brimming cups of tea, and strenuously endeavouring to keep his balance on the swaying deck. With pardonable triumph at having brought them from the pantry without upsetting them, he placed the cups on the table, where they added to the general confusion by promptly slopping their contents over everything.

In order to avoid being shot off our chairs we had to hang on with one hand while we tried to feed ourselves with the other. I had quite an exciting time trying to spear pieces of bacon with a fork, my plate always sliding away to the other side of the table at the crucial moment! In the end I became quite an expert at the job, and managed to consume really a considerable amount. (*N.B.* Try our new parlour-game: "Pig-Sticking" on a destroyer in mid-Channel!) Fortunately for me, I am what is known as a "good sailor," and have never yet experienced the miseries of seasickness. What service in small craft must mean for those with less tractable tummies I shudder to think. [127]

We sighted the Isle of Wight about 3 P.M. and were congratulating ourselves on the fact that within an hour and a half we should be safely berthed in Portsmouth, and with any luck would get a night in, as the ship had been running exceptionally hard for a week past.... But our congratulations were premature, for when we drew near our objective we received a signal ordering us to anchor as convenient and await the arrival of another "P." boat which was bringing us our sailing orders. This meant that yet another night's work was before us. So, having anchored in accordance with instructions, we promptly turned in to try and get some sleep before we had to again proceed to sea. [128]

Our sailing orders arrived about two hours later, and their purport proved particularly annoying for both M— and me, for it meant that he would be detained on the ship for another thirty-six hours or so, and for the like period I should still be without my clothes, etc. It will be remembered that I had had to come away without my gear, which was still at Portsmouth. However, we had to make the best of it.

We got under way at about 8 P.M., did our job, and after an uneventful trip returned to our base, and finally secured alongside Boat House Jetty at 10 A.M. on a Sunday morning.

The other Sub. went off immediately to take up his new appointment, and I very thankfully collected my belongings. [129]

It was about 3.30 on that afternoon when we learned that we were required to take the place of a T.B. which had unexpectedly been forced to dock, and in company with another patrol-boat execute certain orders. The T.B. we were replacing was down to remain at the destination whither we were bound over Monday, but as we were due to commence our periodical boiler-cleaning that morning, our Captain made a signal to Captain "D." asking if we were to remain at the place in question in accordance with these sailing orders, or to return to Portsmouth as per schedule. His reply was that we were to return.

We left harbour at 4 P.M., and in a howling gale dropped anchor at the spot indicated in our instructions. Very soon we found that one anchor would not hold—we had already dragged about half a mile—and I had to go up on to the fo'c'sle and superintend the letting go of another....

At 8 P.M. we weighed both and proceeded to execute the duty required of us. I had the first watch: there was a very heavy sea running, and the wind being on our starboard quarter, I had to take great care that the ship did not get into the trough of the waves, in which case she would not have answered to her helm. [130]

About 11.30 course was altered, bringing wind and sea dead on our beam, and the ship's head had to be continually brought up to meet the waves.

However, nothing untoward occurred, and at midnight I was relieved by the Gunner. As on the previous night, the violent motion effectually prevented me from sleeping, and at 4 A.M. I had to go on watch again. Then I found that we were already on our homeward course.

The ship was steering very badly, and in order to keep her on her course the port engine had to be kept dead slow, which greatly reduced our speed. When I had been on the bridge for about half an hour the steering-gear broke down altogether, which involved conning by engines alone. With starboard going full ahead, and port slow astern, she would hardly swing through a degree. I sent for an E.R.A. (engine-room artificer) to endeavour to repair the steering-gear, and, through the voice-pipe, informed the Captain, who was sleeping in the chart-house, of the state of affairs. Owing to the violence of the storm we were making considerable leeway, and being unable to keep within 20° of our course, were carried some distance to eastward. [131]

At dawn, the steering-gear having been repaired, we were able to again make headway in the right direction, and the Captain now tried to work out our position by dead reckoning. This was a very difficult job, as there was no possible means of ascertaining how far we had drifted from our course. However, he proved himself a highly skilled navigator, for, although the land was completely obscured by heavy rain squalls, at 11 A.M. we exactly hit off the buoy which marks the entrance to the Channel.

