

WITH BEATTY OFF JUTLAND

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”CAN YOU SPARE US ANY TORPEDOES?” SHOUTED SEFTON”

With Beatty off Jutland

A Romance of the Great Sea Fight

by
PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "The Submarine Hunters"
"A Sub and a Submarine"
"The Dispatch Riders"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by Frank Gillett, R.I.

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By Percy F. Westerman

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The Submarine Hunters.
Sea Scouts All.
The Thick of the Fray.
A Sub and a Submarine.
Under the White Ensign.
The Fight for Constantinople.
With Beatty off Jutland.

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- "Without hesitation Sefton made a flying leap over the guard rails"
- "Poising himself for an instant, Sefton leapt on the 'Calder's' deck"

"She sent a huge shell at point-blank range crashing into the light-built hull"
"The 'Calder' had played her part, and it seemed base ingratitude to leave her to founder"

WITH BEATTY OFF JUTLAND

CHAPTER I—The Ward-room of H.M.S. "Calder"

A cold grey morning in April somewhere in the North Sea; to be more exact, 18 miles N. 75° W. of the Haisborough Lightship.

Viewed from the fore-bridge of H.M. torpedo-boat destroyer *Calder*, there was little in the outlook to suggest that a state of war had existed for twenty months. The same short steep seas, the same lowering sky, the almost unbroken horizon towards which many anxious glances were hourly directed in the hope that "they" had at last come out.

Two cables' distance from the *Calder*, a typical trawler, with dense columns of smoke issuing from her funnel, was forging slowly ahead. Another vessel of a similar type was steaming in almost the opposite direction, and on a course that would bring her close under the stern of the almost motionless destroyer. From the galley funnel of each trawler a trail of bluish smoke was issuing, the reek as it drifted across the *Calder's* deck indicating pretty plainly the nature of the "hands'" breakfast. Of the crew of either craft no one was visible, the helmsman in each case sheltering in the ugly squat wheel-house on the bridge.

Acting Sub-lieutenant Sefton brought his binoculars to bear upon the nearest trawler. The action was merely a perfunctory one. He knew both trawlers almost about as much as their own crews did, and certainly more than their respective owners in pre-war times. For close on fifty hours, watch in and watch

out, the *Calder* had been dancing attendance on these two almost insignificant specimens of the North Sea fishing-fleet—the *Carse o' Gowrie* and the *Dimpled Lassie*, both registered at the port of Aberdeen.

Carrying bare steerage-way, the destroyer glided slowly past the *Dimpled Lassie's* port quarter. From the trawler's stern a flexible wire hawser led beneath the foaming wake of the propeller, dipping with a sag that did not gladden the heart of the young officer of the watch.

"Any luck yet?" shouted Sefton through an enormous megaphone.

At the hail two men's heads appeared above the bulwarks aft, while a great-coated figure came in view from behind the storm-dodgers of the trawler's bridge.

"Not the least, sir," replied the master of the *Dimpled Lassie*, Peter M'Kie, skipper R.N.R. "Are we right, sir?"

The acting-sub had a few minutes previously taken an observation. The destroyer was playing the part of nursemaid to the two trawlers, for although both skippers could find their way, even in thick weather, almost anywhere in the North Sea, solely by the aid of lead-line and compass, neither had the faintest experience in the use of the sextant.

"Ought to be right over it," replied Sefton. "Carry on, and trust to luck."

The trawlers were "creeping" with grapnels. Not for mines, although there was always a possibility of hooking one of those fiendish contrivances. That was a risk that the tough fisherman faced with an equanimity bordering on fatalism. Mine-sweeping they had engaged upon almost continuously since the notable month of August, 1914. Now they were on particular service—a service of such importance and where so much secrecy was imperative that these two Scottish trawlers had been sent expressly from a northern base to scour the bed of the North Sea in the neighbourhood of Great Yarmouth, where there were Government craft for disposal in abundance.

Sefton replaced his binoculars, and, turning, found that his superior officer had just come on deck and was standing at his elbow.

Lieutenant Richard Crosthwaite, D.S.O., the "owner" of the destroyer, was one of those young officers who had made good use of the chances that the war had thrown in his way. Specially promoted for good work in the Dardanelles, he found himself at a comparatively early age in command of a destroyer that had already made a name for herself in the gallant but ill-starred operations against the Turks.

"Well, Mr. Sefton?" he asked.

"Nothing much to report, sir," replied the acting-sub. "But we'll get it yet," he added confidently.

Evidently "it"—hardly ever referred to by any other designation—was more elusive than Crosthwaite had imagined. A shade of disappointment flitted across

his tanned features. The task upon which the trawlers were engaged was a matter of extreme urgency. At Whitehall anxious admirals awaited the news that "it" had been fished up; but "it", reposing serenely on the bed of the North Sea, had resolutely declined to receive the embraces of a couple of heavy grapnels.

Crosthwaite, after giving a searching glance to windward, stepped to the head of the ladder. An alert bos'n's mate, awaiting the signal, piped the starboard watch. Saluting, Sefton gained the deck and went aft, his mind dwelling on the prospects of breakfast and a much-needed sleep.

The ward-room, a scantily-furnished apartment extending the whole width of the ship, was showing signs of activity. From one of the adjoining dog-boxes, termed by courtesy a cabin, a short, full-faced, jovial-featured man had just emerged, clad in regulation trousers and a sweater. His curly light-brown hair was still wet, as the result of his ablutions, a slight gash upon the point of his chin betokened the fact that he had tempted fate by shaving in a stiff seaway, and by the aid of an ordinary razor dulled by the penetrating salt air.

"Oh, it's quiet down here—" he began singing in a ringing baritone.

"No need to rub that in, Pills," exclaimed a drawling voice. "The fact is patent to all. Can't you give us 'They don't run Corridor Cars on our Branch Line' by way of a change?"

Thereon hung a tale: something that took place when Jimmy Stirling first joined the mess at the Portsmouth Naval Barracks as a Probationary Surgeon, R.N.V.R.

"I called attention to the fact that it was quiet down here with deliberate intent, my festive Box-spanner," retorted the surgeon. "At last, after weeks of expostulation, your minions have succeeded in quelling that demon of unrest, the steam steering-gear. For the first time for a fortnight I have slept serenely, and, thanks to that blessed balm, I feel like a giant refreshed. Now, how about it?"

He made a dive into the adjoining cabin, where the engineer-lieutenant was in the act of struggling with a refractory collar. The next instant the two men lurched into the ward-room engaged in what looked to be a mortal struggle.

Cannoning off the stove, sweeping a sheaf of books from the wall, glissading from the cushioned lockers, the high-spirited officers tackled each other with mock-serious desperation until, with a violent heave, the athletic doctor deposited his engineering confrère fairly upon the table. With a series of crashes, cups, saucers, tureens, teapot, coffee-pot, eggs and bacon sidled in an indescribable state of chaos upon the floor.

"Time!" exclaimed Sefton authoritatively. "Look here, you fellows. I haven't had my breakfast, and I suppose you haven't had yours? Not that it matters to me. And, Pills, has your supply of bromide run out?"

The combatants separated and began taking stock of the damage.

"You logged a gale of wind last night, I hope, Sefton?" asked the engineer-lieutenant in tones of mock anxiety. "Must account for this smash-up, you know— Any luck? Have they got it?"

The acting-sub, now that conversation had reverted to the inevitable "it", was bound to admit that the preceding night's labours had been fruitless. The possibilities of the recovery of the much-desired "it" monopolized the attention of the occupants of the ward-room until the steward, outwardly stolidly indifferent to the unsympathetic treatment of his labours, provided another repast.

They were boyish and high-spirited officers on H.M.T.B.D. *Calder*. Their pranks were but an antidote to the ceaseless strain of days and nights of watch and ward.

"To get back to things mundane," persisted the engineer-lieutenant as the trio sat down to their belated meal, "will they find it?"

"It is my firm belief that they will," replied Sefton decisively. "Even if we have to mark time about here for another month."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the surgeon piously, "I pine for fresh water. Your vile condenser-brewed fluid is simply appalling, my festive Box-spanner. And I yearn for newspapers less than a week old."

The engineer-lieutenant glared defiance at his medical confrère. He knew perfectly well that the water on board was brackish and insipid, but it was condensed under his personal supervision. Any disparaging remarks upon his *métier*—even if uttered in jest—touched him to the quick.

A resumption of the "scrap" seemed imminent, when a bluejacket, tapping at the ward-room door, announced: "Captain's compliments, sir; they've just hooked it."

CHAPTER II—The Recovered Cable

Instantly there was a wild scramble on the part of the three officers to gain the deck, all other topics of interest vanishing before the all-important information.

A cable's length on the port beam the *Carse o' Gowrie* was backing gently

astern in order to close with her consort. The *Dimpled Lassie* was pitching sluggishly. Way had been taken off her, while over her squat counter the wire hawser attached to the Lucas grapnel was "straight up and down" under the steady strain of some heavy and still submerged object.

From the destroyer's bridge a signalman was semaphoring rapidly by means of hand-flags. The *Dimpled Lassie* replied. The man had just finished delivering the message to Lieutenant-Commander Crosthwaite when Sefton and the other officers gained the bridge.

"There's no doubt about it now," declared Crosthwaite breezily. "They've just reported that the thing is two fathoms off the bottom. The *Carse o' Gowrie* is going to help take the strain."

"Hope it won't carry away, sir," remarked Sefton.

"Never fear! Where the patent grapnel grips, it holds. What water have we?"

A cast with the lead gave 19 fathoms, the tide having risen 7 feet. The tidal current was setting south-east a half east, with a velocity of 1-½ knots.

"Tide'll be slacking in half an hour," said the skipper. "The less strain we get the better. Signalman!"

"Sir?"

"Ask the *Dimpled Lassie* to report the state of the dynameter."

Promptly came the reply that already the strain on the grapnel hawser was 2-½ tons.

"And the breaking strain is four, sir," Sefton reminded his chief.

"We'll get it all right," reiterated Crosthwaite. "Never fear."

His optimism was justified when forty-five minutes later the grapnel suddenly bobbed above the surface, holding in its tightly-closed jaws the bight of a large submarine electric cable.

"Let's hope we've hooked the right one," muttered the engineer-lieutenant.

"You atom of despondency!" exclaimed Stirling.

"I state a possibility, not a probability, Pills," rejoined Boxspanner. "It's a three-to-one chance, you know."

Already a number of artificers, who had been temporarily detailed for duty on board each of the trawlers, were hard at work in connection with the retrieved cable. What they were doing in connection must remain a matter of conjecture, but the fact was patent that the success or otherwise of unremitting toil depended upon the next few minutes.

Impatiently the young lieutenant-commander of the *Calder* awaited a further signal announcing the result of the investigations. When it came it was highly satisfactory.

"Thanks be for small mercies!" ejaculated Crosthwaite fervently. "Signal

M'Kie and tell him to take due precautions in case a ground swell sets in from the east'ard."

The cable was one of three that in pre-war time connected the little Norfolk fishing-village of Bacton with the German island of Borkum. Two more ran from Borkum to Lowestoft, the whole system being partly British and partly German controlled.

Immediately upon the declaration of war the telegraph cables had been severed, both in the neighbourhood of the British coast and in the vicinity of the German island fortress. To all intents and purposes it seemed as if the cables were nothing more than useless cores of copper encased in gutta-percha, rotting in the ooze on the bed of the North Sea.

Yet in spite of the most stringent precautions on the part of the British Government to prevent a leakage of news, the disconcerting fact remained that, thanks to an efficient and extensive espionage system, information, especially relating to the movements of the Grand Fleet, did reach Germany.

Various illicit means of communication were suspected by the authorities, and drastic, though none the less highly necessary, regulations were put into force that had the effect of reducing the leakage to a minimum.

Simultaneously a campaign was opened against the use of wireless installations. Undoubtedly wireless played its part in the spies' work, but its efficacy was doubtful. It could be "tapped"; its source of agency could be located. However beneficial in times of peace, it was a two-edged weapon in war.

For a long time the British Government failed to unravel the secret, until it was suggested that the submarine cables had been repaired. And this was precisely what had been done. The Huns had promptly repaired their end of one of the Bacton-Borkum lines, while a German trawler, disguised as a Dutch fishing-boat, had grappled the severed end just beyond the British three-mile limit.

To the recovered end was fixed a light india-rubber-covered cable. This would be sufficiently strong to outlast the duration of the war, the scarcity of gutta-percha and the enormous weight of the finished cable being prohibitive. It was paid out from the trawler with considerable rapidity, the end being buoyed and dropped overboard some miles from the spot where the original cable used to land. In the inky blackness of a dark winter's night a boat manned by German agents disguised as British fishermen succeeded in recovering the light cable and taking it ashore. Here it was a brief and simple matter to carry the line to a cottage on the edge of the low cliff, burying the land portion in the sand.

For nearly eighteen months the secret wireless station had been in active operation. News culled from all the naval bases by trustworthy German agents was surreptitiously communicated to the operators in the little unsuspected Nor-

folk cottage and thence telegraphed to Borkum.

For the task of recovering the cable the utmost skill, caution, and discretion were necessary. The vessels detailed for the work were sent from a far-off Scottish port with orders to make no communication with the shore; while to protect them from possible interference the *Calder* had been detached from the rest of the flotilla to stand by and direct operations.

The *Dimpled Lassie* was indeed fortunate in finding the cable in a comparatively short space of time, and, what was more to the point, in locating the right one of the three known to be in close proximity. Contrast this performance with that of the cruiser *Huascar* in the Chilean-Peruvian War. That vessel tried for two days in shallow water to sever the cable at Valparaiso. The officer in charge had himself assisted to lay that particular cable, but picked up the one communicating with Iquique and severed that by mistake.

The only "fly in the ointment", as far as Lieutenant-Commander Crosthwaite was concerned, was the anticipated fact that the *Calder* would have to dance attendance upon the trawlers for an indefinite period. Once the mild excitement of grappling for the cable was over, the *Calder* was in the position of those who "serve who only stand and wait". It was a necessary task to "stand by", but with vague rumours in the air of naval activity on the part of the Huns, the officers and crew of the destroyer would infinitely have preferred to be in the thick of it, rather than detained within a few miles of the Norfolk and Suffolk coast.

When at length interest in the proceeding had somewhat abated, Sub-lieutenant Sefton went below to make up long arrears of sleep.

He had not turned in many minutes when Doctor Stirling gave him a resounding whack on the back.

"Wake up, you lazy bounder!" exclaimed the surgeon. "Didn't you hear 'Action Stations'?' We've got the whole German fleet coming for us."

CHAPTER III—The Stranded Submarine

"No such luck," protested Sefton, until, reading the serious look in the medical

officer's eyes, and now conscious of a commotion on deck as the ship's company went to action stations, he started up, leapt from his bunk, and hurriedly scrambled into his clothes.

Upon gaining the deck Sefton found that Stirling had exaggerated the facts—he generally did, as a matter of fact. Just looming through the light haze were half a dozen large grey forms emitting tell-tale columns of smoke; for, combined with the lack of Welsh steam coal and inferior stoking, the Huns generally managed to betray their whereabouts by volumes of black vapour from their funnels.

The ships were now steaming in double column, line ahead, and, having left Smith's Knoll well on the starboard hand, were running on a southerly course to clear Winterton Ridge.

"Off to Yarmouth, I'll swear," declared Crosthwaite. "The bounders have got wind of the fact that our battle-cruisers are well up north."

The *Calder* was now approaching the two trawlers. Grasping a megaphone, the lieutenant-commander hailed the skipper of the *Carse o' Gowrie*.

"German battle-cruisers in sight," he shouted. "You had better slip and clear out."

The tough old Scot shaded his eyes with a hairy, tanned hand and looked in the direction of the hostile craft.

"I'll bide here, if ye have nae objection, sir," he replied. "After all this fuss, fetchin' the cable an' all, I'm nae keen on dropping it agen. Maybe they'll tak no notice of us, thinking we're fisherfolk."

"The probability is that they'll sink you," said Crosthwaite, secretly gratified at the old man's bravery, and yet unwilling to have to leave the trawlers to their fate.

"If they do, they do," replied the skipper unmoved. "It wouldna be the first by many a one. But sin' we hae the cable, here we bide."

Old Peter M'Kie was of a similar opinion. Sink or swim, he meant to stand by. The *Carse o' Gowrie* and the *Dimpled Lassie* were to remain with the fished cable, since it was just possible that the Germans might take them for ordinary trawlers, as the boats showed no guns.

The lieutenant-commander of the destroyer saw that it was of no use to attempt to shake the resolution of the two skippers. After all, they stood a chance. By remaining quietly, and riding to the raised cable, they certainly had the appearance of fishing boats using their trawl, while any attempts at flight might result in unpleasant attentions from the number of torpedo-boats accompanying the German battle-cruisers.

Accordingly the *Calder* slipped quietly away, keeping under the lee of the Haisborough Sands to avoid being spotted by the enemy vessels. It was a genuine case of discretion being the better part of valour. Although not a man of her crew

would have blanched had orders been given to steam full speed ahead towards the huge German battle-cruisers, Crosthwaite realized that such a step would be utterly useless. Long before the destroyer could get within torpedo-range of the foe, she would be swept clean and sent to the bottom under the concentrated fire of fifty or more quick-firers. Had it been night or thick weather the *Calder* would no doubt have attempted to get home with her 21-inch torpedoes. The risk would be worth running. But, as matters now stood, it would be sheer suicidal madness on her part, without the faintest chance of accomplishing anything to justify the attempt.

Meanwhile the destroyer was sending out wireless messages reporting the presence of the raiders. Busy in exchanging wireless signals with their far-flung line of covering torpedo-boats, and with a couple of Zeppelins that flew high overhead, the German vessels made no attempt to "jam" the *Calder's* aerial warning.

Constantly ready for action at very brief notice, the British battle-squadrons were under weigh within a few minutes of the receipt of the *Calder's* message, and Beatty's Cat Squadron was heading south-east with all possible speed before the first hostile gun thundered against Great Yarmouth.

"They've opened the one-sided ball," remarked Sefton as a dull boom from the now invisible German ships—a single report that was quickly taken up by other heavy weapons—was borne to the ears of the *Calder's* crew. "And, by Jove, Whit-Monday too."

"Yes," assented the doctor. "And ten to one the beach is crowded with holiday-makers. Before we left port, didn't we see some idiotic report in the papers stating that the East Coast would be ready for holiday visitors 'as usual'?"

"Let's hope the Huns will get cut off again," said the sub. "Another *Blücher* or two will make them sit up."

"They're too wary," replied the somewhat pessimistic medico. "They've been warned that the coast is clear. Before the submarines from Harwich can come up they'll be off. And with twelve hours of daylight in front of them they'll be back long before our sixth destroyer flotilla can make a night attack."

For nearly twenty minutes the officers and men listened in silence to the furious bombardment. Several of the latter had homes in the town that now lay exposed to the enemy guns. Realizing their helplessness, they could only hope that the damage done was no greater than that of the previous naval attack on the same place, and that this time the Cat Squadron would intercept the raiders and exact a just and terrible retribution.

At length the firing ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun. In vain the destroyer's crew waited long and anxiously for the renewal of the cannonade in the offing that would announce the gratifying news that Beatty had once more

intercepted the returning Huns.

At 20 knots the *Calder* returned towards the position in which she had left the two trawlers. With feelings of relief it was seen that both craft were still afloat and apparently all well.

Suddenly one of the look-outs raised the shout of: "Submarine on the star-board bow, sir!"

Without a moment's hesitation Crosthwaite telegraphed for full speed, at the same time ordering the quartermaster to port helm.

A mile and a half away could be discerned the elongated conning-tower and partly housed twin periscopes of a large submarine, although why in broad daylight the unterseeboot—for such she undoubtedly was—exposed her conning-tower above the surface was at first sight perplexing.

With the for'ard 4-inch quick-firer loaded and trained upon the meagre target the *Calder* leapt forward at a good 24 knots, ready at the first sign of the submerging of the submarine to send a projectile crashing into and pulverizing the thin steel plating of her conning-tower.

So intent was the lieutenant-commander upon his intended prey that he had failed to notice the proximity of a black-and-white can buoy now almost on the starboard bow. It was not until Sefton reminded him of the fact that he realized that the destroyer was doing her level best to pile herself upon the Haisborough Sands—a feat that the German submarine had already accomplished to the rage and mortification of her officers and crew.

Listing violently outwards, the destroyer swung round clear of the treacherous shoal, and for the first time Crosthwaite was aware of the ignominious predicament of the unterseeboot.

"The beggar may have a broadside torpedo-tube," he remarked to his subordinate as he ordered the *Calder* to be swung round, bows on to the stranded craft, speed having been reduced to give the destroyer more steerage-way. "Give her a round with the for'ard gun. Plank a shell a hundred yards astern."

The shot had the desired effect. The conning-tower hatch was thrown open, and the head and shoulders of a petty officer appeared. For a few moments he hesitated, looking thoroughly scared, then his hands were extended above his head.

In this position of surrender he remained, until, finding that the destroyer made no further attempt to shell the submarine, he emerged from the conning-tower. Two officers followed, and then the rest of the crew—twenty-two all told. The officers stood upon the steel grating surrounding the conning-tower, for the tide had now fallen sufficiently to allow the platform to show above water. The rest of the crew, wading knee-deep, formed up in a sorry line upon the after part of the still submerged hull, and, with uplifted hands, awaited the pleasure of their

captors.

"Fetch 'em off, Mr. Sefton," ordered the lieutenant-commander. "Half of 'em at a time."

The sub hastened to order away the boat. As he did so Dr. Stirling nudged him and whispered in his ear:

"Shall I lend you a saw, old man?"

"A saw!" repeated Sefton in astonishment. "What on earth for?"

"Skipper said you were to bring half of them at a time," explained the irresponsible medico with a grin. "Better try the top half of each man first trip."

"That'll do, Pills," retorted the sub. "If it's surgery you're after, you had better do your own dirty work."

"Give way, lads," ordered the sub as the boat drew clear of the steel wall-side of the destroyer.

"We surrender make," declared the kapitan of the submarine as the boat ranged up alongside. "We haf a leak sprung."

[image]

"WE SURRENDER MAKE.... WE HAF A LEAK SPRUNG"]

"Sorry to hear it," rejoined Sefton.

"Is dat so?" enquired the perplexed German, mystified at his foe's solicitude.

"Yes," soliloquized the sub. "We would much rather have collared the strafed submarine intact. We didn't bargain for her keel plates being stove in.

"Now then!" he exclaimed. "I'll take eleven of you men first trip."

The coxwain and bowman of the boat deftly engaged their boat-hooks in convenient projections of the submarine's conning-tower, while the specified number of dejected and apprehensive Huns was received on board.

Having delivered the first batch of prisoners on the destroyer, Sefton returned, but, instead of immediately running alongside the prize, he ordered his men to lie on their oars. With the boat drifting at a distance of twenty yards from the unterseeboot, the sub coolly awaited developments.

The Huns—officers and men alike—were far from cool. Gesticulating wildly, they implored the sub to take them off. Never before had Sefton seen a greater anxiety on the part of the Germans to abandon their ship, and in the course of eleven months' service in the North Sea his knowledge of the ways of the wily Hun was fairly extensive.

At length two of the submarine's crew, unable to restrain their panic, leapt overboard and struck out for the boat.

"Stand by with a stretcher, there, Jenkins," ordered Sefton. "Show them what we mean to do. Knock them over the knuckles if they attempt to grasp the gunwale."

"We surrender do, kamerad!" shouted the Huns in dolorous chorus, seeing their companions repelled from the waiting boat.

"Yes, I know," replied Sefton. "You've told me that already. A few minutes' wait won't hurt you. There's plenty of time."

"Back oars!" ordered the sub, as the Germans, terrified beyond measure, slid from the submarine's deck into the water, officers and men striking out frantically.

Thirty seconds later came the dull muffled sound of an explosion. A thin wreath of vapour issued from the open conning-tower.

"Not much of a bust-up that," exclaimed Sefton contemptuously. "It would not have flicked a fly from her deck. Well, I suppose I must take the beggars into the boat."

The lightness of the explosion had also astonished the German officers. Adopting their usual procedure they had fixed three detonators in the hull of the stranded vessel, and upon the approach of the *Calder's* boat the second time they had lighted the four-minute time-fuses.

Sefton, guessing rightly what had been done, had resolved to give the Huns, not a bad quarter of an hour, but a worse three minutes. He, too, expected to see the submarine's hull disintegrated by a terrific explosion.

On the boat's return to the destroyer with the rest of the prisoners, Sefton made his report to the lieutenant-commander.