Owing to the fury of wind and waves we had sustained considerable damage. The stout iron stanchions supporting the engine-room hatch were bent; the port foremost Berthon boat had broken adrift from its securing chains; several ventilators had been unshipped, and every one of our fenders had been swept overboard. But by 1.30 P.M. we were safely secured alongside Boat House Jetty, and one watch proceeded on leave. [132]

I had to remain in charge on board, but dined with the Gunner of *P*—, which was lying alongside. He was an old friend, as he had been in charge of the cadets at Dartmouth during the one term I spent there.

A week later, the boiler-cleaning being finished and the damage aforementioned having been made good, we were once more ready for sea, and in due course received sailing orders....

We arrived at our first destination at about 3 P.M. T.B. — made fast astern of us, and after I had seen her secured I turned in until 7.30, when we once more got under way and proceeded into harbour. Here we made fast alongside the —, which was nice and handy for getting ashore. I was not greatly impressed with — as a town, but it afforded an opportunity for some much-needed exercise. [133]

At 5.30, in company with another "P." boat we steamed out of harbour to find a stiff breeze blowing, and the tide setting strongly against the wind. This created a nasty chop on the water, but, as the ship we had to shepherd carried no signalman, in order to facilitate communication with her in reference to course to be steered, etc., we decided to secure alongside her until 8 P.M., when she was due to get under way. When we had made fast, *P*— secured alongside us, thus bringing the full strain of two boats on our hawsers. I heard our wire beginning to strand, so gave the order to ease away and take the strain on the grass line, but that had no sooner tautened than it parted. Directing the men to pay out the wire as slowly as possible, I dispatched a messenger aft to the Captain to inform him that we should not be able to hold on much longer. Before he had time to give orders to let go aft and get way on, the wire was all paid out and we had to let the end go overboard, as, had it parted, it would naturally have flown back, and probably caused serious injury to those on the fo'c'sle. The remaining securing lines had then to be let go, and thus we were left, drifting about the roads with no way on, and still secured to and bumping *P*—. After considerable trouble we managed to get free and dropped our anchor. By this time it was 7.30, so we had only half an hour for dinner, after which we weighed anchor again. [134]

I had the first watch, during which no incident occurred, and I turned in at midnight. When I returned to the bridge at 4 A.M. I found that the night was now calm and clear, but it was very dark and there was no moon. I took over from the Gunner, who went below to turn in. All went well for about twenty minutes. Then—suddenly—about one point on our starboard bow, I saw all steaming lights of another vessel switched on! [135]

Now, by rule of the road at sea, as the stranger was on our starboard hand, we were bound to give way to her and pass under her stern, so I gave the order, "Hard aport." Unfortunately she was so very close that there was no time to get full helm on, and seeing that a collision was inevitable I gave the order, "Stop both," and dashing to the starboard telegraph myself put it to "Stop." Before I had even let go of the handle there came a mighty crash ... the ship quivered from stem to stern and stopped dead.

The Captain was beside me in an instant. "What are we doing?" he demanded ... meaning what

orders had I issued. I replied, "All stopped, sir."

Then we looked over the canvas screen and saw that the other boat had her bows locked into our fo'c'sle, and had heeled over to an acute angle as she struck. For the moment we thought she must sink—but, hailing her, the Captain requested her Commander to keep her bows locked in until we had ascertained the extent of the damage. It would appear, however, that he did not hear the hail, for he promptly went astern and backed out. [136]

As the water rushed in through the rent in our side we began to go down by the bows, and for an anxious moment we thought we were done for ... but by good luck we still floated.

Leaving me to superintend the getting out of the collision-mat, my Skipper signalled to the ship that had rammed us—which, by the way, was another "P." boat—asking if we could give her any help. She replied in the negative, saying that so far as she could ascertain she was not damaged, and was returning to her base.