"Can't blame them," declared Crosthwaite. "In similar circumstances we would have done the same, but with better results, I hope. Send that petty officer aft; I want to speak to him."

The man indicated was, as luck would have it, the fellow responsible for lighting the fuses. Putting on his fiercest expression, Lieutenant-Commander Crosthwaite sternly taxed him with attempting to destroy the submarine after she had surrendered.

Taken aback, the man admitted that it was so.

"How many detonators?" asked Crosthwaite.

"Three, Herr Kapitan."

"And what time-fuses?"

"Four-minutes," was the reply.

"Then jolly rotten stuff," commented the lieutenant-commander as he motioned for the prisoner to be removed below. "We'll give them another quarter of an hour before we board her."

The stated time passed without any signs of further internal explosions.

The *Calder* made good use of the interval, Harwich being communicated with by wireless, announcing the capture of the prize, and requesting tugs and lighters to be dispatched to assist the disabled U boat into port.

"Now I think it's all O.K.," remarked Crosthwaite. "Sure you're keen on the job?"

Sefton flushed under his tanned skin. His skipper was quick to notice that he had blundered.

"Sorry!" he said apologetically. "Ought to have jolly well known you better. Off you go, and good luck. By the by, take a volunteer crew."

Of the seventy men of the *Calder* every one would have unhesitatingly followed the sub. Asking for volunteers for a hazardous service was merely a matter of form. There was quite a mild contest to take part in the operations of boarding the submarine.

By this time the falling tide had left nearly the whole extent of the deck dry. There were four hatchways in addition to the conning-tower, each of which was securely fastened. Through the open aperture in the conning-tower Sefton made his way. Below all was in darkness, for with the explosion the electric lamps had been extinguished. A heavy reek of petrol fumes and sulphurous smoke scented the confined space.

The sub switched on the electric torch which he had taken the precaution to bring with him. The rays barely penetrated the smoke beyond a few feet.

"Phew!" he muttered. "Too jolly thick. It is a case for a smoke-helmet."

Back went the boat, returning in a short space of time with the required article. Donning the safety-helmet, one of the bluejackets descended, groped his way to the nearest hatchway and opened it.

An uninterrupted current of fresh air ensued, and in ten minutes the mid-ship portion of the prize was practically free from noxious fumes.

"Blow me, Nobby," exclaimed one of the carpenter's crew, "did you ever see such a lash up? Strikes me they slung this old hooker together in a bit of a hurry."

The shipwright's contemptuous reference to the Teuton constructor's art was justified. The submarine had every appearance of being roughly built in sections and bolted together. Everything pointed to hurried and makeshift work.

Under the engine beds Sefton discovered two unexploded detonators. The one that had gone off was "something of a dud", for the explosive force was very feeble—insufficient even to start any of the hull plating. But it had performed a useful service to the British prize crew: the blast had detached the time-fuses from the remaining gun-cotton charges, and had thus preserved the submarine from total destruction.

Nevertheless Sefton heaved a sigh of relief as the two detonators were dropped overboard. Guncotton, especially German-made stuff, was apt to play

peculiar tricks.

The fore and after compartments or sub-divisions of the hull were closed by means of watertight doors in the bulkheads. The foremost was found to have four feet of water—the same depth as that of the sea over the bank on which the vessel had stranded. It was here that the plates had been started when the U boat made her unlucky acquaintance with the Haisborough Shoal.

Flashing his torch upon the oily surface of the water, Sefton made a brief examination. On either side of the bulging framework were tiers of bunks. This compartment, then, was the sleeping-quarters of the submarine's crew. Of torpedo-tubes there were no signs; nor were these to be found anywhere else on board. Aft was a "gantry" communicating with an ingeniously contrived air-lock. The submarine was not designed for torpedo work but for an even more sinister task: that of mine-laying. Not a single globe of latent destruction remained on board. Already the U boat had sown her crop of death; would there be time to destroy the harvest?

CHAPTER IV—Not Under Control

Quickly the news of the captured submarine's former activities was flash-signalled to the *Calder*, and with the least possible delay the information was transmitted by wireless to Great Yarmouth and Harwich.

Until the minefield was located and destroyed it was unsafe for any shipping to proceed to or from Yarmouth Roads.

Questions put to the U boat's crew elicited that the vessel was one of seven operating in conjunction with the raiding cruisers. While the German fleet was bombarding Yarmouth, the submarines—having on account of their slower speed set out on the previous day—proceeded to lay a chain of mines from the Would through Haisborough Gat, and thence to a point a few cables east of the Gorton lightship, thus completely enclosing Yarmouth Roads from the sea. The UC6—that being the designation of the prize—had just completed her task when she sighted the *Calder* approaching. Miscalculating her position, she had run her nose hard upon the shoal, with the result that her low compartment quickly flooded, thus rendering her incapable of keeping afloat.

It was not long before four mine-sweepers came lumbering northwards from Yarmouth, while others proceeded in different directions to "clear up the mess", as their crews tersely described the dangerous operations of destroying the mines.

The *Calder*, still standing by, had missed the northern limit of the German minefield by a few yards. Had she held on her former course the probability was that she would have bumped upon a couple of the infernal contrivances—for the mines were dropped in twos, each pair connected by a span of cable to make more certain of a vessel's bows being caught in its bight—and been blown up with the loss of all her crew.

The destroyer had been sent on particular service. Other side issues had demanded her attention, and, with the pluck and resourcefulness of British seamen, her crew had risen to the occasion. To them it was all in the day's work, with one ulterior motive—to push on with the war.

Deftly, the result of months of experience, the mine-sweepers set to work. With little delay the first of the mines was located, dragged to the surface, and sunk by means of rifle-fire. Others were destroyed in quick succession, two exploding as the bullets, made for the purpose of penetrating the buoyancy chambers, contrived to hit the projecting horns of the detonating mechanism.

In two hours, the trawlers having swept the whole extent of the Wound, the minefield was reported to be destroyed.

"What damage ashore?" enquired Crosthwaite, as the nearest trawler sidled under the destroyer's stern.

"Precious little, sir, considering," replied the master of the mine-sweeper. "A few buildings knocked about and a score or so of people killed or injured. Might ha' been worse," and he shook his fist in the direction in which the raiders had fled.

Sedately, as if conscious of having modestly performed a gallant service, the mine-sweepers bore up for home, and once again the *Calder* was left to stand by her prize.

She was not long left alone. A number of motor patrol-boats came buzzing round like flies round a honey-pot. The work of transferring the German prisoners was quickly taken in hand. They were put on board the patrol-boats in batches of half a dozen. It saved the destroyer the trouble of putting into port when she was supposed to hold no communication with the shore.

The last of the motor-boats had brought up alongside the *Calder* when Sefton recognized the R.N.R. sub-lieutenant in charge as an old friend of pre-war days.

Algernon Stickleton was a man whose acquaintance with the sea was strictly limited to week-ends spent on board the Motor Yacht Club's

headquarters—the ex-Admiralty yacht *Enchantress*—in Southampton Water. Given a craft with engines, he could steer her with a certain amount of confidence. Of navigation and the art of a mariner he knew little or nothing. Tides were a mystery to him, the mariner's compass an unknown quantity. In short, he was a marine motorist—the counterpart of the motor road-hog ashore.

Upon the outbreak of war, commissions in the R.N.R. motor-boat service were flung broadcast by the Admiralty at the members of the Motor Yacht Club, and amongst those who donned the pilot-coat with the gold wavy band and curl was Algernon Stickleton. At first he was given a "soft job", doing a sort of post-man's work in Cowes Roads, until the experience, combined with his success in extricating himself, more by good luck than good management, from a few tight corners, justified the experiment of granting a commission to a comparatively callow marine motorist.

Then he was put through a rapid course of signalling and elementary navigation, and, having "stuck at it", the budding sub-lieutenant R.N.R. was sent to the East Coast on a motor-yacht with the prospect of being given a fast patrol-boat when deemed proficient.

Gone were those halcyon August and September days in Cowes Roads. He had to take his craft out by day and night, blow high or low. Boarding suspicious vessels in the open roadstead hardened his nerves and gave an unwonted zest to his work. At last he was doing something definite—taking an active part in the navy's work.

"My first trip in this hooker, old man," he announced to Sefton, indicating with a sweep of his hand the compact, grey-painted motor craft that lay alongside the destroyer's black hull. "A clinker for speed. She'd knock your craft into a cocked hat. It beats Brooklands hollow. Wants a bit of handlin', don't you know, but I think I brought her alongside very nicely, what?"

The last of the German prisoners having been received on board and passed below to the forepeak, Sub-lieutenant Stickleton prepared to cast off. Touching the tarnished peak of his cap, for months of exposure to all weathers had dimmed the pristine lustre of the once resplendent headgear, he gave the word for the motors to be started.

Then, with one hand on the steering-wheel, he let in the clutch.

Like an arrow from a bow the powerful box of machinery leapt forward. The result was disastrous as far as Stickleton was concerned. Unprepared to counteract the sudden momentum, he was literally "left", for, subsiding upon the short after-deck, he rolled backwards over the transom and fell into the boiling wake of the rapidly-moving motor-boat.

Fortunately he could swim well, and was quickly hauled over the destroyer's side, a dripping but still cheerful object.

Several of the *Calder's* crew laughed outright. Even Crosthwaite and Sefton had to smile. The sopping R.N.R. officer was quick to enter into the joke against himself.

"Hope I won't get reprimanded for leaving my ship without permission," he remarked facetiously.

"You haven't asked permission to board mine," Crosthwaite reminded him. "It's the custom of the service, you know."

Meanwhile attention was being transferred from the dripping officer to the craft of which he ought to be in command. Evidently her crew were unaware of what had occurred. The bowman was coiling down a rope, two of the deck hands were engaged in securing the fore-peak hatchway, while the rest were down below. The patrol-boat was tearing along at 38 knots, and, owing to the "torque" of the propellers, was describing a vast circle to port.

It was the cabin-boy who first made the discovery that the little craft was without a guiding hand at the wheel. He was down below tidying up the sub's cabin, when he found an automatic cigarette-lighter that Stickleton had mislaid. Anxious to get into his superior officer's good books, for the youngster was the bane of Stickleton's existence on board, the boy ascended the short ladder leading to the cockpit. To his surprise he found no helmsman.

Guessing that something was amiss, he hailed the bowman. The latter, scrambling aft, steadied the vessel on her helm, at the same time ordering the motors to be eased down. He was convinced that Stickleton had been jerked overboard and was swimming for dear life a couple of miles astern.

By this time the *Calder* bore almost due west, at a distance of six sea miles, for the patrol-boat had described a complete semicircle. For some time the boat searched in vain for her missing skipper, until the coxswain suggested returning to Yarmouth to report the casualty.

"Better get back to the destroyer, George," counselled another of the crew. "Maybe they've got our skipper. Anyway, there'll be no harm done."

Somewhat diffidently, George up-helmed and ordered full speed ahead. He, like the rest of the crew, was, before the war, a paid hand in a racing yacht; keen, alert, and a thorough seaman, but unused to a powerfully-engined boat. Ask him to bring a sailing-boat alongside in half a gale of wind, he would have complied with the utmost skill, luffing at the exact moment and allowing the craft to lose way with her canvas slatting in the breeze without the loss of a square inch of paint. Bringing a "match-box crammed chock-a-block with machinery" alongside was a totally different matter; but, as it had to be done, George clenched his teeth and gripped the spokes of the wheel, determined to die like a true Briton.

The patrol-boat had covered but half of the distance back to the *Calder* when she almost leapt clear of the water. The two deck-hands for'ard were

thrown flat, and, sliding over the slippery planks, brought up against the low stanchion rails. A slight shock, barely perceptible above the pulsations of the motors, and the little packet dipped her nose under to the water, shook herself clear, and resumed her mad pelt.

"What's up, George?" sang out the mate.

"Dunno," replied the coxswain. "Guess we've bumped agen' summat."

Then, the dread possibility that he had run down his own skipper entering his mind, he decided to return and investigate.

Having had but little experience in the use of the reversing-gear, George slammed the lever hard-to. With a sickening jerk, as if the little craft were parting amidships, the patrol-boat stopped and gathered sternway. A minute later she backed over a large and ever-increasing pool of iridescent oil, through which air-bubbles were forcing their way.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed one of the crew; "blest if we haven't rammed a strafed U boat."

The man had spoken truly. A German submarine, acting independently of the raiding-squadron, had sighted the *Calder*, hove-to, at a distance of three miles. Unaware of the presence of the patrol-boat—and the sight of a patrol-boat or a trawler usually gives the German unterseebooten a bad attack of the blues—her kapitan had taken a preliminary bearing prior to submerging in order to get within effective torpedo range. Having judged himself to have gained the required position, the Hun ordered the boat to be again brought to the surface.

At the critical moment he heard the thud of the propellers of the swiftly-moving patrol-boat. He attempted to dive, but too late. The sharp steel stem of the little craft, moving through the water at the rate of a railway train, nicked the top of the U boat's conning-tower sufficiently to penetrate the plating. Before steps could be taken to stop the inrush of water the U boat was doomed. Sinking slowly to the bottom, she filled, the heavy oil from her motors finding its way to the surface in an aureole of iridescent colours to mark her last resting-place.

George, seaman first, and fighting-man next, gave little thought to his involuntary act. The safety of his temporary command came foremost.

"Nip down below and see if she's started a seam," he ordered.

The men, who had been ejected from their quarters by the concussion, hurried to the fore-peak. As they opened the cuddy-hatch the half-dozen terrified German prisoners made a wild scramble to gain the deck.

"Who told you blighters to come out?" shouted George, and, abandoning the wheel, he rushed forward, seized the foremost Hun by the scruff of the neck and hurled him violently against the next man. The floor of the fore-peak was covered with a squirming heap of now thoroughly cowed Huns, to whom the apparition of the stalwart, angry Englishman was more to be dreaded than being

shaken like peas in a pod in the dark recesses of their temporary prison quarter.

"Is she making anything?" enquired George anxiously, as he returned to take charge of the helm.

"Hardly a trickle," was the reassuring reply. "Whack her up, mate."

The coxwain proceeded to order full speed ahead, and the little craft tore back to the *Calder* in order that the news of her skipper's disappearance might be reported.

To the surprise of the patrol-boat's crew they discovered their sub, arrayed in borrowed garments, standing aft and motioning to the boat to come alongside.

It was easier said than done. The coxwain's faith in his capabilities was weak, notwithstanding his resolution. At the first shot he carried too much way, reversing engines when the little craft was fifty yards ahead of the destroyer. The second attempt found him a like distance short, with no way on the boat. At the third he dexterously caught a coil of rope hurled from the *Calder*, and succeeded in hauling alongside.

"We've just rammed a submarine, sir," reported the coxwain, saluting, delivering the information in a matter-of-fact manner, as if destroying enemy craft in this fashion were an everyday occurrence.

Sub-lieutenant Stickleton having regained his command, the motor-boat piloted the *Calder* to the scene of her exploit. A diver descended in nine fathoms, and quickly telephoned the confirmatory information that a U boat was lying with a list to starboard on the sand, with a rent in her conning-tower—the indirect result of the involuntary bathe of Sub-lieutenant Stickleton, R.N.R.

CHAPTER V—Sefton to the Rescue

"A tug and a couple of lighters bearing down, sir," reported the *Calder's* look-out before the diver had reappeared from his errand of investigation.

Approaching at the modest rate of 7 knots was a paddle-wheel steamer towing two unwieldy craft resembling overgrown canal barges.

The tide was now well on the flood. It wanted about a couple of hours to high water, and, since the falling glass and clear visibility of distant objects betokened the approach of bad weather, urgent steps would have to be taken

speedily to extricate the captured submarine from the embraces of the sand-bank.

The examination of the prize by her captors was now practically complete. The U boat was one of a new type, and had left Wilhelmshaven on her maiden trip forty-eight hours previously. She had either lost her bearings or had purposely approached shoal water. Anyhow she had been neatly strafed before she had had time to do much mischief.

Already the *Calder's* crew had taken steps to assist the salvage people in the task of floating the prize. The hatchways, with the exception of that of the conning-tower, had been hermetically closed, and the watertight doors in the for'ard bulkhead shut and shored up to withstand the pressure of water in the holed fore-peak.

By the time the lighters were made fast, one on either side of the submarine, the level of the water was up to within fifteen inches of the conning-tower hatchway. Quickly hoses, connected to Downton pumps, were led from the lighters to the water-ballast tanks of the submarine, since it had been found impossible to "start" the ballast by means of hand pumps.

It was a race against time and tide. The mechanical appliances won, and soon the *Calder's* officers and crew had the satisfaction of seeing the submarine's deck appear close to the surface.

She still had a pronounced "dip", the flooded for'ard compartment tending to depress her bow; but, supported by the two lighters, she was prevented from sinking. Then, taken in tow by the tug, the prize, with her cumbersome attendants, waddled slowly for Harwich.

Her part in this supplementary business ended, the *Calder* slipped off at full speed to the position where the *Dimpled Lassie* and the *Carse o' Gowrie* still held a resolute grip on the recovered cable.

As Skipper M'Kie had surmised, neither of the trawlers had been molested by the German battle-cruisers or destroyers. Carried away by their frantic desire to make a display of frightfulness upon an unprotected English watering-place they had totally ignored the seemingly innocuous cable-grappling craft.

"It will blow like billy-oh before morning," remarked Lieutenant Crosthwaite to his subordinate. "I'm going to tell them to buoy and slip the cable. We've done very well, I think. You might make an observation; I'll take another, and we'll check our calculations. I'll guarantee we won't have much trouble in fishing up the cable next time."

Crosthwaite's orders to the skippers of the trawlers were smartly carried out, and the cable, left with its position marked by a green wreck-buoy, a sufficient guarantee against detrimental examination by curious fishermen. Before sunset the *Calder* and her two charges were snug in Lowestoft harbour, the crews being cautioned against the risk of letting fall any hint concerning their recent

work—an injunction that they loyally carried out.

It was three days before the gale blew itself out. During that period events had been moving rapidly. And here one of the few advantages of being on particular service became apparent. Had not the *Calder* been detailed for escort duties to the cable-grappling trawlers the chances were that she would be plugging against heavy green seas, while those of her crew not on duty on deck would be existing under battened hatches. Instead, the destroyer was lying snugly berthed in a harbour, and her crew were able to enjoy brief spells of liberty ashore.

The next step was to locate the shore end of the cable. This work required particular skill and discretion, since the German operator would certainly be on the alert for the first suspicious movement.

Scotland Yard detectives, disguised as fishermen and longshoremen, eventually succeeded in tracing the source of the leakage of information. The temporary cable had been brought ashore nearly four miles from the original landing-place of the severed line, and led to a wooden hut on the edge of the sandy cliffs.

For the present, all that was required to be done in that direction was performed. The Admiralty had decided to let the cable turn the tables upon the Huns, and, until the time was ripe, the spy could telegraph without interruption, but unwittingly he was digging a pit for himself from which no escape was possible.

It was well into the third week in May when the *Calder* received orders to proceed to Rosyth, replenish stores and oil-fuel, and rejoin her flotilla. The news was hailed with delight, since it was possible that many of the officers and crew would be able to proceed on leave.

Another week passed. Information had reached the Commander-in-Chief of a certain amount of German activity in the North Sea. Something had to be done to attract the attention of the German populace from the series of rebuffs experienced by the Huns before Verdun. Exaggerated reports concerning the prowess of the German High Seas Fleet, coupled with news of spasmodic raids upon the British coast, helped to foster the ill-founded belief of the Huns in the invincibility of their navy, while, to keep up the deceit, Admiral von Scheer took his ships out for various discreet cruises off the Danish coast, where there was ever a possibility of making a quick run back under the guns and behind the minefields of Heligoland.

On the 29th May orders were issued for the First and Second Battle Squadrons and the Second Battle-Cruiser Squadron to proceed to a certain rendezvous in order to carry out target practice. The instructions were issued through the usual channels, with the almost certain knowledge that the information would leak out. The Commander-in-Chief's anticipation proved to be correct, for within three hours of the issuing of the order the news was transmitted to Germany by means of the tapped cable.

It was not the Admiral's intention to carry out target practice. Instead, the whole of the Grand Fleet put to sea from its various bases, ostensibly for the neighbourhood of the Orkneys, but in reality for a far more important objective.

At 1 a.m. on the 31st the authorities raided the isolated hut on the Norfolk coast, captured the German telegraph operator in the act of communicating with Borkum, and hurried him away under close arrest. He had played his part as far as the British interests were concerned, since he had informed the German Admiralty of the supposed rendezvous of Jellicoe's fleet.

"Do you think there's something in the wind, sir?" asked Sefton, as the *Calder*, in station with the rest of her flotilla, was slipping along at 18 knots.

Crosthwaite smiled enigmatically. He knew as much as captains of ships were supposed to know, which wasn't very much, but more than their subordinates were told.

"Patience!" he replied. "Can't say more at present. You might see how repairs to that 4-inch gun are progressing."

Sefton descended the bridge ladder and made his way aft. Slight defects in the mounting of the stern-chaser quick-firer had appeared almost as soon as the destroyer left the Firth of Forth, and the armourer's crew were hard at work rectifying the damage.

Gripping the stanchion rail surrounding the gun platform, for the *Calder* was rolling considerably in the "wash" of her preceding consorts, and exposed to a stiff beam wind, the sub watched the operation. He had no need to ask any questions; there was little about the mechanism of a 4-inch and its mountings that he did not know. He could see that the repairs were almost completed, only a few finishing touches requiring to be done.

"Man overboard!"

The sub rushed to the side just in time to see the outstretched arms of a bluejacket emerging from the following wave of the swiftly moving craft. It was indeed fortunate that the man was still alive, not only had he escaped having his back broken on striking the water, but he had missed the rapidly revolving starboard propeller. Clad in a "duffel" suit and wearing sea-boots, his position was precarious in the extreme.

Without hesitation Sefton made a flying leap over the guard-rails. Once clear of the side he drew up his legs and hunched his shoulders, striking the water with tremendous force. Well it was that he had taken this precaution instead of making a dive in the ordinary sense of the word, for, carried onward at the rate of a mile every three minutes, he ran a serious risk of dislocated limbs or a broken back had he not rolled himself into the nearest resemblance to a ball.

He sank deeply, and was swept irresistibly by the back-wash; it seemed as if he were fathoms down. Before he emerged he could distinctly hear the whirr

[image]

"WITHOUT HESITATION SEFTON MADE A FLYING LEAP OVER
THE GUARD RAILS"

of the triple propellers. Rising to the surface he refilled his lungs with the salt-laden air, for the concussion had wellnigh deprived him of breath. Then he gave a hurried glance around him.

The *Calder* was already a couple of cables' lengths away, while the destroyer next astern was almost on top of him. As she swept by, a lifebuoy was hurled towards the sub, luckily missing him by a bare yard.

The second and last destroyer astern saw the swimmer, and by porting helm avoided him easily, and saved him from the great discomfort of being flung about in her wake like a pea in a saucepan of boiling water. Without making any attempt to slow down and send a boat, the destroyer flotilla held on.

Sefton soon realized the necessity for this apparently inexplicable act. It was impossible without grave risk to the flotilla to break up the formation, while the danger was still further increased by the fact that the First Cruiser Squadron was pelting along somewhere three or four miles astern, and these vessels, being of a considerable tonnage, carried a tremendous amount of way. Above all, it was war-time, and individuals do not count when greater issues are at stake.

Presently the sub descried the head and shoulders of the missing man as he rose on the crest of the broken waves. He, too, had succeeded in reaching a lifebuoy thrown by the nearest destroyer. Short as had been the time between the man's tumble overboard and Sefton's deliberate leap, owing to the speed of the flotilla nearly a quarter of a mile separated the would-be rescuer from the object of his gallant attempt.

"No use hanging on here," thought Sefton, as he clung to the buoy. "Must get to the man somehow."

Then it was that he realized that he had gone overboard in a thick pilot coat and india-rubber sea-boots. These he sacrificed regretfully, since there was no chance of replenishing his kit until the *Calder* returned to port—that is, if he had the good fortune to survive his adventure "in the ditch". The operation of discarding the boots gave him a tussle, during which he swallowed more salt water than desirable; then, relaxing his grip on the lifebuoy, Sefton struck out towards the man.

The sub was a good swimmer. At Dartmouth he had been "runner-up" for the 440 yards championship, but now he realized the vast difference between

swimming that length in regulation costume and an equal distance almost fully clothed in the choppy North Sea.

By the time the sub came within hailing distance of the seaman his limbs felt as heavy as lead, while, do what he would, he was unable to raise his voice above a whisper, much less "assure the drowning man in a loud, firm voice that he is safe", according to the official regulations. Sefton was by no means certain that he himself was in anything but a most precarious position.

Sefton found that the man he had risked his life to save was not half so exhausted as he was. The seaman had come off lightly in his fall, and he had had no occasion to tire himself with a long swim to the lifebuoy, since the crew of the passing destroyer had all but brained him with the cork "Kisbie".

The A.B. regarded his rescuer with a look that betokened pained disapproval. He was one of those men who are ever "up against discipline". To him the gold band and curl on a uniform meant something more than authority: it roused a spirit of sullen aggression.

And yet Thomas Brown had joined the Royal Navy with the best intentions. Fate, in the shape of a short-tempered recruiting-officer, had marred his career from the very start; for, on joining the training-school at Shotley, one of the questions asked of him was the name of his birthplace.

"Ashby-de-la-Zouch, sir," replied young Brown, giving the name with the accepted Leicestershire accent.

"Where did you say?" enquired the lieutenant.

The recruit repeated the words.

"Zoo, did you say?" snapped the officer.

"Yes, sir," rejoined Thomas Brown without a moment's hesitation. "The next cage to yours."

The repartee came absolutely on the spur of the moment. A second's reflection might have made all the difference. It was a bad start, and the newly-entered boy suffered for it. That was some years ago, but in the Royal Navy the old adage of giving a dog a bad name holds good longer than anywhere else.

Sefton recognized the man as one who figured frequently in the "Captain's Report". Young as he was, the sub had a keen insight into human nature, and although he knew nothing of the first slip that had marred the A.B.'s career he was certain that there were good points in the man, and that underneath his rugged, surly exterior there was something of true worth.

"No need for you to tumble into the ditch after me, sir," said the man. "I can shift for myself."

He spoke gruffly, but underlying the remonstrance was an unmistakable tone of gratitude. In the circumstances he was glad of company. He would have welcomed his "raggie", or chum, in preference to an officer, but at such times the

difference of rank gives place to the equality of human peril.

"They'll pick us both up," declared Sefton, although in his mind he had grave doubts as to the matter.

"Not they," rejoined A.B. Brown, indicating the direction of the now invisible flotilla with a jerk of his closely-cropped head. "The cruisers might. But take hold of this, sir," he added, pushing the buoy to within reach of the sub. "You looks as if you want it a long sight more'n me."

Both men relapsed into silence. Further conversation meant a waste of precious breath. At intervals, as the buoy rose on the billows, Sefton "hiked" his head and shoulders well clear of the water in the hope of sighting the armoured-cruiser squadron.

"They're a precious long time in coming up," he soliloquized. "Seven minutes ought to have done the trick."

As a matter of fact, the First Cruiser Squadron had received a wireless message from the *Calder* within ninety seconds of Sefton's leap overboard, requesting the vessels to keep a sharp look-out for the two men.

On receipt of the intelligence the armoured cruisers' speed was reduced to 10 knots, and this accounted for the seemingly endless time that elapsed before the vessels came within sight of the two well-nigh exhausted men as they clung to the lifebuoy.

At length, through the light haze that prevailed throughout the morning, could be discerned the grey outlines of the First Cruiser Squadron.

The ships were steaming in double column, line ahead, the *Defence*, flying the Rear-Admiral's flag, leading the starboard and the *Warrior* the port line. With faultless precision they came on, three cables' distance separating the units of each division, and twice that interval betwixt the columns.

"They've spotted us, sir," exclaimed Able Seaman Brown, as the alteration of position of the red flag and green cone displayed from the cruiser's mainmast yard-arm told the two men that the *Warrior's* helm was being ported. Simultaneously the "steaming cones" were reversed, showing that the ship's engines were going astern—a manoeuvre followed by the rest of the squadron.

Almost before way was taken off the ship the *Warrior's* sea-boat was rapidly lowered from the davits. Sefton could hear the dull thud of the lower blocks as the releasing-gear came into action and the falls surged against the ship's side, and the treble-voiced midshipman urging his boat's crew to "give way there, my lads, for all you're worth."

Although only a minute and a half elapsed between the time the sea-boat got away from the ship and her arrival at the scene of the rescue, the interval seemed interminable to Sub-lieutenant Sefton.

With feelings of indescribable relief he realized that he was being gripped

by two pairs of horny powerful hands and lifted over the dipping gunwale into the stern-sheets, while others performed a like office for the saturated A.B.

Smartly the sea-boat was brought alongside the cruiser. Deftly the hoisting-gear was engaged, and with a hundred-and-twenty men tailing on the falls the boat and her occupants were whisked up to a level with the vessel's quarter-deck.

And thus Acting Sub-lieutenant John Sefton found himself on board H.M.S. *Warrior*, in blissful ignorance of the gallant part the armoured cruiser was about to bear in the glorious battle off the Jutland Bank.

CHAPTER VI—Action at the Double

The ship upon which Sefton found himself as an unauthorized supernumerary was an armoured cruiser of 13,550 tons, built and completed at Pembroke nine years previously. She was one of a class of four that marked a new departure in naval architecture—each of her guns being mounted singly and in a separate turret. At the time when she was laid down she was considered one of the heaviest armed cruisers of her day, mounting six 9.2-inch and four 7.5-inch guns. Of these, three 9.2's could be made to fire ahead, and a similar number astern, while on either broadside she could deliver a formidable salvo from four of the guns of heavier calibre and two of the 7.5's. With the exception of the following year's programme of the *Minotaur* class, the *Warrior* and her sister ships were the last armoured cruisers laid down by the British Admiralty, the all-big-gun battle-cruisers simply outclassing at one swoop the armoured cruisers of the world's navies.

Nevertheless the *Warrior* was still a powerful unit, and calculated to be more than a match for any German vessel of her size. Her designed speed of a fraction over 22 knots—a rate that when necessity arose could be exceeded—enabled her with the rest of her class to form a valuable, hard-hitting auxiliary to the vessels of the battle-cruiser squadrons.

While Sefton was being kitted out by an obliging brother sub-lieutenant, a wireless message had been sent to the *Calder* announcing the safety of her sub-lieutenant and A.B. Brown.

Crosthwaite received the gratifying intelligence with undisguised delight. His feelings were shared by the whole of the ship's company, for, almost without exception, the destroyer's officers were voted a "sound lot", and the possibility of Sefton's death in a gallant attempt at the rescue of a lower-deck man had thrown a gloom over the ship.

As for the lieutenant-commander, his relief and gratitude to Providence knew no bounds. Between Sefton's leap overboard and the receipt of the *Warrior's* message he had passed through a distressing time. Apart from his personal regard for the sub, with whom he had shared adventures and perils in the Near East, the fact that he had been compelled to abandon Sefton to the vagaries of fate hit him hard. He was even doubtful whether, with the possibilities of hostile submarines cruising around, the armoured cruisers would risk slowing down to rescue two men and at the same time present a splendid target for German torpedoes. However, the deed of rescue was accomplished, and the next step to consider was how to get Sefton and the A.B. back on the destroyer. The former's presence was desirable, in fact essential.

In answer to the *Calder's* lieutenant-commander's request, whether it would be possible for Sefton to be sent back to the destroyer, the rescuing ship replied that, should opportunity occur, the *Calder* could close, but that, in view of present conditions, such a step was most unlikely.

"So you'll jolly well have to make yourself at home here, old bird," remarked one of the *Warrior's* sub-lieutenants, who as a youngster had passed out of Dartmouth at the same time as Sefton. "Suppose the trip will do you good. Sort of marine excursion out and home, don't you know. Nothin' doin', and never a sign of a Hun, unless it be a 'tin-fish' or two."

The *Warrior's* sub voiced the opinion of the rest of the gun-room. He was president of the mess and a mild autocrat over the "small fry", and generally voted a rattling good sort by the handful of midshipmen, many of whom, alas! were to yield up their lives in undying fame before many hours were past.

Yet, although the whole of the personnel of the Grand Fleet were as keen as mustard to meet the Huns, frequent and almost unvarying disappointment had been their lot. Over and over again Beatty's squadron had swept the North Sea without coming in contact with the enemy, until it was the general conclusion that, until the High Seas Fleet was actually sighted, it was of no use speculating upon the chances of the "big scrap".

And now, on the memorable morning of Wednesday, the 31st May, the First and Second Battle-cruiser Squadron, three light-cruiser squadrons, with attendant destroyers, were ploughing eastward across the North Sea, with the knowledge that the hard-hitting Battle Fleet, together with a formidable array of cruisers and destroyers, was some distance to the nor'ard, ready, at the first wire-

less call, to complete the toils thrown around the German fleet should the latter, lured into a sense of false security, dare to leave the mine-fields of Heligoland.

Shortly after noon the wind dropped and the water became almost calm, save for the undulations caused by the swiftly-moving squadron. Overhead the sun shone faintly through a thick haze, which for hours hung about with irritating persistence.

Sefton had just commenced a game of draughts with some of the officers who were off duty, when a messenger entered the gun-room and handed a "chit" to the senior sub. Not until the man had gone did the young officer break the momentous news to the others, apologizing as if the information might unduly raise their hopes.

"I don't want to be too cock-sure, you fellows," he announced. "Looks as if they're out this time, but—"

"I vote we go on deck," suggested a midshipman.

"And see the whole of the German fleet," added a junior watchkeeper facetiously.

"Anyhow, there's 'General Quarters'," retorted the middy daringly as a bugle rang out, the call being quickly repeated in various parts of the ship, "Look alive, you fellows."

"Stick to me, Sefton," said the senior sub, snatching his telescope from a rack and making a bolt for the door. "If there's anything to be seen of the scrap you'll have a good chance with me. I'm fire-control, don't you know?"

Jack Sefton nodded his head in acquiescence. He was sorry that he was not on board the *Calder*, since there was a greater possibility of the destroyer flotillas dashing in to complete the work of the battle-cruisers than of the armoured cruisers getting within range.

Gaining the quarter-deck, the *Calder's* sub heard the unmistakable baritone hum of an aerial propeller. Overhead, at a low altitude of less than a thousand feet, a sea-plane was flying in a northeasterly direction. By the markings on her planes and fuselage—concentric red, white, and blue circles—Sefton recognized her as a British one. It afterwards transpired that Sir David Beatty had ordered the *Engadine* to send up a sea-plane for reconnaissance work, and that wireless reports were received from the daring airmen that they had sighted four hostile light cruisers. The latter opened a hot fire with every quick-firer they could get to bear upon the indomitable sea-plane, the range being less than 3000 yards, but in spite of the hail of shrapnel the airmen gained their desired information and returned to their parent ship.

On board the *Warrior*, as was the case with the rest of her consorts, hands were hard at work clearing ship for action. Already the masts and shrouds had been "frapped", or protected, by means of wire cables wrapped round the spars

and interlaced between the standing-rigging. "A" and "B" water-tight doors were closed, armoured hatchways battened down, and hoses led along the decks in order to quell the fire that would inevitably break out should a hostile shell burst inside the armoured belt. Stanchions, cowls, and all gear likely to interfere with the training of the guns were unshipped and stowed, tons of His Majesty's property were jettisoned, the danger of their remaining on board being more than sufficient reason for their sacrifice.

Inside the turrets, tubs of water were provided to slake the burning thirst of the guns' crews, for experience had proved that the acute mental and physical strain, coupled with the acrid fumes that drift into the confined steel spaces, produces an intense dryness of the mouth and throat. Behind the armoured protection, stretcher-bearers and fire-parties were preparing for their stern work.

Down below, far beneath the water-line, the fleet surgeon and his staff were getting ready for their grim yet humane tasks. Operations have to be performed under great disadvantages, the complexity of wounds caused by modern shells adding to the difficulties under which the medical staff labours. Contrast an operation in a well-ordered hospital on shore—where perfect quietude reigns and everything is conducive to success—with the conditions on board a war-ship in action. The indifferent light, for the electric lamps are quivering under the vibration of the guns; the deafening concussion overhead as the ship gives and receives punishment; the jerky motion of the vessel as she twists and turns to the rapid movements of the helm and quivers under the titanic blows of hostile shells; and the probability of the ship's bottom being shattered like an egg-shell by a powerful torpedo—all these form but a part of the disadvantages under which the naval medical staff labour during the progress of an action.

Literally imprisoned below the armoured deck, the grimy stokers were preparing for the coming ordeal. Hidden from the rest of the ship's company, they toiled like Trojans in order to raise such a terrific head of steam as would make the cruiser "foot it" at a speed far in excess of her nominal 22.33 knots. In action the lot of the "black squad" is perhaps the worst on board. Knowing nothing of what is going on, they have to work in a confined, heated steel box, shovelling coals with a dexterity that is the outcome of months of strenuous training. Besides the risk of torpedoes and shells there is ever the danger of the boilers giving way under the pressure of steam, with the inevitable result—a horrible death in a pitch-black stokehold filled with scalding steam. And yet, for easygoing joviality and good comradeship the naval stoker is hard to beat. He will face discomforts with a smiling face and a cheerful heart. He will be ready to risk his life for his chum—or on the altar of duty.

These thoughts flashed through Sefton's mind as he watched the rapid and methodical preparation of clearing ship for action. For once the sub realized that

he was a mere spectator—a sort of pariah, dumped from a comparatively insignificant destroyer upon a cruiser mustering a complement of over 700 officers and men. He was aware of the fact that he was a "deadhead"—an individual having no right to take part in the forthcoming contest. The inaction seemed the worst part of the business as far as he was concerned.

Presently Sefton's thoughts were interrupted by the shrill, long-drawn-out trills of the bos'n's mates' pipes summoning the ship's company to muster on the quarter-deck. At the double the men romped aft—every seaman, marine, stoker, and "idler" not actually prevented by pressure of duty elsewhere.

Since the captain could not quit the fore-bridge the assembled ship's company was addressed by the commander. In crisp sentences of simple brevity he explained to the men the position of affairs. At length a big action was in progress, he announced, for a wireless message had just come in to the effect that the battle-cruisers were already engaging the enemy at 18,000 yards—a distance of nearly 11 land miles. More than that, the German Battle Squadron was coming from the nor'ard, and there was a grave possibility of the British battle-cruisers being engaged between the enemy battleships and their battle-cruisers. In which case, the commander hastened to explain, losses would doubtless be severe; but it was part of the Commander-in-Chief's plan to risk certain of his battle-cruisers in order to cut off and detain the German fleet until the British Main Battle Squadrons got between the enemy and their bases.

"I do not expect that we shall go into action just at present," concluded the commander, "but should events shape themselves all right we'll be in the thick of it before long. And I have not the faintest hesitation in expressing my firm belief that every man jack of us will do his duty to King and country, and uphold the traditions of H.M.S. *Warrior*."

With that the men were dismissed, and, all preparations having been made, they were at liberty until the "Action Stations" sounded. That interval was perhaps the most trying of all. Many of the ship's company were going into action for the first time. The majority were laughing and cutting jokes; some could be seen with grey, anxious faces as they thought of their dear ones at home; but amongst the whole complement there was not the faintest trace of faint-heartedness. From the captain down to the youngest "first-class" boy the same sentiment held sway: that the *Warrior* would be able to acquit herself with glory and with honour.

Through the sultry air could be faintly heard the distant and constant rumble of heavy gun-firing. The naval action was developing, although the engaged portions of the rival fleets were fifty or sixty miles away. The subdued noise made a fitting accompaniment to the stirring words of the commander.

Sefton, still remaining on the quarter-deck, could not help admiring the

steadiness with which the cruisers kept station. From time to time hoists of bunting fluttered to the yard-arm of the flagship *Defence*, the orders they expressed being carried out with the utmost celerity and precision.

A lieutenant descending from the after-bridge passed along the quarter-deck towards the companion on the half-deck.

"You're out of it, Sefton, I'm afraid," he remarked. "We've just had another wireless. Our destroyers are giving the Huns socks. The old *Calder* is in the thick of it."

"Any losses?" asked Sefton, feeling ready to kick himself for being out of the scrap.

"Don't know yet," was the reply. "I only—"

The lieutenant's words were interrupted by the blare of a bugle. Turning on his heels he rushed forward at top speed, for at last the rousing order "Action at the Double" was given.

In an instant all was a scene of "orderly confusion", each man running with a set purpose. For the most part the crew were stripped to the waist—a crowd of muscular-armed, deep-chested, clean-shaven men in the very pink of condition. Still exchanging banter, they disappeared to their battle-stations, eager and alert to let loose a hail of shell upon the first hostile vessel that came within range.

"Come along, old man," exclaimed the young sub who had previously "cot-toned on" to Jack Sefton. "Now's your chance if you want to see the fun."

The two junior officers made their way for'ard, past the starboard guns in their isolated and closely-sealed steel turrets, until they reached the foremast.

"Up with you," said Sefton's companion laconically.

Sefton agilely ascended to the dizzy perch known as the fire-control platform. The other sub followed quickly at his heels, squeezed through the narrow aperture in the floor of the enclosed space, and slammed to the metal hinged cover.

"At last!" he exclaimed gleefully.

Sefton only nodded in complete accord. A clock on the after side of the steel wall indicated 5.45. A glance to the deck a hundred feet below showed no sign of life. There was nothing to show that confined within that double-wedge-shaped hull were close upon seven hundred human beings, all with one set purpose, as the thirteen thousand tons of dead-weight forged ahead at full speed towards a distant blurr just visible through the ever-varying haze.

Suddenly the *Defence* opened fire with her for'ard pair of 9.2's, quickly following with her 7.5's. The ball had opened.

"Fifteen eight hundred, sir," reported one of the range-finding officers within Sefton's hearing.

Rapidly yet smoothly the *Warrior's* bow guns rose until Sefton could see

their muzzles showing like oval-shaped cavities against the dull-grey painted chases. For a second or two only the weapons hung seemingly irresolute.

Then with a concussion that shook the ship the guns sent their missiles hurtling through the air, while clouds of acrid-smelling smoke, black, white, and brown in hue, drifted rapidly across the deck.

At last the *Warrior* had her chance—and she was taking it with a vengeance.

CHAPTER VII—In the Thick of the Fight

Leaving Sub-lieutenant Jack Sefton on his elevated perch in the fire-control station, it will be necessary to follow the fortunes of the vessel from which he had in theory deserted—the destroyer *Calder*.

Like the rest of the flotillas, the *Calder* had cleared for action shortly after noon. Hers was a far different part from that of the *Warrior*. There was practically no protection for her guns' crew and for the men serving the torpedo-tubes. Her conning-tower afforded shelter only from slivers of steel and the bursting shrapnel; it was vulnerable to large projectiles. Relying solely on her speed and quickness of helm, the destroyer's mission was to dart in towards the enemy lines and get in as many hits with her torpedoes as possible. Then, if fortunate enough to escape a direct hit from the German guns, she would have to scurry back to the shelter of the battle-cruisers, and await another opportunity to make a further torpedo attack upon the enemy.

At 3.30 p.m. Beatty's command increased speed to 25 knots, the Second Battle-cruiser Squadron forming astern of the First, while a far-flung line of destroyers took up station ahead. The course was now E.S.E., slightly converging upon the enemy, whose ships, looming with varying degrees of visibility through the haze, were now at a distance of a little more than ten sea miles.

Half that distance away the Fifth Battle Squadron, including the gigantic *Warspite*, was bearing N.N.W., with the object of supporting the battle-cruisers when occasion arose.

It was a proud moment for the gallant Beatty when he realized that now he was between the enemy battle-cruisers and their North Sea bases; while there

was an ever-increasing possibility that Jellicoe's main fleet would speedily be in a position to cut off the German battleships from their retreat through the Skager-Rack to Kiel. Yet at the same time the odds against Beatty were bordering upon the enormous. His duty was to engage, entice, and hold the enemy in a northerly direction without being overwhelmed by superior force. Even at the risk of losing some of his best ships he had to engage the attention of the enemy, lure them into the belief that at last the British battle-cruisers had run into a trap, and hammer away until the Commander-in-Chief arrived upon the scene with a vastly superior fleet.

At a quarter to five the opposing forces opened fire simultaneously at a range of 20,000 yards. The *Calder* was keeping station broad on the beam of the *Queen Mary*, and warding off threatened submarine attacks, for the time was not yet ripe for the destroyers to hurl themselves against the battered hostile ships.

"By Jove, this is going to be 'some' scrap," muttered Crosthwaite, as a regular tornado of heavy shells "straddled" the leading battle-cruisers.

At first the German gunnery was excellent, several direct hits being received by the British battle-cruisers, but in a few moments the steady, rapid, methodical salvos from the British 13.5's began to make themselves felt. Between the patches of haze, rent by the lurid flashes of the guns, could be descried the greenish-grey outlines of the hostile vessels fast being reduced to scrap-iron. For the time being all seemed well with the British battle-cruisers, whose volume of fire was still being delivered with that terrible regularity which the Huns have good cause to dread.

Suddenly the huge *Indefatigable* was destroyed; a gallant battle-cruiser of nearly 19,000 tons had paid the price of Admiralty.

In previous naval battles such an appalling catastrophe as the blowing up of a mighty ship has caused the two fleets spontaneously to cease fire for a period of some minutes; but in the Jutland fight, regardless of the fate of the battle-cruiser, the rest of the squadron redoubled their efforts. Not for one second did the hellish din cease, as the death-dealing salvos hurtled into the opposing ships. To quote the words of one on board the *Tiger*, it was "a glorified Donnybrook Fair—whenever you see a head, crack it!"

Twenty minutes later Crosthwaite saw the *Queen Mary* sunk. So quickly did she disappear that the *Tiger*, following astern, passed through the smoke that marked the grave of the devoted ship.

Beyond, the *Invincible*, already badly hit, sank, taking with her 750 gallant officers and men.

By this time the Fifth Battle Squadron, which had been attached to Beatty's command, came into action, opening fire at 20,000 yards, and although the pressure of the enemy's predominance in numbers was considerably relaxed, the dan-

ger was by no means over. For, in the now thicker haze, the German battle fleet had arrived upon the scene, and Beatty was literally betwixt two fires. Yet he handled his vessels with admirable strategical and tactical skill, being convinced, as was every man under him, that in spite of losses he was succeeding in holding the Huns.

Majestically the four great battleships, *Warspite*, *Valiant*, *Barham*, and *Malaya*, bore into the mêlée, each of their 15-inch guns firing with terrible effect. The head of the German column seemed to be literally crumpled and crushed. A large three-funnelled battleship, possibly the *Thuringien*, received terrific punishment. Masts, funnels, turrets, were blown away piecemeal, until, a mass of smoke and flames, she hauled off line and was quickly screened by the smoke from some of the German destroyers. Whether she sank—and it seemed as if she could not do otherwise—Crosthwaite was unable to determine. Other German vessels, badly damaged, were swung out of position, some of them on fire and showing a tremendous list.

At a quarter to five both fleets altered course several points, the rival lines turning outwards and completely reversing their previous direction. It was at this juncture that the British destroyers were ordered to take advantage of the confusion in which the Huns had been thrown and to launch a torpedo attack upon the battered enemy ships.

"Now for it," thought Crosthwaite, the glint of battle in his eyes. It was his chance—a dash in broad daylight against the quick-firers of the German vessels. Never before in the history of naval warfare had destroyers been ordered to attack battleships save at night. Everything depended upon skill in handling, speed, and the turmoil into which the enemy had been thrown by the terrific gun-fire of the battleships of the *Queen Elizabeth* class.

In four columns line ahead the destroyer flotillas raced off at top speed. Drawing clear of the cruisers, they turned 8 points to starboard, a course that would bring them in contact with the enemy line. Thick clouds of fire-tinged smoke belched from their funnels—not due to bad stoking but to the deliberate manipulation of the oil-fuel-fed furnaces, since smoke alone offered any concealment during the daylight attack.

With a couple of quartermasters, a signalman, and a messenger to attend to the voice-tubes, Crosthwaite took up his station within the conning-tower. All his mental powers were at work, and yet he remained perfectly cool and collected. Hardly a detail that came under his notice of that onward rush escaped his recollection.

For the first few miles the destroyers kept perfect station. Had they been on peace manoeuvres their relative distances could not have been better maintained. Through the eddying, ash-laden smoke, Crosthwaite strained his bloodshot eyes

upon the destroyer next ahead, ready at the first sign to reduce speed or swerve should the little craft be hit or fall out of line. The possibility of the *Calder* being "done in" never occurred to him, once the order had been given to attack. It was always one of her consorts that might meet with ill-luck, but Crosthwaite's command—no, never.