After I had reported to the Captain that the collision-mat was in place, he ordered me to go below and superintend the shoring up of the bulkheads. The stokers off watch, and the watch below, under the directions of the Engineer, had already collected all spare balks of timber, mess stools, etc., for this purpose. The hatch leading to the coxswain's storeroom had been opened up and it was discovered that we were making no water abaft the compartment in which we had been holed. [137]

When I had seen the bulkheads shored up to my satisfaction, I reported to the Captain on the bridge. Every possible precaution for insuring the safety of the ship having now been taken, he decided that it would be best to get under way immediately, and endeavour to get back to Portsmouth without further delay, in case it came on to blow and the sea got up. At the moment, fortunately for us, it was quite calm. Not feeling certain that the bulkheads would withstand the strain of going ahead, and not knowing the extent of the damage the ship had sustained below the water-line, the Captain decided to proceed stern first until daylight enabled us to make a more thorough examination.

We had been struck a bare six feet forward of the stoker's mess deck, the foremost living-space in this class of ship, in view of which fact we were uncommonly lucky in that no lives were lost, nor had any of the crew been injured. [138]

We were obliged to proceed dead slow as, owing to her overhanging counter, the slightest sea jarred the ship horribly, and stern first at this speed she steered very badly. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I was able to keep her within five degrees of the course without having to supplement the helm by continually altering the revolutions of the engines.

When daylight came, I went with the Captain on to the fo'c'sle, and then we discovered that the collision-mat was quite inadequate—in fact it had already carried away and was towing aimlessly alongside. I ventured to suggest to the Skipper that it might be a good plan to fill up the hole with fenders, to which he agreed, and leaving me to summon the watch and get the job duly executed, he returned to the bridge to give the necessary orders for bringing the ship round, as he considered that it was now safe to proceed in the orthodox manner—bows first. [139]

Having seen the work on the fo'c'sle accomplished, I once more resumed my morning watch, and after the Captain had given orders for a stoker to be posted on the mess deck, with instructions to give immediate warning in the event of the bulkhead showing any signs of giving, he retired below.

About 7.30, as everything seemed to be holding well, I ventured to increase speed to 10 knots. At 8 I was relieved by the Gunner and went down to breakfast; after which, at the request of the Captain, I made out a rough report of the orders I had given in respect of helm and engines in the moments immediately preceding the collision. This, after revision, would be embodied in the statement he would have to forward to Captain "D." as soon as we reached harbour. We had already dispatched a wireless message to the effect that we had been in collision and were returning to our base.

Finally, at about 3 P.M. we entered harbour and secured at our usual berth. [140]

I was in a bit of a funk that I should have to appear before a court of inquiry. However, it must be assumed that on the report sent in by my Skipper and the Commander of the ship with which we had had the misfortune to collide, the C.-in-C. was satisfied that everything possible had been done: that in the circumstances the collision could not have been avoided, and that no blame attached to the officers on watch at the time.

Nevertheless, since accidents must be sternly discouraged, the Captains were admonished, and warned that a still stricter lookout must be kept in future.... This was very rough on them, as naturally every precaution is taken to keep as keen a lookout as possible, not only with a view to avoiding disaster, but also in hope of locating and perhaps, with luck, strafing a U-boat.

The responsibilities of a Commanding Officer must needs weigh heavily, for it is obvious that the High Command can take no cognizance of that occult and fickle factor "luck," and naval discipline in war-time must be merciless. [141]

Little wonder that the N.O. is inclined to be superstitious, and to burn incense at the shrine of Joss!

A week later, my ship being in dock, I was able to go home on two weeks' leave. Oh, most certainly collisions are severely to be deprecated!... But—the cloud had a silver lining!

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[142]

What matter to-morrow—there's courage enough for to-day.

"Gay gallant lives so oft at stake,
Danger and you are such old friends
That we have learned to mock it for your sake."

AVE!—ATQUE VALE.

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