Shells were beginning to ricochet from the water all around the devoted destroyers; yet, seemingly bearing a charmed life, they held grimly on their way.

More than once the sharp crash of a projectile exploding astern caused the lieutenant-commander to turn his head. Already rents were visible in the *Calder's* funnels, through which the smoke poured in long trailing wisps. By the two tubes the torpedo-men stood rigidly at attention. Their two deadly weapons had been "launched home" and the tubes trained ten degrees for'ard of the beam. With his hand upon the firing-trigger the torpedo coxswain of each end waited, as impassive as if carved in marble, ready to speed the missile on its way, and apparently indifferent to the fact that a sliver of steel striking the deadly warhead would involve the destroyer and her entire crew in absolute and instantaneous destruction.

Suddenly the leading destroyer ported helm, turning so swiftly and listing so excessively that, for the moment, Crosthwaite thought that she had received a mortal blow. Her alert commander had noticed a suspicious movement amongst the irregular line of battered German war-ships, now almost within effective torpedo range.

Out from behind the screen of battleships tore a German light cruiser and nearly a score of their ocean-going torpedo-boats. Whether it was with the intention of intercepting the British destroyers, or whether about to launch a torpedo attack upon Beatty's battle-cruisers, Crosthwaite knew not. All he did know was that the rival flotillas were closing at an aggregate rate of more than a mile a minute, and that the next few seconds would find the torpedo-craft mixed up in a most unholy scrap.

All attempts at formation were now cast to the winds. Interlining, dodging across each other's bows, the engaging vessels raced madly to and fro, their quick-firers barking as rapidly as the gunners could thrust home the cartridges and clang the breech-blocks. So intricate was the manoeuvring that Crosthwaite saw two German torpedo-boats collide, and, while in that position, they were raked by a dozen shells from the *Turbulent*.

Almost the next instant he was aware that a similar peril threatened the *Calder*, for a British destroyer, hit in her engine-room, circled erratically to starboard across her bows.

Gripping the engine-room telegraph-indicator levers, Crosthwaite rammed them to full speed astern. It was his only chance, for he could not pass either

across the bows or astern of the crippled destroyer without certain risk of colliding with others of the flotilla. Then he waited—perhaps five seconds—in breathless suspense. Thank God, the *Calder* began to lose way! It now remained to be seen whether she would gather sternway before her sharp stem crashed into the other destroyer amidships.

Even as he gripped the levers Crosthwaite saw the crew of the crippled craft's after 4-inch gun slew the weapon round to have a smack at the German vessel that had hit her so badly. The gun-layer, pressing his shoulder to the recoil-pad, bent over the sights. The next instant a hostile shell landed fairly upon the 4-inch quick-firer, bursting with an ear-splitting detonation.

When the smoke had drifted away, the gun was no longer visible, only a few twisted pieces of metal marking the spot where the mounting had stood. Of the men serving the quick-firer only one remained—the gun-layer. By the vagaries of explosion he was practically unhurt, except for being partially stunned by the terrible detonation. For some minutes he stood stock-still, as if unable to realize that the gun and his comrades had disappeared; then, making a sudden bound, he leapt into the sea. Evidently under the impression that the vessel was on the point of foundering, he had decided to swim for it.

Well it was for him that the *Calder* was now almost motionless, although her propellers were going hard astern. Caught by the backwash of the revolving screws, he was swept past the side like a cork in a mountain torrent, until one of the men on the *Calder's* fore-bridge threw him a rope.

As coolly as if mustering for divisions, the rescued gun-layer made his way aft, and, saluting the gunner, requested to be allowed to assist in serving the *Calder's* after 4-inch.

Out from behind a dense cloud of smoke leapt a German torpedo-boat. Her commander had spotted the *Calder* practically without steerage-way, and had made up his mind to ram, since his own craft was badly hit and could not keep afloat much longer.

Quickly Crosthwaite shouted an order. A torpedo leapt from the *Calder's* deck and disappeared with a splash beneath the surface. Anxiously the lieutenant-commander watched the ever-diverging lines that marked the track of the locomotive weapon. The target was a difficult one, although the range was but 200 yards.

The German skipper saw the approaching danger and attempted to port helm. Crippled in the steam steering-gear, the Hun torpedo-boat was slow in answering. A column of water leapt 200 feet in the air; by the time it subsided the hostile craft was no longer in existence, save as a shattered and torn hull plunging through nineteen fathoms of water to her ocean bed.

By this time the German torpedo-craft had had about enough of it. At least

two of them had been sunk by German gun-fire, while another pair, their upper works reduced to a mass of tangled scrap-iron, had mistaken each other for foes, with the result that a German destroyer had been sent to the bottom by a torpedo from her consort.

Turning back, the battered remnants of the Hun flotilla fled for the shelter of their battle-cruisers. The path was now clear for the furtherance of the British destroyers' attack upon the larger vessels of the hostile fleet; but the difficulties had increased tenfold owing to the injury of some of the boats, which were compelled to slacken speed and drop astern.

Yet undaunted, the black-hulled hornets reformed into some semblance of order, and, under a galling fire, hurled themselves upon the formidable array of German battle-cruisers.

CHAPTER VIII—The "Calder's" Second Scoop

Of the mad, desperate, and, above all, glorious race into the gates of a maritime hell Crosthwaite saw but little beyond his immediate front. Since the British destroyers were under the fire of projectiles ranging from 11-inch downwards, it was evident that the *Calder's* light-armoured conning-tower would afford little protection, and if it were hit by a heavy shell the fate of all within would be sealed. So, standing on the starboard extremity of the bridge, the lieutenant-commander took his craft into the second phase of the destroyer attack.

Up to the present not a single British destroyer had been sunk, although some had been compelled to retire owing to damage received during their scrap with the hostile torpedo flotilla; but the good start in this direction was no longer maintained.

A large destroyer, subsequently identified as the *Nomad*, was struck by a huge projectile almost amidships. A rush of scalding steam, followed by clouds of smoke, announced that the engine-room was wrecked, and that the vessel was no longer under control.

Porting helm, the *Calder* ran past the lee of the crippled destroyer, the smoke from which undoubtedly saved Crosthwaite's command from severe pun-

ishment.

For nearly half a mile the *Nomad* carried way, until she came to a stop between the lines. The last Crosthwaite saw of her was the destroyer, still afloat, maintaining a desultory fire, although a stationary target for an overwhelming number of hostile guns.

Suddenly Crosthwaite staggered, hurled sideways by an invisible force. The guard-rail, which he was still gripping, was no longer supported by the stanchions. Falling heavily upon the bridge, he was within an ace of dropping overboard when a signalman gripped him by the ankles.

The lieutenant-commander regained his feet in an instant, barely conscious of his narrow escape, for a 4-inch shell had passed so close to him that the windage had capsized him. Crashing aft, the projectile demolished the short mast supporting the wireless, hurling the fragments upon the deck. The *White Ensign*, which had fluttered from this masthead during the action, had blown against the mounting of the after 4-inch gun. Although little more than a riddled piece of bunting, it was secured by one of the men and lashed to the stump of the mast.

Hardly had the dauntless man completed his self-imposed task when another shell struck the *Calder* obliquely on the port bow. Penetrating the fo'c'sle, it burst with a muffled report, but, instead of shattering the for'ard part of the destroyer, it emitted dense clouds of greenish-yellow smoke that eddied through the shattered plating on the fore-deck and drifted sullenly aft.

In a second Crosthwaite realized the danger. The shell had been filled with poisonous gas, and just at the time when the ship was getting within torpedo-range, and the men had to direct all their energies upon loosing the 21-inch weapons, the asphyxiating fumes threatened to put them, at least temporarily, out of action.

With his hands clasped to his mouth and nostrils Crosthwaite awaited the noxious vapour, hoping that the head wind caused by the rush of the destroyer through the water would quickly disperse the poison; but with horrible persistence the deadly smoke hovered betwixt the various projections on deck.

He was conscious of the quartermaster and the others on the bridge staggering, with their fingers frantically gripping their throats. The signalman who had previously saved his commanding officer from falling overboard was writhing in agony, clawing at whatever came to hand, until in a frenzy he took a flying leap over the side and sank like a stone.

Left to herself, the *Calder* began a broad sweep to starboard. As she did so, the fumes drifted to leeward, yet not before the men standing by the pair of torpedo-tubes were temporarily overcome by the diabolical product of German *Kultur*.

In vain Crosthwaite attempted to rally the men. It was either now or never,

for, unless the torpedoes were fired, the opportunity would be gone. He tried to shout, but no sound came from his tortured throat. Between the eddying clouds of steam and smoke he could discern the torpedo-men moving like stupefied bees.

With an effort the lieutenant-commander regained his voice. He turned to the quartermaster, who, although still gasping for breath, had come through the terrible ordeal with comparatively slight ill-effects.

"Keep her steady on her helm," exclaimed Crosthwaite, and, literally tumbling down the bridge ladder, he made his way aft to the torpedo-tubes.

Pushing aside two victims of the poison-gas, one of them the L.T.O., who lay athwart the racer, the lieutenant-commander gripped the training-wheel and slewed the pair of tubes until they were nearly broad on the beam. At 2000 yards distance three large battle-cruisers over-lapped, presenting a target nearly 1800 feet in length. To miss such an objective seemed almost impossible.

With a wrench Crosthwaite dropped the firing-lever of the right-hand tube. Through the thin haze that emerged from the metal cylinder, he caught a glimpse of the gleaming, steel, cigar-shaped missile as it leapt clear and disappeared with a mighty splash beneath the water. Then, changing over to the left-hand tube, he sent the second weapon on its errand of destruction.

A sudden and a totally unexpected swerve of the ship prevented Crosthwaite from observing the result of his single-handed efforts. Instinctively he realized that his presence was again required on the bridge. As he hastened for'ard he almost collided with Surgeon Stirling, who, in his shirt-sleeves, had come up from below to aid the sufferers.

Seeing Crosthwaite stagger along with his features contorted and his complexion showing a sickly yellow in spite of the tan, the doctor hurried after him.

"Not this time, Doc," protested the lieutenant-commander with a wan smile, as he lurched forward. His brain was whirling under the strain of the awful ordeal, yet he was dimly conscious that something was amiss, and that at all costs he must return to his post.

He was barely in time. The quartermaster was huddled in a heap at the base of the steam steering-gear column with a ghastly wound in his thigh. The destroyer, left to her own devices, once more was bearing down upon one of her helpless consorts.

Thrusting the wheel hard over, Crosthwaite found that the vessel was still under control. Almost by a hairbreadth she scraped the port quarter of the crippled destroyer, whose decks were literally swept by the enemy's fire, and resembled a charnel-house. Nothing could be done to save her, for she was already on the point of foundering. Of her crew not one visible remained alive. She had fought to the death—a typical example of British pluck and endurance against overwhelming odds.

Her last torpedoes fired, the *Calder* was free to make good her escape—if she could. Receiving a couple of glancing hits as she sped towards the shelter, she slid past the foremost of the British battle-cruisers, receiving three hearty cheers from the crew.

The second phase of the destroyer operations was over. Although not so successful as had been expected, owing to the formation having been disturbed by the encounter with the German torpedo flotillas, the dash was not without definite material gains. *Nomad* and *Nestor* had not returned, and were presumed to be sunk, a surmise that subsequently proved to be correct, since a portion of their crews were rescued by the German torpedo-craft.

Having brought the *Calder* safely out of the inferno, Crosthwaite's next step was to take stock of damages and report to the commander of his flotilla.

The wireless was by this time again made serviceable, several of the crew having worked while under fire on setting up the aerials which had been carried away with the demolition of the after-mast.

Others were busily engaged in putting patches on the gaping rents in the funnel casings and stopping the shell-holes in the thin plating. Fortunately the engine-room had escaped serious damage, only two casualties occurring owing to an auxiliary steam-pipe being severed by a sliver of shell.

On the whole the *Calder* had come off lightly. The worst damage to personnel had been caused by the gas-shell, for, before the fumes had dispersed, six men had lost their lives and ten others had been incapacitated by the poisonous fumes.

"She's as fit as ever she was in my department," reported Engineer-Lieutenant Boxspanner. "Hope to goodness we shan't be ordered to haul out of it."

"I trust not," replied Crosthwaite. "Must turn a blind eye to some of the defects, I suppose. What did it feel like down below?"

Boxspanner shrugged his broad shoulders. It was the first time he had been in action, his appointment to the *Calder* being of recent date.

"It was all right after the first half-minute or so," replied the engineer-lieutenant. "The racket at first was enough to stun a fellow. I suppose in this job one can get used to anything. Where's Stirling, by the by?"

"Busy," replied Crosthwaite gravely. "Come and see him at work—if you can stick it."

Well it was that the Admiralty, with their customary promptitude to promote the welfare of the fighting fleet, had lost no time in appointing scores of probationary assistant surgeons to the destroyers immediately after the outbreak of hostilities. Previously no medical staff had been carried on these small craft. A casualty occurring on board, and accidents in the engine-rooms, were not of

unfrequent occurrence; the patients had to rely upon the well-meant attentions of their comrades until they were transferred either to a parent ship or to one of the shore hospitals.

Dr. "Jimmy" Stirling was a man who took life seriously. At times he was almost pessimistic, although there were occasions when a sudden spirit of youthful exuberance would take complete possession of him.

In his shirt-sleeves, and with a blood-stained apron that an hour previously had been spotlessly white tied closely under his armpits, the surgeon was working with deliberate haste, performing a serious operation at a speed that would have turned a hospital probationer pale with apprehension.

The confined space which had been turned into a sick-bay reeked with chloroform and iodoform. Wounded men were vying with each other in their efforts to make light of their injuries, whilst those who were able to smoke aroused the envy of their less fortunate comrades. It was considered "good form" for a patient to utter a rough-and-ready jest at his own case, while grim, but none the less sympathetic, words were bestowed upon their nearest fellow-sufferers. It was a curious physiological fact that a man who would have raved at a careless comrade for having accidentally dropped some gear, narrowly missing his head, greeted the information that he would lose his right arm with the nonchalant remark: "Anyhow, when I get home on leaf my missus can't make me dig the bloomin' allotment."

"Let's get out of this, sir," whispered the engineer-lieutenant. "Thought it would take a lot to capsize me, but, by Jove--!"

He backed abruptly, followed by the lieutenant-commander. Stirling, deep in his task, had not noticed their presence.

A barefooted signalman, his blackened face and scorched and torn singlet bearing testimony to his part in the "scrap", pattered along the shell-pitted deck, and, saluting, tendered a signal-pad to his commanding officer.

Crosthwaite took the paper and read the message scrawled thereon in violet pencil.

"H'm!" he muttered. "S'pose they want us out of it."

It was an order to the effect that the *Calder* was to steam to a certain rendezvous, fall in with one of the parent ships, transfer wounded, and await further orders. There seemed very little possibility of the destroyer participating in the night attack upon the German fleet—an operation in which the swiftly-moving British vessels might achieve greater results, even if they failed to surpass the glory they had already acquired by their wild, tempestuous dash in broad daylight.

"Almost wish I'd let the damaged wireless go for a bit," mused Crosthwaite as he made his way to the badly-shattered bridge.

CHAPTER IX—The "Warrior's" Gallant Stand

"What do you think we are up against?" asked Sefton, taking advantage of a lull in the firing to put the question to his companion in the fire-control station.

"Something big," replied the other, wiping a thin layer of coal dust and particles of burnt cordite from the lenses of his binoculars. "With this rotten mist hanging around, one has to be jolly careful not to pitch a salvo into one of our own craft. Wish to goodness I'd remembered to bring my camera along. By Jove! Wouldn't the old *Defence* make a fine picture when she opened fire?"

"I'll fetch it for you," volunteered Sefton.

His companion looked at him in astonishment.

"I mean it," continued the sub. "We won't be in action again for quite ten minutes, unless those Huns take it into their heads to alter course—which I don't fancy will be at all likely."

He pointed to five faint objects scurrying farther away through the patches of haze. They were German light cruisers, which, having had a taste of the salvos of the leading ships of the First Cruiser Squadron, had thought it prudent to sheer off.

"Then look slippy, old bird," said the other. "I'm rather keen on getting the thing; I'd go myself if I were not here on duty with a capital D. I'll pass the word for the covers to be left open for your return."

Gaining the shrouds, Sefton descended cautiously, for already fragments of exploding shells had cut through several of the wire strands, and had played havoc with the ratlines.

Gaining the fore-bridge, he descended the ladder to the superstructure, and, passing in the wake of the trained-abeam turrets, reached the only hatchway leading to the main deck that had not been closed with an armoured lid.

'Tween decks the air was hot and oppressive. The confined space reeked with cordite fumes. Through the brown haze a streak of yellow light played upon the deck—a beam of sunlight entering through a jagged shell-hole in the ship's

side.

Farther along, a party of sick-bay men were lowering a stretcher through a hatchway. On the stretcher was strapped a wounded petty officer, one of whose legs had been shattered below the knee.

The man was struggling violently, and expostulating in no mild terms. Ignorant of his terrible injuries, he was insisting on being allowed to return to his station and "have another smack at the Huns".

"Can't go no farther this way, sir," announced a marine, recognizing the sub, and knowing that he was new to the ship. "Bulkhead doors are shut. There's a way round past the issue-room, sir, down this 'ere ladder."

The "issue-room" was open. An electric lamp illuminated the irregular-shaped space, which on one side was bounded by the convex base of the after turret, a 6-inch wall of hard steel.

Sefton could hear voices raised in loud and vehement argument: two assistant ship's stewards were discussing the respective merits of music-hall favourites.

A third voice joined in the discussion—that of one of the ship's boys.

"'Taint neither the one or t'other," he began. "I was a-saying—"

"Then don't say it, but get on with your job," interrupted the first speaker. "Those casks look a regular disgrace. You haven't polished the brasswork for more'n three days, and it's captain's rounds to-morrow."

The next instant came a regular avalanche of flour-sacks, casks, copper measures, and other paraphernalia pertaining to the ship's steward's department. Across the raised coaming of the doorway tripped the three occupants of the issue-room, landing in a struggling, confused heap at Sefton's feet.

From a distance of nearly nine miles an 11-inch shell had hit the *Warrior* abreast of the after turret. It was some little time before it was realized that the damage was slight.

The first to pick himself up was the ship's steward's boy.

"Guess you don't want me to carry on with that there polishing job," he remarked nonchalantly, as he heaved the winded petty officer to his feet and indicated the debris of the brass-bound casks.

Sefton lost no time in fetching the camera from the gun-room. Slinging it round his neck, he gained the upper deck, and began his ascent to the fire-control platform.

"Thanks," said his companion, as the sub handed the precious apparatus to him. "You're only just in time. Those light cruisers have altered helm 16 points. Looks fishy, by Jove! They've something behind them to back them up."

It was now nearly six o'clock. Already the *Defence* was hurling shells at the leading German light cruiser at 14,000 yards, the range momentarily decreasing

as the two squadrons closed.

The Huns were certainly not devoid of pluck, although, as Sefton's chum had remarked, they evidently had some card up their sleeves.

For the next fifteen minutes the *Warrior* and her consorts were at it "hammer and tongs", directing a furious fire into the head of the approaching column. One of the hostile cruisers, hit by a double salvo from the *Warrior* and the *Defence*, capsized and sank. Another, burning fiercely in three different places, hauled out of line.

"Great sport, isn't it?" exclaimed Sefton's companion, setting down his range-finder, for the distance had now decreased to 5000 yards, so that the gunlayers were able to trace their weapons independently of orders from the fire-control.

Suddenly and unexpectedly a salvo of heavy shells hurtled through the haze, and, with deadly precision, riddled the flagship *Defence* through and through. Her masts and funnels went by the board, flames burst from her foreward, midships, and aft, while with her engines disabled she dropped slowly astern.

It was now the *Warrior's* turn to lead the line. As she forged ahead, other enormous shells straddled her, coming in different direction from the tempest of shot that had crippled the *Defence*.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Sefton. "We're in for it now."

Between the drifting clouds of smoke could be discerned the huge shapes of a dozen large battleships and battle-cruisers, not those of Jellicoe's command, but flying the Black Cross ensign of Germany. On the port side, at less than 4000 yards, were four hostile battle-cruisers. At a similar distance to starboard were at least five battleships of the *König* class.

The *Warrior* and *Defence*, hemmed in by vastly superior numbers, and menaced by guns of far greater calibre, were seemingly doomed to annihilation. All that remained, as far as human judgment went, was to fight to the last and worthily uphold the glorious traditions of the Senior Service.

The *Warrior* held grimly on her way, battered fore and aft on all sides from the gradually contracting circle of big German ships. In spite of the terrific hail of projectiles rained upon her, the *Warrior* still maintained a rapid and determined fire. It was against overwhelming odds, and the Huns knew it.

Presently a violent thud caused the already trembling fire-control platform to shake to such an extent that Sefton quite thought the whole concern was about to tumble over the side. A shell had shattered the fore-topmast, the debris falling athwart the steel canopy protecting the range-finding officers. With the topmast came a raffle of gear, including the wireless aerials.

By this time the cruiser was hulled over and over again. Several of her 7-inch-gun turrets had been bodily swept away with their crews; two funnels

had gone by the board; the remaining pair, perforated like sieves, were held in position merely by the wire guys. A fierce fire was raging aft, an incendiary shell having landed in the wardroom, while a heavy dose of poison-gas prevented any of the crew from attempting to quench the flames.

Twelve minutes of terrible battering the *Warrior* stood, until an 11-inch shell, ripping through her 6-inch armoured belt, burst inside the port engine-room, shattering the main steam-pipe.

The scene in the confined space was terrible beyond description. The concussion had shattered every electric lamp, the oil ones were extinguished by the noxious fumes. The floor of the engine-room was flooded to a depth of four inches with scalding water that surged to and fro with each roll of the sorely-pressed vessel, and added to the torments of the men already wounded by the shell explosion.

Yet even in that inferno there were men whose courage did not desert them, and dozens of heroic and never-to-be-recorded deeds were performed in the darkness of the scalding engine-room.

Then the starboard engine-room was swept by the explosion of a shell, increasing to a terrible extent the casualties amongst the courageous "black squad". For nearly two miles the *Warrior* carried away, until, deprived of the means of propulsion, she lay, a battered hulk, surrounded by her enemies.

It was the story of the *Revenge* over again, but with a different sequel.

Sefton realized that he and his companions were virtually prisoners in the fire-control platform. Even had they dared to risk descending through that tornado of shrapnel and flying slivers of molten steel, their means of escape was limited to one solitary shroud. The rest, "whipped" into a confused tangle, were trailing over the ship's sides.

Passive spectators, for their work aloft was done, they awaited the end, their eyes fixed upon the German battle-cruisers as at intervals they became visible through the drifting cloud of smoke and steam.

Only two guns of the *Warrior* were now replying to the hostile fire, barking slowly, yet resolutely, as they sent their projectiles hurtling through the air at the nearest of the assailants, now but 3500 yards distant.

"By Jove, look!" exclaimed Sefton's chum, pointing with a bandaged hand at a large object looming through the smoke close under the *Warrior's* stern.

It was the gigantic battleship *Warspite*.

Tearing along at well over her contract speed, the 27,500-ton leviathan meant business. Receiving a salvo of heavy shells that were intended to administer a *coup de grâce* to the crippled *Warrior*, and which for the most part rebounded harmlessly from her armour, the *Warspite* let rip with her splendid 15-inch guns. At the second salvo a German battle-cruiser simply crumpled up and vanished

in a cloud of smoke.

Pitted for the first time in this particular engagement against guns of more than their own calibre, the Germans began to fire most erratically. Many of the projectiles fell into the sea. Their shooting, hitherto fairly accurate, became wild and spasmodic. They were learning the truth about modern British gunnery, with British hearts of oak behind the powerful weapons.

But, in spite of her size and superiority of armament, the *Warspite* did not come off unscathed. At a critical moment her steam steering-gear jammed, and round she circled, straight for the enemy's line. Before the damage could be rectified she was hit several times, losing, amongst other gear, her wireless aerials. While she was still under fire a hostile submarine let off a couple of torpedoes, both of which fortunately missed their mark.

The action had already passed away from the battered *Warrior*. She had played her part. It remained to save herself from foundering, if she could—a truly herculean task.

CHAPTER X—Battered but Unconquered

Almost as in a dream Sefton realized that he was still alive. His hearing was practically done for, owing to the terrific detonation of the guns. His eyes were red and smarting from the effects of numerous particles of soot and dust that had drifted in through the sighting apertures of the fire-control station. He could scarcely speak, his throat was parched and gripped by a terrible thirst. His borrowed uniform was rent in several places, while the right leg of his trousers was warm and moist. Unknown to him, a splinter of metal had cut a clean gash just above the knee. In the excitement of the action he had not felt the wound. Now it was beginning to throb painfully.

"The stick will go by the board before long," remarked an officer, as the crippled foremast gave a sickening jerk with the roll of the ship to starboard. "The sooner we get out of this the better, I fancy."

It was easier said than done. Even if the attention of the men on deck—and they were busily engaged with hoses in quelling the numerous small outbreaks

of fire amidships—could be attracted, it was wellnigh impossible to form a means of communication with the elevated masthead platform.

"Worth risking it?" queried Sefton's chum, indicating the solitary shroud on either side of the mast.

The sub shook his head.

"A tall order," he replied. "I don't seem to have the strength of a steerage rat for a swarm-down from this height. No thanks, I'm not taking any."

"If we had only a coil of signal halyard," remarked the range-finding officer tentatively, "we might— But there isn't a couple of fathoms of line left aloft."

He thrust his head and shoulders through a hole in the steel plating, and surveyed the scene 100 feet below. Viewed from that dizzy height, the prospect of descending by means of a wire stay was not inviting.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "There's a bluejacket swarming aloft."

"Bluejacket" was hardly a strictly correct description, for climbing hand over hand was a man clad only in a pair of canvas trousers. From his waist upwards he was stripped. His feet, too, were bare. His bronzed face, neck, and hands stood out in vivid contrast to the whiteness of the rest of the skin. His muscles, like whipcord, rippled as he ascended with a steady, even movement towards the isolated foretop. From his belt trailed a line the coils of which were being carefully "paid out" by a seaman standing on the extremity of the badly-damaged fore-bridge.

Half-way up the shroud the climber paused to regain his breath. As he threw back his head to gauge the remaining distance, his face was revealed to the group on the swaying platform.

"By George!" ejaculated Sefton's chum. "It's the man you went into the ditch after."

It was Able Seaman Brown. Having lost touch with his officer during the engagement, his first thoughts after the *Warrior* had ceased fire were for the sub who had risked his life on his behalf. Enquiries elicited the information that Sefton had been last seen while ascending to the fire-control platform.

"Blow me if they ain't properly cut off," muttered the man, as he eyed the precarious perch. "Here goes."

Obtaining the consent of one of the officers to attempt his perilous ascent, A.B. Brown was now well on his way to establish communication with the deck.

Perspiring from every pore, his muscles creaking under the strain, the horny palms of his hands lacerated by the frayed strands of the wire, the seaman at length gained one of the angle-girders upon which the platform was bolted. Here he remained for fully five minutes before essaying the last part of his journey.

Hanging from the metal structure was a block, from which the running-

gear had long since "rendered through". The man examined it critically. To all outward appearance it seemed to be sound.

Jockeying himself along the sharp-edged angle-plate, Brown rove the end of the rope through the block, and "paid out" until the line touched the deck. Fortunately there was enough to spare. Three or four of the *Warrior's* crew were standing by to give assistance, and quickly bent a "bos'n's chair" to one end of the rope.

"Come along, sir," exclaimed the A.B. encouragingly. "We'll have the lot of you down in a jiffy."

He held out his hand to steady Sefton on his dizzy journey along the metal "bracket", until a sudden thought flashed across his mind. What if the rope carried away or the pulley-block was defective?

"Hold on, sir," he said. "I'll show you the way down."

He signalled for the bos'n's chair to be sent aloft, reflecting that if the appliance were strong enough to bear his weight—he could give Sefton nearly a couple of stones—the sub would run very little risk. If, on the other hand, the gear carried away, he reflected grimly, his "number would be up".

Sliding into the wooden seat, the A.B. motioned to his comrades to lower. Handsomely the men paid out the comparatively frail rope until Brown's bare feet came in contact with the bridge planking.

Five minutes later, the three seamen who had been attending to the voice-tubes in the fire-control station were lowered into safety, in spite of the fact that one was in a semi-conscious condition owing to a shrapnel wound in his head.

Sefton was the next to descend, after a spirited argument with his brother sub on the etiquette of seniority, until the lieutenant settled his subordinate's dispute by declaring that Sefton was a guest, and that the question of precedence did not hold good in present circumstances.

At length all the occupants of the fire-control platform were lowered in safety. Barely had the lieutenant gained the deck when Sefton's companion gave vent to an exclamation of annoyance.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed. "I clean forgot all about that camera. Here goes."

Slipping into the bos'n's chair he made the men haul away for all they were worth, and, spinning round at the end of the rope, the *Warrior's* sub again ascended to the dizzy, insecure perch.

Sefton watched him disappear into the recesses of the enclosed space, presently to reappear with the precious camera dangling round his neck.

"Wouldn't have lost it for anything," remarked the young officer as he regained the fore-bridge. "I've knocked about with it ever since I was at Osborne, you know."

"Take anything during the action?" enquired Sefton.

"By Jove, no, I didn't! Clean forgot all about it."

"And I fancy, old bird, you won't again," interposed an assistant paymaster, vainly attempting to "open out" the folding camera. "It's done for."

Which was only too true. A fragment of shell had penetrated the case, reducing the delicate mechanism to a complete wreck.

"Look out! Stand clear!" shouted a dozen voices.

With a rending crash the crippled mast buckled up and disappeared over the side.

Sefton glanced at his chum. The imperturbable sub shrugged his shoulders.

"Better to be born lucky than rich, old man," he remarked. "But, by heavens, what a jamboree!"

He could find no other words to describe the scene of destruction. Now that the ship was out of action, and the excitement of the titanic struggle was over, the grim realization of what a naval engagement means was beginning to reveal itself to the survivors of the gallant crew.

All the fires had been extinguished, with the exception of the big outbreak aft. Gangs of men toiled desperately at the hand-pumps with a double purpose. The *Warrior* was making water freely. Already her stokeholds and engine-rooms were flooded. Deprived of the aid of her powerful steam bilge-pumps it seemed doubtful if the hand appliances would be able to cope with the steady inrush. Moreover, a considerable volume of water had to be directed upon the fire.

Officers with blackened faces and scorched uniforms encouraged the men by word and deed. At whatever cost the *Warrior* had to be saved from foundering if human efforts were capable of such a herculean task. Undaunted, the crew toiled manfully, fighting fire and water at one and the same time.

Already the dead had been identified and given a hasty, yet impressive, burial, while—an ominous sign—the wounded had been brought up from below and laid in rows upon the upper deck. It was a necessary precaution, and clearly indicated the grave possibility of the old *Warrior* being unable to battle much longer against the ever-increasing leaks.

There was now plenty of work for Sefton to do. Placed in charge of one of the fire-parties he was soon strenuously engaged in fighting the conflagration. With the flooding of the after magazine all danger of an explosion was now at an end, but, unless the flames were speedily quelled, the possibility of foundering would be materially increased, since several shell-holes betwixt wind and water had occurred in that part of the ship still dominated by the outbreak.

Although no doubt existed in the minds of the *Warrior's* crew as to the outcome of the general engagement, they were in suspense owing to a total lack of news. Without wireless they were debarred from communication with the rest

of the squadron. As helpless as a log, the battered vessel was floating in the vast expanse of the North Sea without a single vessel in sight. The roar of the battle had rolled on far to the nor'ard, and although the incessant rumble of the terrific cannonade was distinctly audible, the *Warrior* was as ignorant of the course of events as if she had been a hundred miles away.

The almost flat calm had given place to sullen undulations rippled by a steady breeze that threatened before long to develop into a hard blow. There was every indication of an angry sea before nightfall.

An hour had elapsed since the *Warrior* had ceased firing—sixty minutes of strenuous exertion on the part of all hands—when a vessel was sighted apparently steaming in the crippled cruiser's direction.

For some moments suspense ran high, for whether the strange craft were friend or foe no one on board could give a definite decision.

"What do you make of her?" enquired Sefton's chum as the two young officers stood under the lee of a partly demolished gun-turret.

"Precious little," replied Sefton. "Can't say that I am able to recognize her. But in these times, with a new vessel being added to the navy every day, one can hardly be expected to tell every ship by the cut of her jib."

"She might be a Hun," said the *Warrior's* sub. "One that has got out of her bearings and is just sniffing round to see what damage she can do. Hallo! There's 'Action Stations!'"

The *Warrior* was taking no unnecessary risks. She was still in a position to bite, although at a terrible disadvantage if opposed to an active and mobile foe. Gamely her war-worn men doubled off to the light quick-firers, three rousing cheers announcing the fact that, although badly battered, the gallant British seamen knew not the meaning of the word surrender.

Nearer and nearer came the mysterious vessel. She was by no means moving at the rate of a light-cruiser, her speed being about 15 knots. She flew three ensigns on various parts of her rigging, but, being end on and against the wind, the colours could not be distinguished.

Presently she ported helm slightly. Another roar of cheering burst from the throats of the *Warrior's* men, for now the colours were discernible. They were not the Black Cross of Germany—a counterfeit presentment of the White Ensign—but the genuine article—the British naval ensign.

Simultaneously a hoist of bunting ascended to the signal yard-arm. A hundred men could read the letters, but the jumble conveyed nothing to them. Not until the code-book was consulted could the vessel's identity be made known.

"*Engadine*, sir," replied the chief yeoman of signals. "Sea-plane carrier, that's what she is," he confided in an undertone to another petty officer standing by his side.

A lengthy exchange of semaphore by means of hand-flags ensued, for other methods of communication on the part of the *Warrior* were impossible, owing to the clean sweep of everything on deck.

And now, in the rapidly rising sea, preparations were made for taking the crippled *Warrior* in tow. Already the cruiser's stern was well down, and, badly waterlogged, she would prove a handful for a powerfully-engined craft to tow, let alone the lightly-built *Engadine*.

But Lieutenant-Commander C. A. Robinson of the sea-plane ship *Engadine* knew his business, and handled his vessel with superb skill. Thrice he manoeuvred sufficiently close to establish communication between his ship and the drifting *Warrior*, Twice the flexible wire hawser parted like pack-thread. At the third attempt the hawsers held, and the *Warrior* slowly gathered way, wallowing astern of the *Engadine* at a rate of 4 knots—but every minute was taking the unvanquished cruiser nearer Britain's shores.

By this time all on board knew that their sacrifice had not been in vain. Jellicoe was known to have effected a junction with Beatty's hard-pressed squadrons, the German High Seas Fleet was in flight, and betwixt them and their North Sea bases was the invincible Grand Fleet. "The Day" had proved to be a day of reckoning for the boastful Huns in their efforts to wrest the trident from Britannia's grasp.

CHAPTER XI—The Wrecked Sea-plane

With her stock of torpedoes replenished and certain defects made good, H.M.T.B.D. *Calder* sheered off from her parent ship, and, increasing speed to 21 knots, shaped a course to rejoin the rest of the flotilla.

Lieutenant-Commander Richard Crosthwaite was in high spirits. He thought that he had succeeded in bluffing the commodore to give his permission to rejoin the rest of the fleet instead of being ordered back to the Firth of Forth. As a matter of fact, his senior officer, realizing that a "stout heart goes a long way", had purposely refrained from asking a lot of awkward questions concerning the *Calder's* injuries. In the forthcoming and projected night attack

every destroyer available would be needed to put the fear of the British navy into the minds of the Huns and 21-inch torpedoes into the vitals of their battleships.

The spirit of the *Calder's* skipper was shared by every member of the crew. Even the wounded showed reluctance to be transferred to the parent ship; those whose injuries did not prevent them from getting about sturdily asserting that they might be of use. Those obliged to take to their hammocks were emphatic in impressing upon their more fortunate comrades the request "to get their own back".

The sun was low in the north-western sky when the *Calder's* look-out men sighted two vessels slowly making their way in the direction of home. One, evidently badly damaged, was in tow of the other.

It was part of the destroyer's duty to investigate, since it might be possible that the vessels were hostile craft endeavouring by making a wide detour to reach their base.

A wireless message, in code, was sent from the *Calder*, requesting the two vessels to disclose their identity. The reply left Crosthwaite no longer in doubt. The towing ship was the *Engadine*, while the crippled craft wallowing in her wake was the heroic *Warrior*.

It was Crosthwaite's opportunity to regain the services of his sub-lieutenant if the latter had been lucky enough to escape from the terrible grulling to which the British cruiser had been subjected.

Closing to within a cable's length of the *Warrior* he signalled:

"Request permission to take off my sub-lieutenant."

To which the *Warrior* replied:

"Permission granted, provided no needless risk to His Majesty's ships."

Crosthwaite smiled grimly. The idea of further damage being done to the *Warrior* seemed out of the question, while he considered he was quite capable of bringing the *Calder* alongside without denting a single plate.

Ordering "easy ahead", Crosthwaite brought the *Calder* close alongside the *Warrior's* port quarter. Although the sea was now running high, and the waves were breaking over the latter's almost submerged quarter-deck, it was comparatively calm under her lee.

"There's your glorified Thames penny steamer alongside, old man," remarked Sefton's chum as the *Calder* was made fast fore and aft, her deck being little more than a couple of feet below that of the cruiser—so low had the latter settled aft. "No, don't trouble to return my coat. It's positively not respectable for the quarter-deck. Well, so long! I'll run across you again before this business is over, I guess."

Scrambling over the debris, from which smoke was still issuing in faint bluish wisps, Sefton gained the armoured cruiser's side. Poising himself for an

instant he leapt on the *Calder's* deck, followed by Able Seaman Brown.

[image]

"POISING HIMSELF FOR AN INSTANT, SEFTON LEAPT ON THE
'CALDER'S' DECK"

"Can I be of any assistance, sir?" enquired Crosthwaite from the bridge of the destroyer.

The commanding officer of the *Warrior* returned the salute and shook his head. He was loath to detain even one destroyer from the fighting that yet remained to be done.

Amid the cheers of both crews the *Calder* sheered off, and, porting helm, resumed her course, while the *Warrior*, in tow of the *Engadine*, was confronted with the approach of night and a steadily-increasing rough sea.

The badly-damaged *Warrior* never reached port. After being towed for twelve hours, her position became so serious that the sea-plane carrier hove alongside and removed her crew.

Giving three cheers for the old ship, as the *Engadine*, abandoning her tow, increased the distance between her and the *Warrior*, the gallant crew watched the battered hulk rolling sullenly in the angry sea until she was lost sight of in the distance.

Having formally reported himself, Sefton went below to make up arrears of sleep. Boxspanner and the doctor were in the ward-room, both engaged in animated conversation, not upon the subject of the action, but on the merits and demerits of paraffin as a substitute for petrol for a motor-bicycle.

With disjointed fragments of conversation ringing in his ears, and "carburation", "sooty deposit in the sparking plug", and "engine-knock" figuring largely, Sefton fell into a fitful slumber, dreaming vividly of the stirring incidents of the past few hours, until he was aroused by the reversal of the destroyer's engines, the lightly-built hull quivering under the strain.

Instinctively he glanced at the clock. He had been asleep only ten minutes—it seemed more like ten hours by the length of his excited mental visions.

Leaping from his bunk, Sefton scrambled into his clothes and hurried on deck. It was still twilight. The wind was moaning through the aerials; splashes of spray slapped the destroyer's black sides as she lost way and fell off broadside on to the waves.

Fifty yards to leeward was a large British sea-plane. She was listing at a dangerous angle, her starboard-float being waterlogged, and showing only above

the surface as the fabric heeled in the trough of the sea. Her planes were ripped in twenty places, while the fuselage showed signs of having been hit several times. The tip of one blade of the propeller had been cut off as cleanly as if by a knife. All around her the water was iridescent with oil that had leaked from her lubricating-tanks. Waist-deep in water, and sitting athwart the undamaged float, was the pilot—a young sub-lieutenant, whose face was blanched with the cold. He had voluntarily adopted his position in order to impart increased stability to the damaged sea-plane.

Lying on the floor of the fuselage, with his head just visible above the coamings, was the observer. He had discarded his flying-helmet, while round his head was bound a blood-stained scarf. Evidently his wound was of a serious nature, for he evinced no interest in the approach of the *Calder*.

As the destroyer drifted down upon the crippled sea-plane a dozen ready hands gripped the top of one of the wings, and a couple of seamen swarmed along the frail fabric to the chassis.

The rescue of the pilot was a comparatively easy matter, but it took all the skill of the bluejackets to extricate the wounded observer. It was not until others of the crew came to the aid of their comrades, the men in their zeal almost completing the submergence of the still floating wreckage, that the unconscious officer was brought on board.

There was no time to waste in salvage operations. At an order from the lieutenant-commander a seaman, armed with an axe, made his way to the undamaged float. A few vigorous blows completed the work of destruction. Held by the tip of one of the wings until the man regained the destroyer, the sea-plane was allowed to sink.

"Rough luck to chuck away an engine like that," remarked a voice regretfully.

Sefton turned his head and saw that the speaker was Engineer-Lieutenant Boxspanner, and for once at least Dr. Stirling agreed with him.

The rescue of the sea-plane's crew threw additional work upon the already harassed surgeon, for the observer was showing signs of collapse, while upon examination it was found that the pilot had been hit in the forehead by a shrapnel bullet.

Pulling himself together, the observer managed to impart important information before he fainted through sheer exhaustion. The sea-plane had sighted the main German fleet fifty miles to the nor'-nor'-east.

The intelligence was highly desirable. It settled without doubt the all-important question as to the enemy's whereabouts, and definitely proved that Jellicoe's ships were between the Huns and their North Sea bases. If steps could be taken to intercept the German vessels' retreat through the Cattegat, it seemed

as if they were doomed to annihilation at the hands of the British.

Quickly the news was wirelessly from the *Calder* to the *Iron Duke*. Unless anything unforeseen occurred, it seemed pretty certain that Admiral Jellicoe would be able to turn the initial advantage into an overwhelming defeat for the enemy.

The two airmen had rendered good service against considerable odds. They had ascended three hours previously, and, flying low in order to be able to see through the haze, had eventually sighted the badly-damaged German squadron under Rear-Admiral von Scheer, which had contrived to slip away while Admiral Hipper was endeavouring to delay the advance of Jellicoe's main fleet.

Owing to the low degree of visibility, the seaplane came within range of the hostile quick-firers almost before her pilot was aware of the unpleasant fact. Greeted by a hot fire, almost the first shell of which carried away the wireless, the sea-plane ascended, trusting to be hidden in the clouds until she could volplane from another direction and renew her reconnaissance of the hostile fleet.

Unfortunately, it was a case of "out of the saucepan into the fire", for on emerging above the low-lying bank of clouds the sea-plane found herself almost underneath a Zeppelin, several of which accompanied the German fleet, although their sphere of usefulness was considerably curtailed by reason of the climatic conditions. Although the haze prevented the British from inflicting greater damage upon their opponents, it is fairly safe to assert that had the sky been clear the Zeppelins would have given the German fleet timely warning, and an action would never have ensued.

Nothing daunted, the British sea-plane opened fire upon her gigantic antagonist; but the odds were against her. The Zeppelins, floating motionless in the air and in perfect silence, had long before heard the noisy approach of the mechanical hornet, and her appearance was greeted with a concentrated fire of half a dozen machine guns, accompanied by a few choice titbits in the shape of bombs.

The latter, without exception, missed their objective, but the hail of bullets ripped the sea-plane through and through and dangerously wounded her observer. In spite of the riddled state of the planes the pilot kept his craft well under control, but was forced to descend, not before the Zeppelin was showing signs of having been much damaged by the sea-plane's automatic gun. The last the airmen saw of her was that she was making off at full speed in an easterly direction, her stern portion dipping ominously in spite of the quantity of ballast hurled overboard by her crew.

The British air-craft's long volplane terminated on the surface of the sea miles from the place where she had "spotted" the hostile ships. Before long the pilot made the disconcerting discovery that one of the floats was leaking. Hav-

ing bandaged his unfortunate comrade's wound, he slipped over the side of the fuselage on to the damaged float. Failing to locate and stop the leak, he took up his position on the sound float, in the hope that his weight would preserve the sea-plane's stability. In this position he remained for two hours, until, numbed by the cold, he was on the point of abandoning hope when the *Calder* hove in sight.

The sun had set when the *Calder* rejoined the flotilla. The enemy was entirely out of sight, but there was every possibility of the German torpedo-boats making a night attack upon the long line of battleships.

Every precaution was taken against such a step. The battleships and battle-cruisers were encircled by a line of light cruisers, while beyond them, and mostly between the British fleet and the reported position of the German ships, was a numerous gathering of destroyers for the dual part of protecting the larger ships and also, when opportunity occurred, of making a dash against the Huns.

"Mark my words, Sefton," said Lieutenant-Commander Crosthwaite when the *Calder*, having transferred the two airmen, had taken up her allotted station, "to-night's the night. We'll have the time of our lives."

CHAPTER XII—The Night Attack

Just before midnight two columns of destroyers in line ahead slipped away in the darkness, the course being N. 42° E. Without showing so much as a glimmer of light, with their funnels screened with "spark arresters" to prevent the exit of glowing embers from the furnaces, the long, lean craft headed in the supposed direction of the enemy fleet.

From the elevated fore-bridge Sefton could scarce distinguish betwixt the *Calder's* bows and the dark, heavy waves. The only guide to enable the destroyer to keep station was the phosphorescent swirl at the stern of the vessel next ahead, as her triple propellers churned the water.

On deck the men were at the battle-stations, standing motionless and silent. Their faces had been blackened with burnt cork to render them as inconspicuous as possible should the beam of a hostile search-light swing itself athwart their vessel.

Although the high-raised fo'c'sle of the *Calder* was comparatively dry, showers of spray cast aside by the flaring bows were caught by the strong wind and dashed over the bridge until it was impossible to make use of night-glasses owing to the beads of moisture on the lenses.

Beyond a curt, clearly-enunciated order to the quartermaster, neither of the two officers spoke a word, Crosthwaite gripping the guard-rail and peering ahead, while Sefton kept his attention upon the tell-tale greyish smudge that marked the position of the destroyer ahead.

The result of years of training at night manoeuvres was bearing fruit. Iron-nerved men were at the helm of each boat—men who had long since got beyond the "jumpy" stage, when strange freaks of imagination conjure up visions of objects that do not exist. A false alarm and a rapid fire from the 4-inch guns would be fatal to the enterprise, the success of which depended entirely upon getting well within torpedo-range without being spotted by the alert foe.

A feeble light, screened in all directions save that towards the vessels astern, blinked rapidly from the leading destroyer. It was the signal for the flotilla to form in line abeam.

"Starboard ten!" ordered Crosthwaite.

"Starboard ten, sir!" was the helmsman's reply, while the lieutenant-commander telegraphed for speed to be increased to 22 knots in order to bring the *Calder* even with the leader.

Had it been daylight the manoeuvre would have been executed with the precision of a machine; being night it was impossible to follow the movements of the whole flotilla, but carried out the orders were, each destroyer keeping station with the one nearest on her starboard beam.

Suddenly the darkness was penetrated by the dazzling beam of a searchlight from a ship at a distance of two miles on the *Calder's* port bow. For a moment it hung irresolute, and then swung round in the direction of the on-coming destroyers.

A huge black mass intercepted the rays, its outlines silhouetted against the silvery glare. The mass was a German light cruiser, evidently detached for scouting purposes and returning with screened lights towards the main fleet.

Instantly a furious cannonade was opened upon the luckless light cruiser from half a dozen of her consorts. For a couple of minutes the firing continued, until, with a tremendous flash and a deafening roar, her magazine exploded.

"The Huns will never admit their mistake," thought Sefton. "They'll claim to have destroyed another of our ships."

Then the sub's whole attention was chained to the work now on hand. Barely had the last of the flying debris from the German light cruiser struck the water when at full speed the British destroyer flotilla hurled itself upon the foe.

Played upon by fifty search-lights, the target for a hundred guns, large and small, the destroyers held on with one set purpose, their torpedo-men discharging the 21-inch missiles with rapidity and cool determination.

Above the crash of the ordnance could be heard the deeper boom of the torpedoes as they exploded against the ships' bottoms at a depth of fifteen or twenty feet below the surface.

Slick in between two large battleships the *Calder* rushed, letting loose a pair of torpedoes at each of the hostile ships. One torpedo was observed to explode close to the stern of the battleship to starboard, the stricken vessel leaving the line with a decided list and enveloped in smoke.

"Light cruisers, by Jove!" muttered Sefton, as the *Calder*, on nearing the end of the enemy line, was confronted by three vessels of the "Wiesbaden" class.

A heavy fire greeted the approaching destroyer, but almost without exception the shells went wide of their mark. Then, gathering speed, one of the German light cruisers ported helm and attempted to ram her lightly-built opponent.

Making no effort to avoid the danger, the *Calder* held on, until Sefton, turning to see what his commanding officer was doing, found Crosthwaite sitting on the bridge with his back against the pedestal of the semaphore, and his hands clasping his right leg just above the knee, and blood oozing from a gash in his forehead.

The sub was the only officer on the bridge capable of taking command.

"Hard-a-starboard!" he shouted, in order to make himself heard above the din.

Ever quick on her helm, the destroyer spun round almost on her heel. The German's stem missed her by a couple of feet, while, hurled bodily sideways by the mass of water from the former's bow wave, the *Calder* slid past with her side-plating almost touching that of her enemy.

Simultaneously the Hun let fly a broadside. The destroyer reeled under the shock, but once again she was in luck, for none of the hostile guns could be sufficiently depressed to score a vital hit. The next instant the cruiser was lost to sight in the darkness, saluted by a number of rounds from the destroyer's after 4-inch gun.

Temporarily stunned by the detonations of the German cruiser's guns—for he was within twenty feet of the muzzles of several of the weapons—Sefton leaned against the conning-tower. The metal was unpleasantly hot, for a light shell had burst against it hardly a minute before. Beyond denting the steel armour and blowing the signal-locker over the side, the missile had done no further damage.

Coughing the acrid fumes from his lungs and clearing his eyes of involuntary tears, for the air was thick with irritating dust, Sefton began to take a renewed interest in his surroundings.

The *Calder* had penetrated the hostile line without sustaining serious damage. She had now to return.

The sub grasped one of the voice-tubes. The flexible pipe came away in his hand, the whole system having been cut through with a fragment of shell.

"We've had it pretty hot!" he soliloquized. "Wonder we're still afloat. Well, now for it once more."

He leant over the after side of the bridge. A dark figure was moving for'ard ten feet beneath him.

"Pass the word to the L.T.O.," ordered the sub, "to report the number of torpedoes remaining."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the man, and, retracing his steps, he hurried aft to where the leading torpedo-man was standing at the tubes.

Back came the messenger, lurching as he loomed through the darkness.

"The man hasn't found his sea-legs yet," thought Sefton; then aloud he asked: "Well?"

"None left, sir," replied the seaman, and, having delivered his message, he pitched upon his face.

Sefton had to let him lie there. The sub could not leave the bridge. Even Crosthwaite had to be left alone until the destroyer was out of action.

It would have been a futile task to attempt to take the *Calder* back between the enemy lines. With no other offensive weapons than her comparatively light 4-inch quick-firers, she would be unable to do any serious damage to the huge armoured ships, while at the same time she would be exposed to an overwhelming fire as she passed abeam of the German battleships and light cruisers.

So into the darkness, beyond the glare of the search-lights, Sefton took the destroyer, with the intention of making a wide sweep and rejoining the British fleet. Of how the *Calder's* consorts were faring he knew nothing, except that the action was being briskly maintained. Occasionally the foggy night would be rent by a vivid red glare that outclassed the almost continuous flashes of the guns, which illuminated the low-lying clouds like incessant summer lightning. The roar of the ordnance was simply indescribable. It seemed impossible that a man could go through it without having his ear-drums burst by the terrific air-beats of the appalling detonations.

A dark shape loomed through the darkness almost athwart the *Calder's* track. Only a quick movement of the helm avoided collision with the floating object, which, as the *Calder* swept by, revealed itself as a large destroyer.

On deck she was little better than a wreck. Bridge, conning-tower, funnels, masts, and boats had vanished utterly. Her guns, wrenched from their mountings, pointed upwards at grotesque angles through their shattered shields. Where the torpedo-tubes had been was a jagged hole still spanned by one arc of the gun-

metal racer. This much was visible in the reflected glare of the distant search-lights as the *Calder* swept by with her guns trained abeam should the vessel still be capable of offence.

A score of men, mostly engine-room ratings, were gathered amidships on the shattered deck of the crippled vessel. They had desisted from the work on which they were engaged, and were gazing mutely at the destroyer that might be instrumental in giving them the *coup de grâce*.

"What ship is that?" roared Sefton through a megaphone, the intervening distance being less than twenty yards.

"His Majesty's destroyer *Yealm*," was the reply, flung proudly through the darkness.

Thrusting both levers of the engine-room telegraph to "Full Speed Astern" and afterwards to "Stop", the sub brought the *Calder* to a standstill within easy hailing distance of her disabled consort. Here was a case in which assistance could be rendered without detriment to the interests of the Service. The *Calder*, until she could replenish her store of torpedoes, was practically useless as a fighting unit. With her engines undamaged she could tow the *Yealm* into comparative safety, provided she was not intercepted by a stragglng hostile ship.

"Stand by to receive a hawser!" continued Sefton. "We'll give you a pluck out of this."

"No; thanks all the same, sir," shouted a deep voice. "We're sound below the water-line, and we can get under way again in a few minutes. We'll take our chances of getting out of it. We gave the swine an almighty punching before they swept our decks. Carry on, sir, and give them another half a dozen for us."

It was the *Yealm*'s torpedo gunner who spoke, the only surviving executive officer of the gallant destroyer.

"Can you spare us any torpedoes?" shouted Sefton, an inspiration flashing across his mind.

"Aye, aye, sir," was the reply. "Four."

"Very good; we'll come alongside," rejoined the sub, who thereupon ordered two wire "springs" to be made ready, so as to establish communication between the two destroyers.

"Well done, Sefton!" exclaimed his lieutenant-commander.

The sub turned and found that Crosthwaite had regained his feet, and was standing beside him upon the partly demolished bridge.

"You're—", began Sefton, but the lieutenant-commander shut him up.

"Nothing," he replied laconically. "You might fix me up. Not a word to Stirling, mind. If I keep out of his way, he's not to know. But, by Jove, you've been knocked about a bit."

The information, although correct, came as a surprise to Sefton. For the

first time he noticed that the coat-sleeve of his left arm was cut away, the remnant hanging by a few threads, while his left wrist was encumbered by a bandage. He must have tied the handkerchief himself, but the action had been purely automatic. Hitherto he had had no knowledge that he had been hit by a splinter, and was quite unaware that he had acted as his own bandager.

"Carry on," continued Crosthwaite. "I'll stand easy for a while. I'll feel all right in a few minutes."

He vanished behind the wreck of the conning tower, leaving Sefton to survey the scene. It was now light enough to discern the nature of the damage caused by the ordeal through which the *Calder* had passed, for the flashes of the distant guns, added to the reflected rays of the search-lights, made it possible to see with fair distinctness.

Of the *Calder's* funnels only one remained standing. The others, either swept clean away or lying athwart the deck, left jagged cavities, through which the smoke was pouring from the oil-fed furnaces.

The starboard side of the bridge had vanished, with it the domed top of the conning-tower, while the armoured sheets upon the latter, ripped like cardboard, had been torn open, revealing the interior—a jumble of twisted voice-tubes and shattered indicators. The same shell that had wrought havoc with the conning-tower had swept the forward 4-inch completely from its mountings, taking its crew with it.

Meanwhile a dozen men had boarded the *Yealm*. Her scanty survivors were too done up to tackle the task of heaving out the torpedoes, for, included in the work of destruction, her derricks had shared the fate of the rest of the top-hammer. Others of the *Calder's* crew were attending to the injuries of their comrades, for, in addition to eight men killed outright, six were mortally wounded, and a dozen more had sustained injuries that would incapacitate them for further service.

The plucky messenger who had brought Sefton's reply from the L.T.O. had been carried below. In the heat of the fight he had received a splinter of shell in his chest, the impact fracturing one of the breast-bones. Yet, undaunted, he continued to serve his gun until the destroyer had emerged from the hostile fire. Even then he refused to present himself before the doctor, and was making his way to the fo'c'sle like a wounded animal, when Sefton, unaware of his injuries, had ordered him to take a message aft. This he did, in spite of the increasing pain and faintness, and having delivered the reply he had been forced to collapse.

At length the four gleaming cylinders were transferred from the *Yealm* to the *Calder's* decks. Once more the destroyer, although battered sufficiently to justify her retiring from the fight, was made capable of dealing deadly blows at her gigantic antagonists.

The "springs" were cast off, and, with the engines running at full speed

ahead, the *Calder* again hurled herself into the fray.

CHAPTER XIII—Sefton in Command

By this time the firing had ceased, while, the search-lights of the German war-ships having been screened, intense darkness brooded over the scene. The sea was rising rapidly, as if Nature was about to assert her power over the opposing fleets.

Exposed to the full force of the wind and waves, Sefton stood upon the remaining portion of the bridge, with his lieutenant-commander reclining within easy distance. Crosthwaite had given his subordinate strict orders to inform him of the moment when the Huns were again sighted. His wounds mattered little. Provided his head were cool and his brain alert the *Calder's* skipper meant to miss no part of the next phase of the scrap.

The destroyer was now steaming in almost the opposite direction to that by which she had penetrated the enemy line. She was five or six miles to leeward of the German ships and possibly three times that distance from the British main fleet.

Far away to the west'ard came the dull rumble of a furious cannonade.

"Our light cruisers are having a scrap with the Hun destroyers," muttered Sefton. "By Jove, this is a night!"

The sub was correct in his surmise. Although the British heavy ships were not attacked during the night, thanks to the screen provided by the Second Light-cruiser Squadron and several of the destroyer flotillas, the enemy torpedo-craft were several times in touch with the "fringes of the fleet".

Darkness played many strange pranks with the combatants, mistakes that more than once told against the Huns occurring with remarkable persistency.

On one occasion a battleship of the "Kaiser" class was observed by the *Fearless*. The Hun was entirely isolated, and was steaming at full speed. The British destroyer was unable to engage her gigantic antagonist—the two vessels passing in opposite directions at an aggregate rate of 50 miles an hour. To launch a torpedo would almost certainly result in a miss, while it was extremely hazardous

for the *Fearless* to turn and follow, without colliding with other British destroyers following much farther astern. Nor did the German battleship make any attempt to engage; possibly the *Fearless* was not visible from the war-ship's deck.

Holding on her course, the *Fearless* warned her consorts by wireless, and a heavy explosion long after told its own tale.

An even more remarkable incident occurred during the night. Several British light cruisers were steaming in line ahead when a severely mauled German ocean-going torpedo-boat was observed approaching. Mistaken for one of our destroyers, the two leading cruisers let her slip past within the distance of a cable's length. The third, taking no risks, suddenly unmasked her search-lights and played them full upon the stranger. Caught in the blinding glare, her crew could be seen hard at work endeavouring to turn a pair of torpedo-tubes abeam—a task of considerable difficulty owing to the "racer" being damaged.

The British light cruiser saved them the job in a most effectual manner. Depressing her for'ard 9.2-inch gun, she sent a huge shell at point-blank range crashing into the light-built hull.

[image]

"SHE SENT A HUGE SHELL AT POINT-BLANK RANGE CRASHING INTO THE LIGHT-BUILT HULL"

A blinding flash, a huge puff of smoke, and all was over. The search-light played upon an expanse of agitated water where, five seconds before, a German torpedo-craft had been churning on her way.

Meanwhile the *Calder* held resolutely on her course, ignorant of her position relative to the enemy fleet, and liable at any moment to "knock up against" one of the German light cruisers.

Crosthwaite had now resumed command. His unconquerable determination had soared above physical injuries. He was not out for personal kudos. Actuated solely by a desire to uphold the prestige of the Grand Fleet, and his own flotilla in particular, he was determined to hurl the *Calder* between the hostile lines. It mattered little that the destroyer was unsupported—for long since she had lost touch with her consorts. Even if none of her officers and crew returned to tell the tale, he was confident that the craft under his command would play her part in a manner worthy of the time-honoured traditions of the British navy.

Presently a high dark mass was observed almost ahead and slightly on the destroyer's port bow. It was a hostile battleship. She was lying athwart the *Calder's* course, with a considerable list to starboard, and proceeding at a rate

of about four knots. Her foremast had been shot away, and with it the foremast funnel, which in ships of this class is close to the mast. One of her two steel derricks had collapsed, the curved end trailing over the side. Long gashes in her armoured plates testified to the accuracy and power of the British gunnery.

Already the torpedoes had been "launched home" into the *Calder's* twin tubes. In any case the battleship must not be allowed to crawl into port, even if she should be incapable of repairs for months.

Crosthwaite was about to con the destroyer in order to bring the torpedo-tubes to bear, when the already stricken battleship gave a violent lurch, from which she made no attempt at recovery.

Farther and farther she heeled, the rush of water into her hull and the hiss of escaping air being distinctly audible above the howling of the wind. Her crew—or, rather, the survivors—could be heard as they leapt from the steeply inclined decks. There was no need for a torpedo to administer the *coup de grâce*.

Five minutes later only the battleship's keel-plates and the tips of the four propellers remained above the surface, by which time the *Calder* had left her well astern and was approaching the double lines of hostile light cruisers, whose indistinct shapes were just beginning to be visible against the patch of starlight that penetrated a gap in the inky mist.

A sudden blinding glare enveloped the *Calder*, causing her lieutenant-commander, quartermaster, and helmsman to blink helplessly. Fairly caught by the rays of half a dozen search-lights, they were temporarily blinded as effectually as if their eyes had been bandaged with opaque scarves.

Fortunately Sefton's back was turned from the direction in which the destroyer was proceeding. The unmasking of the concentrated rays warned him. Shielding his eyes, he turned and made a dash for the steam steering-gear, the wheel of which the helmsman was still grasping automatically.

"Hard-a-port!" shouted the sub.

The man made no attempt to carry out the order, but, slowly bending forward, collapsed upon the bridge. A fragment of shell had pierced his brain.

Pushing the body aside, Sefton put the helm hard over, and the destroyer, screened by an intervening vessel that fortunately did not make use of her search-lights, entered a darkened patch between the brilliantly lighted areas on either side.

With her remaining guns spitting defiance at the hostile light cruisers, and launching her torpedoes immediately a target presented itself, the destroyer continued her devoted dash. Projectiles, large and small, hurtled overhead, while, rapidly hit again and again, she was soon reduced to a mere wreck.

The German cruisers had a fair and easy mark. Had their gun-layers been equal to the British, the *Calder* would have been blown clean out of the water; but

the terrible night had told upon their nerves. A wholesome dread of the British destroyers with their deadly torpedoes was present in their minds. Not knowing whether the solitary destroyer was supported by others of the flotilla, they were under the impression that the *Calder* was leading a line of swift vessels, and the surmise was not comforting to the Huns.

In the midst of the tornado of shell one of the *Calder*'s torpedoes "got home", ripping open the bottom of a light cruiser and causing an internal explosion that tore her to pieces. So close was the destroyer that the terrific rush of displaced air was distinctly felt, while a dense cloud of smoke from the sinking cruiser, driving to leeward across the foam-flecked and shell-sprayed waves, completely enveloped the little craft that had dealt the successful blow.

"Take her out of action if you can," exclaimed a voice which Sefton recognized as that of his commanding officer. "I'm done in, I'm afraid."

The cloud of smoke saved the *Calder* from destruction, for, turning while still in the midst of the impenetrable pall of vapour, the destroyer slipped away from the rays of search-lights, and, doubling, literally staggered in an opposite direction to the one she had been keeping a minute before.

In vain the German search-lights swept the sea in the supposed position of the daring destroyer, until, convinced that she had shared the fate of their lost light cruiser, they screened lights and re-formed line.

Once more, in the pitch-black darkness of the night, Sefton began to realize the responsibility of his position. Crosthwaite was now lying motionless—either he had fainted from loss of blood or else he was already dead. In spite of his anxiety on his skipper's behalf, Sefton was unable to lift a finger to help him. The sub was the only one left standing on the bridge, and whether the bridge was part of a sinking vessel he knew not. A strange silence brooded over the *Calder*, broken occasionally by the moans and groans of wounded men who littered her deck.

Yet Sefton's instructions were clear up to a certain point. He had to take the destroyer out of action. To all intents this part of his duty had been carried out. The *Calder*, in a damaged, perhaps foundering, condition, was alone on the wild North Sea.

The dark form of a bluejacket clambered up the twisted bridge-ladder, and, crossing to where Sefton stood, touched his shoulder.

"Where's the sub-lootenant, mate?" he asked.

"I'm here, Brown," replied the young officer.

"Beg pardon, sir," replied the A.B. "Couldn't recognize you in the darkness. Thought I'd see if you was all right."

"Thanks," replied Sefton, touched by the man's devotion. "How goes it on deck?"

"A clean sweep, sir," replied Brown. "A regular wipe-out. Copped us proper, the swine. Both tubes knocked out, after 4-inch blown clean over the side."

"Do you know if we're making much water?" asked the sub anxiously, for the sluggish way in which the destroyer laboured through the water gave rise to considerable apprehension in that respect.

"Can't say, sir."

"Then pass the word for the senior petty officer to report to me."

The A.B. hurried off, muttering curiously expressed words of thanksgiving at his young officer's escape. Gratitude had been a hitherto undeveloped trait in Brown's nature, until that memorable occasion when Sefton risked his life, if not exactly to save, to be with him when he found himself in the "ditch".

Groping for the voice-tube from the bridge to the engine-room, for the telegraph had disappeared, Sefton attempted to call up the engineer-lieutenant, but in vain. This means of communication with the engine-room was completely interrupted.

It seemed an interminable time before the desired petty officer reported himself to the bridge. He was a short, lightly-built man, holding the rank of gunner's mate, and was a capable and fairly well-educated specimen of the lower deck. Yet, had it been daylight, and he had been dumped down just as he was in the streets of a naval town, he would have been promptly run in by the police as a vagrant. His features were literally hidden in soot mingled with blood, for a shell had hurled him face downwards upon a jagged steel grating, which had harrowed his face in a disfiguring though not dangerous fashion. His scanty uniform was in ribbons, and smelt strongly of smouldering embers, while a black scarf tied tightly round his left leg below the knee failed to stop a steady trickle from a shrapnel wound.

Briefly and to the point the petty officer made his report. The *Calder* had been hulled in more than twenty places, but only three holes were betwixt wind and water. These had already admitted a considerable quantity of water, but temporary repairs were already in hand. The steam-pumps had been damaged, but were capable of being set right, while the use of the hand-pumps enabled the sorry remnant of the destroyer's crew to keep the leaks well under control.

Nevertheless the *Calder* no longer rose buoyantly to the waves. A sullen, listless movement told its own tale. Not without a grim, determined struggle would her crew be able successfully to combat the joint effects of war and rough weather.

On deck most of the fittings had been swept clear. Of the funnel only seven feet of jagged stump remained. The rest had vanished. Both masts had been shot away close to the deck. Of the conning-tower only the base was left; the rest had been blown away almost with the last shell fired at point-blank range. The

Calder's raised fo'c'sle no longer existed. From two feet close to the water-line at the stem, and rising obliquely to the foot of the bridge, there was nothing left but an inclined plane of bent and perforated steel plates.

"Our own mother wouldn't know us, sir," concluded the petty officer.

"Let us hope she'll have the chance," rejoined Sefton, wondering whether it was humanly possible once more to bring the crippled vessel alongside her parent ship, or whether the *Calder* would again berth alongside the jetty at far-off Rosyth.

The arrival of half a dozen men enabled Sefton to have the commanding officer removed below. Anxiously the sub awaited Stirling's verdict. The report was long in coming, but the doctor's hands were full to overflowing. During that terrible night many a man owed his life, under Providence, to the administrations of the young medico. Indifferent to his own peril, although the crippled destroyer was straining badly in the heavy seas, Pills toiled like a galley-slave in the semi-darkness, for the electric light had failed, and the temporary operating-room, crowded with ghastly cases, was illuminated only by the glimmer of three oil-lamps.

"That you, Pills?" enquired Sefton anxiously, as an officer, distinguishable only by his uniform cap stuck at a comical angle on the top of his head, clambered upon the bridge.

"No-Boxspanner," replied that worthy. "At least what's left of him. Where's the skipper?"

"Knocked out."

"Done in?"

Sefton shook his head.

"Don't know," he replied. "Pills has him in hand. In any case he's got it pretty badly. Well, how goes it?"

"Can't get more'n five knots out of the engines," replied the engineer-lieutenant. "Port engine-room reduced to scrap. There was three feet of water in the stokeholds, but it's subsiding, thank goodness! Deuce of a mess when the lights went out. Stumbled over a man and banged my head. It feels like a blister on the tyre of a car-liable to burst at any moment, don't you know. The fellow strafed me for treading on him. Asked him what the deuce he was lying there for, since he had wind enough to kick up a row. What do you think he was up to?"

"Can't say," replied Sefton.

"Plugging a shot-hole with his bare back. Had his shoulder wedged against the gash. He'd been like that for twenty minutes-and he'd lost three fingers of the right hand."

"You'll have to make a special report," remarked the sub.

"A special report of every man of my department you mean!" exclaimed Boxspanner enthusiastically. "By Jove! If you could have seen them—"

The arrival of the doctor cut short the engineer-lieutenant's eulogies.

"Just up for a breather," gasped Stirling. "Thought I'd let you know how things are going in my line. A bit stiff our butcher's bill. The skipper's pretty rough. Took a wicked-looking chunk of high-explosive shell out of his forehead. I've had the deuce of a job to stop the flow of arterial blood from a gash in his leg. He'll pull through. He's as hard as nails."

"That's good," said Sefton and Boxspanner in one breath.

"Talking of nails," continued Stirling, "I've just had a rum case—Thompson, the leading signalman. Took fifty pieces of metal from his hide. The poor wretch couldn't sit down, although the wounds were light. Those strafed Huns had crammed one of their shrapnel-shells with gramophone needles. Fact! I'm not joking! I suppose they haven't the heart for any more music, so they made us a present of the needles. How much longer to daybreak?"

"About a quarter to three, Greenwich time," replied Sefton. "I haven't a watch."

He did not think it necessary to explain that his wristlet watch had been ripped from its strap by a flying fragment of shell. He was becoming painfully aware of the circumstance, for every movement of his wrist gave him a sharp pain.

Boxspanner crossed over to the temporary binnacle—one removed from the wreckage of one of the boats—for the destroyer's standard compass had gone the way of the majority of the deck-fittings, while the gyro-compass, placed in the safest part of the vessel, had been dismantled by the bursting of a shell.

"It's only a quarter past eleven," he announced dolorously, as he consulted his watch by the feeble light of the binnacle.

"Rot!" ejaculated the doctor. "It was midnight when we went into action."

The engineer-lieutenant made a second examination. The glass of the watch had been completely broken; not even a fragment remained. The hands had gone, while across the dial were two cracks in such positions that they had misled Boxspanner into the belief that they were the hands. Yet, on holding the timepiece to his ear and listening intently—for like the rest of the *Calder's* complement he was temporarily deafened from the result of the violent gun-fire—he found that the watch was still going.

"It's getting light already," observed Stirling, pointing to a pale-reddish hue in the north-eastern sky. "Well, I must away. More patching and mending demand my modest attention."

Slowly the dawn broke, a crimson glow betwixt the dark, scudding masses of clouds betokening a continuance of the hard blow, and plenty of it. With the

rising sea the task of the *Calder's* crew increased tenfold. Anxiously the horizon was swept in the hope of a friendly vessel being sighted, but the sky-line was unbroken. The tide of battle, if the action were still being maintained, had rolled away beyond sight and hearing of the little band of heroes who so worthily maintained the prestige of the White Ensign.

CHAPTER XIV—Out of the Fight

With the pumps ejecting copious streams of water the damaged *Calder* held gamely on her way, daylight adding to the horrors of the aftermath of battle. The hull echoed to the clanging of the artificers' hammers and the dull thud of the caulkers' mallets as the undaunted and tireless men proceeded with the work of stopping leaks. On deck steps were being taken to clear away the debris, and to set up a pair of temporary funnels of sufficient height to carry the smoke clear of the side. The sole remaining gun was overhauled and again made fit for action in case of necessity. Although not anxious to fall in with a U boat or a stray Zeppelin, the *Calder's* crew were determined to take every precaution to keep the tattered ensign still flying from the temporary staff set up aft.

For another hour the destroyer crawled on her long journey towards the cliff-bound shores of Britain. Then Sefton issued an order which was repeated aft and down below. The engines were stopped, the remnants of the crew mustered aft, and the battle-scarred pieces of bunting lowered to half-mast.

The *Calder's* crew were about to pay their last homage to those of their comrades who had gallantly laid down their lives for king and country.

Fifteen hammock-enshrouded forms lay motionless at the after end of the deck. Bare-headed their messmates stood in silence as Sefton, with a peculiar catch in his usually firm voice, read the prayer appointed for the burial of those at sea. Then into the foam-flecked waves, the bodies of those conquerors even in death were consigned, to find an undisturbed resting-place fathoms deep on the bed of the North Sea.

It was no time for melancholy. At the word "Dismiss" the men trooped for'ard, for there was plenty of work to do, and, in the navy especially, hard but necessary work is rightly considered one of the best antidotes for grief.

Snatching at the opportunity to visit his chief, Sefton hurried below to the shattered ward-room, where Crosthwaite lay on a mattress that smelt abominably of cordite and the lingering odours of poison-gas. The lieutenant-commander had by this time recovered consciousness, and greeted Sefton with a bad attempt at a smile.

"We've kept our end up," he said feebly. "Think you'll get the old ship back to port?"

"I trust so," said the sub guardedly. "I'll do my level best."

"I know," assented Crosthwaite. "Still, you've a stiff job. I'll be on the bridge in another half an hour and give you a spell."

Sefton said nothing. He realized that many hours—nay, days—would pass before his chief would again assume command. Crosthwaite was quick to notice his subordinate's silence.

"Suppose I've had it pretty badly," he admitted reluctantly. "It was a rotten business getting knocked out at the critical time."

"Nothing much happened after that," explained Sefton. "We were out of it within twenty seconds from the time you were hit."

"Man alive!" protested Crosthwaite. "You're altogether wrong. For nearly ten minutes I was lying there quite conscious and watching you. You're a plucky fellow, old man."

Before Sefton could reply he was called away. A Zeppelin had been sighted, flying in the direction of the badly mauled *Calder*.

Quickly the remaining gun was manned. Although not intended for aerial work, modification to the original mounting permitted it to be trained within ten degrees of the perpendicular, supplementary sights having been fitted to enable it to be laid while at extreme elevation.

The air-ship was still four miles off, and flying at an altitude of about 2000 feet. Apparently undamaged, it was proceeding at a rapid pace against the wind.

Deprived of the advantage of speed and manoeuvring powers, the destroyer would fall an easy prey to the Zeppelin's bombs unless the *Calder* could make good use of her solitary 4-inch quick-firer. The weapon was loaded and trained abeam, the gun's crew being ordered to take cover, and thus give the destroyer the appearance of being incapable of defence.

Sefton made no attempt to alter helm. He had made up his mind to wait until the huge target came within easy range. He knew that the *Calder* was under observation, and that the Germans were trying to ascertain the nature of the destroyer's injuries. Should they come to the conclusion that the slowly-moving British craft was powerless of doing damage they would not be likely to waste ballast in ascending to a safe altitude and a corresponding loss of hydrogen in descending after the attack.

Nearer and nearer came the huge air-ship, her bows steadily pointing in the direction of the destroyer. Range-finder in hand, Sefton curbed his impatience. Not until the Zeppelin bore at a distance of 2500 yards did he order the gun's crew to their stations.

With a vicious spurt of flame and a sharp, resounding detonation the 4-inch sent a shell hurtling through the air. Admirably timed, it burst apparently close to the silvery-grey envelope. Almost instantly a huge cloud of black and yellow smoke shot from the Zeppelin.

A rousing cheer burst from the throats of the British seamen. The cheer was taken up by the wounded heroes down below, who, having heard in some mysterious manner of the air-ship's approach, were waiting the issue of events with mingled confidence and regret that they themselves were unable to assist in "strafing the sausage".

The cheers literally froze on the lips of the men on deck, for when the smoke cleared away the Zeppelin was a mere speck, 10,000 feet in the air. Under cover of a discharge of smoke she had dropped a large quantity of ballast and had shot vertically upwards to a safe altitude.

The Hun in command had received orders not to attack unless he could do so without risk, the Zeppelin being specially detailed for observation work. With a range of visibility of fifty or sixty miles she was of far more service to the discomfited German High Seas Fleet in warning them of the position of their victors than in strafing a solitary destroyer.

With solid water sweeping her fore and aft, the *Calder* still struggled on her course, steered by the hand-operated gear in conjunction with the inefficient boat's compass. Hitherto the leaks had been kept under, but now the water was making its way in through the shattered fore-deck.

Reluctantly Sefton came to the conclusion that he would have to give the order "abandon ship" before many minutes had passed. Already the knowledge that the old *Calder* was slowly foundering had become general, yet there was no panic.

Calmly some of the men began to collect all the buoyant materials they could lay their hands upon for the purpose of constructing rafts, since there were no boats left. Others stuck gamely to the task of manning the pumps, while the wounded were carried on deck in order to give them a chance of getting clear of the sinking ship.

At seven in the morning a vessel was sighted to the west'ard proceeding in a nor'-easterly direction. After a few minutes of anxious doubt as to her nationality, she proved to be a Danish trawler—unless the national colours painted on her sides and the distinguishing numbers on her sails were disguises.

Altering her course, the trawler bore down upon the *Calder* and slowed

down within hailing distance to leeward.

"Come you all aboard," shouted the Danish skipper, a tall, broad-shouldered descendant of a Viking forbear. "We save you. Plenty room for all."

"We don't want to abandon ship yet," replied Sefton. "We may weather it yet."

"An' I think that you answer so," rejoined the skipper. "You British seamans brave mans. Englishmans goot; Danes goot; Germans no goot. Me stand by an' 'elp."

"Seen anything of the battle?" enquired the sub.

The Danish skipper nodded his head emphatically.

"Germans run for port as if Satan after them," he declared; then, realizing that he had paid the Huns a compliment, he hastened to add: "No, no; Germans too fond of wickedness to run from Satan—it is from the English that they run. Ships sunk everywhere, dead men float by thousands: we no fish for months in these waters."

This was the first intimation that the *Calder's* crew received of Jellicoe's failure to combine annihilation with victory. Victory it undoubtedly was; but, although the Grand Fleet had succeeded in getting between the enemy and his North Sea bases, the Huns, favoured by darkness and fog, had contrived to elude the toils, and were skeltering for safety with a haste bordering upon panic. Jellicoe and Beatty had done everything that courage and science could devise. They had inflicted far greater losses on the Huns than the latter did upon us. And, what is more, the British fleet "held the lists", while the boastful Germans, crowding into Wilhelmshaven and other ports, spent their time in spreading lying reports of their colossal victory over the hated English.

"You no look surprise at the news," continued the master of the Danish trawler. "Me think you cheer like mad."

"Of course, we're glad," replied Sefton, "but it is not quite what we expected, you know. We're sorry that the enemy got away."

"Me, too," agreed the Dane. "Germany treat little Denmark badly. She bully; we cannot do anything. Shall we run alongside an' take you and your crew off?"

Sefton gave a glance to windward. It seemed as if the seas were moderating. His reluctance to abandon ship increased. The *Calder* had played her part, and it seemed base ingratitude to leave her to founder.

[image]

*"THE 'CALDER' HAD PLAYED HER PART, AND IT SEEMED BASE
INGRATITUDE TO LEAVE HER TO FOUNDER"*

"I don't think she's settling down any further, sir," replied one of the carpenter's crew in answer to the sub's question. "Bulkheads are holding well."

"Then we'll carry on," declared the sub, and, warmly thanking the Dane for his humanity, he courteously declined the offer of assistance.

"Goot luck, then!" replied the skipper of the trawler as he thrust the wheel hard over and ordered easy ahead. Yet not for another hour did he part company. Keeping at a discreet distance from the labouring destroyer, he remained until, the sea having moderated, and the *Calder* showing no further signs of distress, he came to the conclusion that the battered British craft stood a fair chance of making port.

For the next couple of hours the *Calder* was continually passing wreckage, scorched and shattered woodwork testifying to the devastating effect of modern explosives. The destroyer was passing over the scene of one of the many isolated engagements that composed the memorable battle and certain British victory of Jutland.

"A boat or a raft of sorts, sir," reported a seaman, pointing to a floating object a couple of miles away, and slightly on the *Calder's* starboard bow.

Sefton brought his binoculars to bear upon the objects indicated by the look-out. At regular intervals, as it rose on the crests of the waves, a large raft known, after its inventor, as the "Carley" was visible. An exaggerated lifebuoy, with a "sparred" platform so arranged that in the event of the appliance being completely upset the "deck" would still be available, the "Carley" has undoubtedly proved its value in the present war. Practically indestructible, not easily set on fire by shells, and with an almost inexhaustible reserve of buoyancy, the raft is capable of supporting twenty men with ease.

Slowly the *Calder* approached the life-buoy. She was doing a bare 3 knots; while, able to use only one propeller, she was hard on her helm.

"Wot are they—strafed 'Uns or some of our blokes?" enquired an ordinary seaman of his "raggie"; for, although the men on the raft were now clearly visible, their almost total absence of clothing made it impossible to determine their nationality.

"Dunno, mate," replied his chum. "'Uns, perhaps; they don't seem in no 'urry to see us."

"'Uns or no 'Uns," rejoined the first speaker, "skipper's goin' to pull 'em out of the ditch, if it's only to show 'em that we ain't like them U boat pirates."

"Strikes me they're pretty well done in," chimed in another. "There's not one of 'em as has the strength of a steerage rat."

Huddled on the raft were fifteen almost naked human beings. Some were roughly bandaged. All were blackened by smoke and scorched by exposure to the sun and salt air. Another half-dozen were in the water, supporting themselves

by one hand grasping the life-lines of the raft.

By this time they had observed the *Calder's* approach; but, content that they had been seen, the exhausted men engaged in no demonstration of welcome. They sat listlessly, with their salt-rimmed eyes fixed upon their rescuers.

At a great risk of crushing the men in the water, the destroyer closed. The "Carley" was secured and brought alongside, and the work of transferring the survivors commenced. Without assistance the majority would never have been able to gain the *Calder's* deck, so pitiful was their condition owing to a night's exposure to the cold.

They were British seamen, but Sefton forbore to question them until they had received attention from the hard-worked Dr. Stirling, and been supplied with food and drink from the already sadly-depleted stores.

When the men had recovered sufficiently to relate their adventures, they told a typical story of British pluck and heroism. They were part of the crew of the destroyer *Velocity*, and had taken part in a night attack upon von Hipper's squadron.

In the midst of the mêlée a hostile light cruiser, tearing at 27 knots, rammed the *Velocity*, cutting her completely in twain just abaft the after engine-room bulkhead. Swallowed up in the darkness, the stern portion of the destroyer floated for nearly ten minutes before it foundered. Of what happened to the remaining and larger part of the vessel the survivors had no definite knowledge, although some were under the impression that it was towed away under fire by another destroyer.

Left with sufficient time to cut away a "Carley", the remnant of the *Velocity's* crew found themselves adrift, with the still engaging vessels steaming farther and farther away.

Without food and almost destitute of clothing, for in anticipation of a swim the men had taken off the remainder of their already scanty "fighting-kit", their position was a precarious one. The rising seas threatened to sweep them from the over-crowded raft, while the bitterly cold night air numbed their limbs. Yet, with the characteristic light-heartedness of the British tar, the men passed the time in singing rousing choruses, even the wounded joining in.

At daybreak they were pretty well exhausted. No vessel was in sight. They were without food and water, and unable to take any steps to propel their unwieldy, heavily-laden raft in any direction.

Presently a large German battle-cruiser loomed through the mist. The Huns must have had a bad attack of nerves, for, contrary to all the dictates of humanity, they let fly a dozen quick-firers at the raft. Possibly they mistook the low-lying object for a submarine. Fortunately the shells flew wide.

Then, to the surprise of the remnant of the *Velocity's** crew, the German

ship suddenly heaved her bows clear of the water and disappeared in a great smother of foam and a cloud of smoke.

A rousing cheer—it is wonderful how much sound men can give vent to even when almost dead through exhaustion—hailed this unexpected deliverance from one of many perils, and the seamen settled themselves to resume their prolonged discomforts, buoyed up by the unshaken hope that a British vessel would bear down to their assistance.

It was indeed remarkable how quickly most of the *Velocity's* men regained their spirits after being received on board the *Calder*.

One, in particular, was displaying acute anxiety as to the condition of a bundle of one-pound notes, which, sodden with sea-water, he had carefully removed from the pouch of his solitary garment—a body-belt. Amidst a fire of good-natured chaff, the man spread his precious belongings out to dry—an almost impossible task owing to the showers of spray—until, taken compassion upon by a sympathetic stoker, he went below to the stokehold and successfully completed the delicate operation.

Another survivor stuck gamely to a wooden tobacco-box. His messmates knew the secret, but, when questioned by the *Calder's* men, he cautiously opened the lid, displaying a couple of white rats. Before going into action, the man, having doubts as to the safety of his pets in the fo'c'sle, had stealthily removed them aft, placing the box in the officers' pantry. When the *Velocity* was rammed he did not forget his dumb friends. At the risk of his life, he went below and secured the box. Throughout the long night he kept the animals dry, only surrendering them to his chums when his turn came to leap overboard and lighten the already overcrowded life-buoy.

The rest of the day passed almost without incident. Food was running short, for, in spite of the sadly depleted number of the *Calder's* crew, there was barely another day's provisions left on board that had not been spoiled by fire and water. In addition, the augmentation of the ship's company by the rescued crew made the shortage still more acute.

Just as night was coming on a petty officer approached Sefton and saluted.

"For'ard bulkhead's giving, sir," he reported, as coolly as if he were announcing a most trivial occurrence. "There's four feet of water in the for'ard stokehold."

The safety of the *Calder* and her crew depended upon that transverse wall of steel. Once this bulkhead yielded to the terrific pressure of water, no human ingenuity and resource could save the battered destroyer from plunging to the bed of the North Sea.

CHAPTER XV—A Day of Suspense

"Confound the wretched thing, Sefton!" exclaimed Major-General Crosthwaite explosively.

"I hereby confound it!" said his companion with grim solemnity. "I'll do anything you like, provided you don't ask me to evacuate this luxurious cushion and push."

"Now if I had my chauffeur here—" began the General, then, realizing that his duty to his country had necessitated the release of the man for military service, he held his peace on that point, only to break out in another direction.

"It's that horrible concoction that is sold as petrol," he remarked with an air of profound wisdom. "Sixty per cent paraffin and ten per cent water. Nine o'clock in the evening, miles from anywhere, and the idiotic car as obstinate as a mule."

Dick's father, enjoying a hard-earned fortnight's leave after a strenuous time at the front, had performed what he would have considered a desperate task in pre-war days. He had actually driven his own motor—a twenty-horse-power touring-car—from Shropshire to Southampton. Luck, in the shape of complete immunity from tyre troubles and the two thousand odd things that might go wrong with a car, had hitherto favoured him. Whereat he became conceited with his powers as a motorist; but it was pride before a fall, and Major-General Crosthwaite found himself stranded with his three companions somewhere in the vicinity of the little Wiltshire town of Malmesbury.

The eldest of the three passengers was Admiral Trefusis Sefton, K.C.B. (retired), whose son Jack was at that very moment engaged upon his desperate venture of bringing the crippled *Calder* across the North Sea. Residing near Southampton, he had accepted Crosthwaite Senior's invitation to spend a long week-end at the latter's house near Bridgnorth, and the Major-General thought it was a good opportunity for having a motor-tour by fetching his guest from the south of England.

"I'll take young George with me," wrote the Major-General, "and there will

be room in the car for Leslie. They can't get into worse mischief than if they were left at home, and one will be company for the other."

So George Crosthwaite accompanied his father from Bridgnorth to Southampton. Shrewdly the fifteen-year old lad suspected that the primary object of his sire was to let his son see what an expert driver Crosthwaite Senior had become.

Leslie Sefton, also aged fifteen, jumped at the invitation, and, in spite of various and oft-repeated warnings from his parent not to skylark, his exuberant spirits formed a sympathetic counterpart to those of young George Crosthwaite.

Declining his son's offer of expert advice and assistance, the general divested himself of his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, inserted his monocle in his eye, and spent four precious minutes in deep contemplation of the stationary car. Then he applied rudimentary tests to half a dozen different parts without locating the trouble, while the admiral placidly smoked a choice cigar and meditated upon the pleasing fact that he had never succumbed to the motor craze.

George and Leslie, seated on a bank by the roadside, were discussing the merits and demerits of various types of aeroplanes when the former's parent interrupted the pleasant discussion.

"George."

"Sir?"

"I want you to go into Malmesbury and get them to send a car to tow us in."

Young Crosthwaite, unlike either of the two sons in the parable, prepared to obey. "Obey orders at the double" had been dinned into his head from time immemorial. On one occasion when the colonel—as he was then—was entertaining a high War Office official, George, in his alacrity to carry out his parent's behests, collided with the portly butler bearing a heavily-laden tray. But the culprit's plea that he was fulfilling the oft-reiterated order calmed the colonel's inward wrath (he dared not "let himself go" just then) and earned a substantial tip from the highly-amused guest.

"Coming?" asked George laconically, addressing his chum.

"Rather," was the reply.

George threw his greatcoat into the car. As he did so, his sharp eyes caught sight of a tap that was turned off when it should have been turned on.

Deftly he depressed the little lever, and, somewhat to his parent's surprise, "tickled" the carburetter.

"It's no use doing that," said the discomfited motorist. "Hurry up and be off. We'll be stranded here all night if you don't bestir yourself."

Crosthwaite Senior's astonishment increased when the dutiful George climbed into the car and released the self-starter. The motor fired without a hitch.

"By Jove!" ejaculated George's parent, too delighted to think of thanking his son. "However did you manage it?"

"Only turned the petrol on," replied George calmly.

"Have you been playing any tricks--?" began the general, then resolved to repeat the question at a more favourable private opportunity. "Jump in, Sefton; we've wasted an hour already. Might have been in Gloucester by this time. 'Fraid we'd better put up in Malmesbury to-night."

On the lowest gear, the car crawled slowly up the stiff gradient leading to the little town, and pulled up outside an ivy-clad inn within a stone's throw of the imposing ruins of the abbey.

"Any news to-night, I wonder?" enquired the general as the four sat down to a substantial supper. "Suppose there's no chance of a late paper in this out-of-the-way spot?"

"'Fraid not," replied the admiral. "You see, it is on a branch line. Decent weather, eh?"

"Not so bad for our men in the North Sea," remarked Crosthwaite complacently. "They've had a long, rotten winter, although Dick never complains on that score. Must be quite yachty weather, I should imagine," he added, with the memories of a certain pleasure cruise to the Baltic in June flashing across his mind.

He picked up a morning paper from a settee and glanced at it. He had read the selfsame news fourteen hours previously. Yet a paragraph had hitherto escaped his notice.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed.

"What's that?" enquired the admiral.

"Suppose, after all, it's nothing much," observed General Crosthwaite. "Masters of neutral steamers arriving at Danish ports state that they sighted numerous wrecks and hundreds of floating corpses. Another Reuter yarn, I take it."

"More U-boat frightfulness perhaps," hazarded Admiral Sefton.

And yet the report was a mild form of paving the way towards the announcement of the Jutland battle. This was on Friday. Already Germany had claimed a glorious and colossal naval victory, and the tardiness of the British Government in giving the lie direct to the boastful Hunnish claims gave, at least temporarily, a severe shock to neutrals' belief in the invincibility of Britain's sea power. Already American pro-German papers had appeared with highly coloured accounts of Great Britain's crushing naval disaster; cartoons depicting John Bull's consternation at the return of the battered British lion with a badly twisted tail spoke volumes for the incontestable superiority of the German navy.

Happily ignorant of the disquieting rumours, and, indeed, of any knowl-

edge of the naval action, the motorists slept soundly until eight on the following morning.

"Another fine day," declared Crosthwaite Senior at breakfast. "We ought to be home by three in the afternoon. Any papers yet?" he enquired of the waiter.

"No, sir, not until eleven," was the reply.

"Must wait until we get to Gloucester, I suppose," grunted the general. "One of the penalties for stopping at a place on a branch line."

"A fine little place, Pater," remarked George. "Absolutely top-hole. Wish we were staying here. There's an awfully decent stream down there—looks just the place for fishing."

"Can't beat the Severn for that, my boy," declared his father, loyal to his native town and the river that flows past its site. "Buck up, my boy, and finish the packing. I want to see that that petrol-tank is properly filled—no unsealed cans, remember."

George Crosthwaite was really a useful assistant to his parent. Crosthwaite Senior frankly recognized the fact, but forbore from giving his son, personally, due credit, avowing that it was bad for discipline to be lavish with praise.

"Smart youngster, Sefton, my boy," he declared in proud confidence to the admiral. "He has his head screwed on the right way, although I suppose I ought not to brag about it. Have to be careful, though, that he doesn't kick over the traces just yet."

It was nearly nine before the car was ready to resume its journey. In high spirits, for the bracing air and bright sunshine made a perfect day, the party set off.

Major-General Crosthwaite started at a strictly moderate pace. He invariably did; but it was always noticeable that, before he had covered many miles, he accelerated the speed until it reached a reckless pace bordering on fifty miles an hour. Towards the end of his day's journey, he would develop a speed that caused his sedate passengers to quake with apprehension, and his youthful ones to revel in the terrific rush through the air.

Twenty minutes after leaving Malmesbury the car, now running splendidly, bounded up the steep ascent into old-world Tetbury. Here, taking a wrong turning, the motorists had to retrace their way, Crosthwaite Senior slowing down in order to avoid a similar mistake.

Presently Leslie caught sight of a placard displayed outside a news-agent's shop. In flaring red letters were the words: "Big Naval Action in the North Sea".

Leaning over the seat he gripped his father's arm. By this time the car was well beyond the shop.

"What's wrong?" bawled the admiral, for the wind-screen had been lowered and the breeze was whistling past his ears.

"Big scrap in the North Sea—it's on the placards," replied his son, "Heave-to, Crosthwaite!" exclaimed Admiral Sefton. "Stop here!"

The driver, imagining that something was amiss, and that he had unknowingly run over something, applied his emergency brakes, bringing up his car all standing and at a grave risk to the tyres. Leslie, taken unawares, shot forward, "ramming" his parent in the small of the back with his head and forcing the admiral against the dash-board.

"What the—!" began the astonished Crosthwaite Senior.

Almost unconscious of the rough treatment by his son, Admiral Sefton descended from the car. Already George had executed a flying leap, and was running towards the news-agent's shop.

Returning with a handful of papers he met the admiral half-way.

"It's 'The Day', sir!" he exclaimed, confident in the belief that the long-expected struggle for naval supremacy had been settled once and for all in Britain's favour.

Admiral Sefton grabbed the proffered paper with super-energy, almost tearing the flimsy fabric with his powerful fingers as he fumbled with the recalcitrant leaves.

Then the look of eager expectancy faded from his face, giving place to a dull, strained expression of incredulity.

"Come along, Sefton!" sang out Crosthwaite Senior. "Don't be greedy with the good news. Why, man—"

"We've got it properly in the neck, Pater," announced his son. "Fourteen of ours, including the *Queen Mary*, sunk."

"But the enemy—the German losses are heavier than ours?" enquired the general, snatching at the paper George was holding.

The two officers scanned the official report. "Owing to low visibility"—was ever an Admiralty dispatch issued with such halting excuses? A straightforward admission of our losses, it is true, but nothing to suggest that the Germans had incurred similar or heavier casualties, or even that the British navy had gained the day. And then there was the perplexing statement that the Germans had rescued a number of British seamen, and no corresponding report to the effect that we had saved any of theirs. Everything pointed to a running fight in which the Huns were the pursuers.

Admiral Sefton was dumbfounded. Had there been a convenient wall, he might have turned his face towards it and groaned in spirit. Instead he set his jaw tightly and thought hard.

"What do you make of it?" enquired the general. "Looks bad on the face of it, eh?"

"We must wait for further details," was his companion's guarded reply. The

journey was resumed, but all the joy had vanished from the minds of the party. No longer, the beautiful scenery appealed to them; the crisp, bracing air and brilliant sunshine called in vain.

Down the steep "hairpin" road through Nailsworth, and along one of the prettiest valleys of the Cotswolds, the car literally crawled. General Crosthwaite, contrary to his usual practice, was driving slowly and listlessly. His keen zest had disappeared. As he gripped the steering-wheel he thought deeply, remembering that his son was somewhere out there in the trackless, mine-strewn North Sea.

The admiral, too, was meditating. He would dearly have liked to have paced to and fro, with his hands clasped behind his back in true quarter-deck style; but since the limits of the car made such a proceeding impossible, and it was equally difficult to alight unless the car stopped, he "sat tight" and made a mental review of the battle, constructing his theories upon the slender foundations conveyed in the official report.

Gradually his perplexities vanished. The firm belief in the well-being of the navy that had gripped his mind ever since those long-past *Britannia* days was not to be shattered by a disquieting and obviously incomplete report, even though it bore Admiralty endorsement.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed, startling his friend by bawling into Crosthwaite Senior's ear. "Hanged if I'll go by that report. Just you wait, my dear fellow, until supplementary information is forthcoming. It's my belief the Admiralty have something up their sleeve, and that we've won hands down."

"You think so?" asked the general eagerly.

"Think so! I know it," was the now decided reply. "Carry on, Crosthwaite, full-speed ahead, and we'll see what news there is when we get to Gloucester."

"Hope you're right," thought the army officer. Visions of a previous naval disaster—that of the gallant Craddock's defeat off Coronel, the first news of which came from German sources—urged that such a thing as a naval defeat might be possible, especially in view of the great part played by chance. A misunderstood order might result in disaster. A chance shot or an accidental internal explosion might imperil the superiority of the British fleet.

But there was always the dominating factor—men, not ships, win battles. The British seaman, with the glorious traditions of centuries behind him, is in every way superior to the brute who mans the fleet of the Black Cross Ensign.

Then the general found himself mentally kicking himself for not sharing in the admiral's optimism.

"Sefton's right," he concluded. "When we get more news we'll find that all's well."

At Gloucester the admiral sent off a telegram, bought four different papers, scanned the bulletins in the windows of the publishing offices, and found himself

little wiser than before; but at Worcester, where the motorists stopped for lunch, they found the outlook much brighter.

Steps had already been taken to counteract the depressing effects of the preliminary official announcement of the Battle of Jutland. The loss of the *Warspite* and *Marlborough*, both ships having been claimed as sunk by the Germans, was categorically denied, and a statement of the British vessels, known to be sunk, given. Enemy ships, aggregating in tonnage more than that of our losses, were claimed only when definite reports of their fate were received, from which it was now evident that, far from being a German victory, the honours rested with the fleet under Jellicoe's command.

At the post office Admiral Sefton obtained a wire, sent in reply to his telegram from Gloucester. It was from an old shipmate, now holding an appointment at Whitehall, and was as follows:—

"Vessel in question has not returned to base."

Without a word the admiral handed the buff paper to his friend. Hardly a muscle of Crosthwaite Senior's weather-beaten face moved as he read the momentous but indefinite news, although the "vessel in question" was the T.B.D. *Calder*, and both men had similar personal interests in the matter.

For the moment private considerations held supreme sway. The two men mutually extended their right hands and exchanged sympathetic grips.

"If they are knocked out, it was in the thick of the scrap," declared General Crosthwaite. "I'll stake my all upon that."

"*Dulce et—*" began the admiral, then, coming to the conclusion that he was a trifle premature, he exclaimed: "Dash it all, Crosthwaite, strange things happen at sea! They may turn up after all."

"It's the suspense," added Crosthwaite. "Look here, I'll take the car right slap on to Edinburgh, and go on to Rosyth. Are you game?"

"Carry on," said Admiral Sefton. "I'm with you."

CHAPTER XVI—The Struggle in the Mountain Pass

Near the summit of Blackstone Edge, an unfrequented road running at a height of between 1200 and 1300 feet over the serrated Pennine Hills, five men were lying upon the short, dark-green grass in a slight hollow within ten yards of the highway. There was little about their appearance that demanded attention. A casual observer might in pardonable error have taken them for a party of Lancashire mill operatives out for a day's enjoyment.

At intervals one of the party would roll over on his side, produce a pair of prismatic glasses from his pocket, and peer with considerable caution over the ridge of the hollow, focusing the binoculars upon the winding ribbon-like "slag" road that ascended steeply from the town of Rochdale, the factory chimneys of which were just discernible through the murky Lancashire atmosphere. Then, with a guttural grunt that betokened disappointment, he would replace the glasses and relapse into a stolid contemplation of his silent comrades. The hot sun pouring pitilessly upon the heavily-clad men did not tend to improve their physical comfort. Several times they cursed the tormenting flies, expressing their murmured epithets in the German tongue.

At last one of the men spoke.

"Are you sure that he is coming this way, Hans?" he asked, addressing the man with the binoculars. "Perhaps he has taken it into his head to take the other road—the Stanedge Pass, it is called."

"These Englishmen are so pig-headed that they rarely change their minds," replied Hans. "It is often as well that they do not. I have it on excellent authority that he leaves Liverpool at nine, addresses a conference at Bolton at eleven, and receives a deputation at Rochdale at two. Now, is it conceivable that he would go a roundabout way to Halifax when this is the shortest and easiest route?"

"He may take the railway train," suggested another of the band, as he shifted an automatic pistol from his hip pocket, where it seriously interfered with his ease, to his breast coat pocket.

"Knowing our man as I do," declared Hans, "I do not think it likely, unless his motor breaks down over these atrocious cobbled roads. No, I think we are soon to meet our expected visitor. Now, are you all thoroughly acquainted with your duties? There must be no failure. Even partial success is not sufficient. Complete obliteration of the man, a final disappearance, is what is required, and what must be accomplished."

A resolute chorus of assent rose from the four subordinates. Their leader, levelling his binoculars, studied the road for the twentieth time.

The five were members of a German Secret Service agency. Provided with registration cards, obtained with the greatest ease, since no attempt had been made to verify the particulars demanded by law; speaking English with a flawless Lancashire accent, members of a trade union, and fully conversant with the pe-

cularities of industrial life, the men were able to carry on their nefarious scheme with little risk of detection.

After a run of minor activities, an opportunity was about to occur whereby they might render an important service to the Fatherland. A high official was engaged upon an industrial tour of Lancashire and Yorkshire, with the intention of increasing the already huge output of munitions from the factories temporarily given over to the production of war-like stores. The magnetic personality of the man made the task an easy one to him, although others less gifted would have encountered nothing but opposition had they proposed the same conditions to the independent operatives of Lancashire and Yorkshire. He was one of the very few Government officials who understood the northern temperament. When others would have "rubbed them up the wrong way", this level-headed statesman was able to enlist the whole-hearted sympathies of blunt and outspoken audiences. His persuasive powers were worth an army corps to the Commander-in-Chief of the British troops in France.

The five Germans had laid their plans well. Their proposed operations had met with full approval from head-quarters at Berlin, and the result of their efforts was anxiously awaited by the German Government. Since abduction left a loophole in the complete furtherance of the plot, Teutonic thoroughness and frightfulness had devised a more drastic plan.

At the summit of the Blackstone Edge is a large lake or reservoir, its unfenced sides shelving steeply to a depth, in a certain place, of fifty feet. It would be a comparatively simple matter to wreck the car, murder its occupants if they still survived the fall from the overturned vehicle, and topple the wreckage into the dark waters of the mountain lake.

A cloud passed athwart the sun. The sweltering heat gave place to a piercing cold. The Huns shivered in the cold wind and grumbled at the keenness of the English June. Overhead three gaunt crows flew, cawing dismally. With Teutonic superstition one of the men called his companions' attention to the ill omen.

"Nonsense, Otto!" protested the man known as Hans. "The ill luck is directed against the man for whom we are waiting so patiently. Ha! Here comes the car."

With their heads just showing above the ridge, the five kept the approaching motor under close observation. It was climbing rapidly, leaving in its wake a cloud of dust that drifted slowly across the deep valley on the left-hand side of the curve. Presently an unmistakable rasping sound announced the fact that the driver, finding the gradient too severe, had let in the lowest gear.

"Are you certain it is he?" asked one of the Huns. "There are four in the car?"

"Did you suppose he would travel alone?" retorted his leader. "That is he

right enough—the man in civilian clothes. The other is a military staff officer. The red in his cap proves that. The younger men are doubtless his secretaries—valets perhaps. Yes, it is our man. Now, make ready.”

Giving a glance in the opposite direction in order to make certain that no one was approaching from the Yorkshire side of the Pass, Hans cautiously placed a small battery within easy reach of his fat, podgy fingers. From the battery ran a couple of fine wires through the stretch of grass, terminating at an inconspicuous greyish object lying in the centre of the road in the midst of a scatter of loose stones.

At the critical moment a touch upon the firing-key of the battery and—

”Why are you so keen upon the East Coast route, Crosthwaite?” asked the admiral. ”It’s a jolly sight longer.”

”That I admit,” replied the general. ”But I know it, which makes a vast difference. The Carlisle road is jolly rough, especially over Shap Summit.”

”By the by, George, here is a little problem for you,” said Admiral Sefton. ”Which is the farthest west, Liverpool or Edinburgh?”

George looked at Leslie for assistance. That worthy, having heard the question put many times before, took an astonishing interest in a policeman at the street corner.

”Well, sir,” replied George, ”Liverpool is on the west coast; Edinburgh on the east—”

”Within a few miles,” corrected the admiral. ”Therefore I should imagine that Liverpool is more to the west.”

”Then look it up on the map,” exclaimed Admiral Sefton triumphantly. ”You’ll find you’re wrong. That’s why I couldn’t understand your father’s intention of keeping to the East Coast route until he explained his preference.”

”We’ll do it quicker, too,” rejoined Crosthwaite, Senior. ”Once we’re clear of the outskirts of Manchester we’ll reel off the miles like winking. Here you are: Rochdale, Halifax, Bradford, and Harrogate, striking the Great North Road at Boroughbridge.”

The journey was resumed, the admiral, as before, sitting with Crosthwaite Senior, while George and Leslie, comfortably ensconced in the rear seats, were surreptitiously examining a formidable-looking air-pistol that Leslie Sefton had smuggled into his portmanteau.

It was modelled after a Service weapon, having the same weight and balance. The barrel was rifled, and was capable of sending a lead slug with considerable force and low trajectory from a distance of fifty yards.

"We'll take pot shots at rabbits on the way," declared Leslie. "The governor won't hear the sound. It makes very little noise, and the engine will drown that. There'll be hundreds of bunnies up there," and he pointed to the still-distant outlines of the frowning Pennines.

Up and up, out of the dreary manufacturing district, the car climbed, until the moist smoky atmosphere of the cotton-mills gave place to the keen bracing air of the hills.

Both lads, alive to the possibilities of using the air-pistol, hung on to the side of the car, their eyes roving the grass-land in the hope of spotting a likely target.

The car had been climbing on low gear, but now the gradient became less. The travellers were nearing the summit of Blackstone Edge.

Suddenly Leslie levelled the weapon, aiming at what he took to be the body of a rabbit showing above the top of a hillock. He was on the point of pressing the trigger when a loud crash, followed by a cloud of smoke and dust immediately behind the car, almost caused the pistol to drop from his grasp.

"What's that?" exclaimed Admiral Sefton.

"Tyre burst, I'm afraid," replied Crosthwaite Senior, momentarily expecting the car to swerve. Applying the brakes he brought the car to a standstill, with the engine still running, and prepared to investigate the extent of the damage.

The Huns' carefully-laid plans had gone awry through Leslie Sefton's instrumentality. The lad had mistaken one of the miscreants' caps for a rabbit. Hans, under the impression that the attempt had been discovered, and that one of the occupants of the car was levelling a pistol at him, suddenly lost his nerve. He depressed the firing-key of the battery a second or so too late. Instead of the detonation occurring immediately underneath the motor, it expended its force harmlessly in the air.

"By Jove, Crosthwaite!" exclaimed the admiral as a rapid fusillade was opened upon the stationary car. "Modern highwaymen!"

"Keep down, lads," ordered the general sharply, for the nickel bullets were singing overhead like a swarm of angry bees. "Under the seat, Sefton. Be sharp!"

"Never!" expostulated the admiral sturdily.

"Not you, I mean," almost roared his companion by way of apology. "You'll find a Webley under the seat. Look alive, man! It's loaded only in one chamber."

Leslie Sefton's first impulse was to duck, until remembering that he still held a loaded weapon, although it was but an air-pistol, in his hand, he rested the barrel upon the padded back of the seat and aimed at the nearest of the assailants.

It was an excellent shot. The little bullet struck Hans just above the right eye. With an oath the German clapped both hands to his injury, dropping his pistol as he did so, and began to dance round and round in agony.

"Four to four now," exclaimed the lad, taking into no account the fact that the supposed highwaymen were all well armed. He jerked back the barrel of the air-pistol and inserted another pellet, the zest of the fight gripping him with the utmost intensity.

Meanwhile Crosthwaite Senior had let in the clutch, and had succeeded in turning the car in the direction of the attackers. Altogether unprepared for this manoeuvre, the four separated, two making to the right, and the others, keeping close together, edging away to the left, still maintaining a hot and erratic fire.

Bending low behind the wind-screen, the plate-glass of which was already "starred" in several places by the impact of the bullets, the general urged the car straight in the direction of the men on his left. Even as he did so, the admiral, who had discovered the loaded revolver, blazed away on his left, with the result that Otto lost all present and future interest in the welfare of the Fatherland.

"Lucky shot," exclaimed Admiral Sefton modestly. "Very lucky shot. In the centre of his fat forehead, by Jove!"

Only on rare occasions, since those far-off days when he was a young lieutenant, had the retired naval officer handled a revolver, but his skill and deadly precision remained. Leisure hours, spent with his favourite dog and gun amidst his preserves, had done much to keep the hardy admiral's eye as bright and his hand as steady as of yore, when his revolver practice was the envy of his mess-mates on the old gunnery-ship Excellent.

Ejecting the empty cartridge case, the admiral loaded all six chambers. Then, ready to resume the encounter, he again levelled the weapon, at the same time protesting audibly that the first shot was a mere fluke.

Giving scant heed to his friend's remarks, Crosthwaite Senior kept the car full in the direction of his particular quarry. Over the low bank bordering the road the heavy vehicle mounted, lurching dangerously as it did so. Only by sheer chance did it escape being capsized, as the offside wheels rose three feet clear of the soft, grass-grown soil.

"Dash it all, Crosthwaite!" protested the admiral. "Fairly spoiled my shot that time. Easy ahead, man, or you'll have us all overboard."

Loud yells from another of the Huns showed that the admiral's second shot, if not so deadly as the first, had "scored an outer". Leaving his companions to continue the treacherous attack, the wounded man ran as fast as he could, still bellowing with pain, and holding his coat tails with both hands.

Only two Huns remained. Wildly firing, they stood their ground until the car was within a few feet of them.

In his keenness Major-General Crosthwaite had not taken sufficient notice of the nature of the ground. Mounting a steep hillock, the car swerved and toppled completely over, pinning the admiral beneath the chassis and throwing the

other occupants headlong upon the turf.

In a flash the two Germans seized their opportunity. One, levelling his automatic pistol, fired point-blank at the prostrate general, the bullet passing completely through his uplifted arm and flattening itself against his silver cigar-case. Before the miscreant could load again—it was the last cartridge in the magazine—George flung himself upon him.

The remaining Hun, finding that his automatic weapon was likewise empty, and mindful of Leslie's brandished air-pistol, was chary of closing with the lad. Incautiously, young Sefton levelled the pistol and fired, the pellet merely penetrating the German's coat and waistcoat, and inflicting a slight scratch on his chest.

In a trice, the Hun guessed the comparatively feeble nature of the British lad's weapon. He knew that seconds would have to elapse before the air-pistol could be reloaded. Mentally comparing his size with that of the fifteen-year-old youth, he came to the conclusion that it was safe to close.

Leslie, far from declining the unspoken challenge, threw himself at his opponent, and two pairs of desperately earnest antagonists were locked in deadly combat. It was long odds, for, with Crosthwaite Senior helpless with a bullet through his arm, and the admiral imprisoned beneath the overturned car, no help seemed likely to be forthcoming from that direction. To make matters worse, Hans, the leader of the gang, having quieted down after the first acute pain, had seen how things stood, and, recovering his pistol, had cautiously approached, seeking a favourable opportunity to turn the already-wavering scale.

CHAPTER XVII—Safe in Port

Throughout the long-drawn night the survivors of the *Calder's* crew battled manfully against increasing difficulties in their efforts to save the destroyer from foundering. The faulty bulkhead, shored and barricaded with tightly-packed hammocks and other canvas gear, required constant watching. The pumps were working continuously, relays of men undertaking the arduous task in the high-spirited manner that pervades the navy, especially when confronted with danger and peril.

Not once during the hours of darkness did Sefton quit the remnants of the bridge. Without the aid of navigating instruments, save the inadequate compass, the destroyer's course could not be maintained with the customary precision. Variation and deviation—factors carefully guarded against in ordinary circumstances—were affecting the boat's liquid compass, but to what extent Sefton knew not. With a vague idea that he would "fetch" the Firth of Forth, the sub held on, the grinding revolutions of the remaining propeller dinning into his ears the knowledge that the old *Calder* was momentarily, but slowly, approaching the shores of Britain.

A cup of unfragrant tea, sweetened with condensed milk, and a biscuit which was strongly scented with a peculiarly acrid smell, were gratefully accepted by the wellnigh exhausted sub. The man who brought the refreshments to the bridge had not thought it necessary to explain that he had scraped the sodden tea from the floor of the shell-wrecked officers' pantry, or that he had been compelled to wash the salt water from the biscuits and toast them in the stokehold.

Once more the waves had subsided, and an almost flat calm prevailed. Overhead a few stars shone dimly through the haze. Not a light was visible; all around, sea and sky blended in a dark, ill-defined murk.

At four bells the helmsman was relieved. He was the seventh consecutive man whom Sefton had seen taking his trick at the wheel, but still the sub stuck gamely at his post. He would have given almost anything to throw himself at full length upon the dewy deck and sleep like a log, even for a couple of hours, but such a privilege was denied him. His wounds, too, although slight, were beginning to feel painfully stiff. The sea-water, penetrating his ragged uniform, irritated the abrasions almost beyond endurance. He yearned in vain for a hot bath and a change of clothing.

"How goes it now?" enquired a tired voice, hardly recognizable as that of Dr. Stirling. "Where are we?"

"Somewhere in the North Sea, old bird," replied Sefton, with a forced laugh. "Do you happen to have a prescription for an eyelid prop, Pills? My optics seem on the point of becoming bunged up."

"Tell it not in Gath," quoted the surgeon. "I've just made a discovery—worth at the present moment more than untold gold. Egyptian, man, real Egyptian, and the only ones to be found on board."

He proffered his silver case. Sefton seized one of the cigarettes with avidity. For hours he had longed in vain for a smoke. His own supply had vanished. Several hundred, having fallen through a jagged rent in the ward-room floor, were lying, a sodden pulp, in the water that surged in the ship's bilges.

"Thanks awfully!" he exclaimed gratefully.

"Bit of luck," continued Stirling. "Found the case in the wreckage of the beer barrel. I don't think the stuff's affected them. Case seems pretty tight. Thought I'd come on deck and have half a dozen whiffs with you."

Crouching under the lee of the canvas screen that had been rigged up to replace the demolished storm-dodgers, Sefton carefully struck a match. Almost before the cigarette was alight, a jarring shock made the *Calder* tremble from her shattered bows to her jagged taffrail. Immediately afterwards the remaining engine began to race with frightful rapidity.

Dropping the cigarette like a hot cinder, Sefton sprang to his feet, fully convinced that the long-expected catastrophe had occurred, and that the bulkhead had given way. Stirling, his first thoughts for his patients, scurried down the bridge-ladder and ran aft to where the double line of wounded men lay, each covered by a hammock to protect him from the night dews and drifting spray.

A minute passed. There was no impetuous inrush of water. The bulkhead was still holding. The engine-room ratings had shut off steam, and the horrible, nerve-racking clank of the racing machinery ceased.

"Propeller fouled some wreckage, sir," reported a petty officer. "Blades stripped clean off the boss I'll allow."

The man was right in his surmise. The last of the four propellers had struck some partly submerged object, with the result that the destroyer was no longer capable of moving through the water under her own power. All she could do was to drift helplessly with wind and tide.

With a deafening hiss, a heavy cloud of steam released from the now useless boilers escaped skywards. The overworked engine-room and stokehold staffs were at last at liberty to "stand easy".

Suddenly a beam of dazzling white light flashed through the darkness. Impinging upon the cloud of steam, its reflected glare illumined the scene on deck as clearly as if it had been broad daylight. Then, with a quick, decisive movement, the giant ray was depressed, until it played fairly upon the battered hull, throwing every object into strong relief, and literally blinding the men with its dazzling glare.

"What ship is that?" shouted a deep voice through a megaphone, the sound travelling distinctly across the intervening water.

A couple of cables' lengths from the stationary *Calder* was a large destroyer, with her search-light directed upon the object of her enquiry.

Sefton's reply was inaudible. The direction of the wind and the lack of a megaphone prevented his words from being understood. Again the challenge was repeated.

Standing erect in the full glare of the searchlight, and apart from his companions, a petty officer semaphored the desired information.

"Stand by to receive a hawser," commanded the lieutenant-commander of the unknown destroyer. "We'll take you in tow."

The vessel was T.B.D. *Basher*, one of the inner patrol of destroyers operating between St. Abb's Head and Spurn Point. Pelting along at 20 knots in the darkness, her first intimation of the proximity of the crippled *Calder* was the hiss of steam from her boilers. Prepared to open fire at an instant's notice, she trained her quick-firers abeam and switched on her search-lights, only to discover that she had fortunately fallen in with a "lame duck" from the Jutland battle—a craft whose absence was beginning to give rise to considerable apprehension on the part of the British Admiralty.

"You'll tow better stern-foremost, I fancy," shouted the *Basher's* skipper, as he noted the extent to which the *Calder* was down by the head.

"Yes, sir," agreed Sefton. "There will be less pressure upon the bulkhead for'ard. It has been giving us some anxiety."

"Is Crosthwaite on board?" enquired the lieutenant-commander of the rescuing craft.

"Badly wounded," was the sub's reply. "We had it fairly hot for a time. Can you give us any details of the result of the action, sir?"

"Yes; we gave them a terrific licking," said the skipper of the *Basher*. "The rotten part was that the Huns got away during the night. Still, they won't come out again in a hurry. They've been very busy ever since sending out fantastic claims to a decisive victory over the British fleet. On paper they certainly beat us hollow, but the funny part about it is that Jellicoe made a demonstration in force off the Bight of Heligoland yesterday, and the beggars funk'd the invitation. By the by, the sea's fairly calm. We'll run alongside and tranship your wounded. It will save a lot of bother if you have to abandon ship."

Adroitly manoeuvred in the darkness, for the search-lights were now screened lest a prowling U boat might take advantage of the motionless British destroyers, the *Basher* was made fast to her disabled consort. Carefully the wounded men were transferred, Dr. Stirling, at the sub's request, going with them, since the *Basher* was one of a class of destroyers without the services of a medical man.

There was one exception. Crosthwaite resolutely declined to leave his ship.

"She's brought us through thus far," he declared, "and I'll stick to her until we fetch home. Where are we now?"

Sefton was unable to reply until he had enquired of the *Basher's* navigating officer the position of the ship. The answer was somewhat astonishing; the *Calder*, when picked up, was forty-five miles from the mouth of the Tyne.

"A precious fine piece of navigation," remarked the sub ruefully. "I was trying to make the Firth of Forth, and instead I find myself barging into the

Northumberland coast.”

”Might have done a jolly sight worse, old man,” said Crosthwaite cheerfully. ”You’re a brick, Sefton!”

The sub flushed like a schoolgirl, and, bolting from the shell-wrecked ward-room, made for the bridge.

”All clear aft?” shouted the *Basher’s* lieutenant-commander.

”Aye, aye, sir,” was the reply from a petty officer stationed at the after capstan, round which the towing-hawser had been made fast.

”Cast off fore and after springs,” continued the officer, telegraphing for ”Half ahead, port engine”.

Very cautiously the towing-craft forged ahead, turning sixteen points in almost her own length. In the darkness the manoeuvre was fraught with anxiety, for, had the slack of the hawser fouled the *Basher’s* propellers, the destroyer would have been as helpless as the craft she was endeavouring to save.

At length the wire hawser began to groan as, under the increased strain, it rasped through the fair-lead. Ever so slowly, yet surely, the *Calder* gathered stern way in the wake of her consort, and presently she was nearing the Tyne at a rate of 7-½ knots.

With her helm lashed amidships, and without means of steering, the partly waterlogged craft yawed horribly, sheering alternately four points to port and starboard of the towing-vessel. Yet it was the only practical means of getting the destroyer into port. Had she been towed bows first, the already-weakened forward bulkhead would assuredly have collapsed under the additional pressure of water.

”We may fetch Tynemouth,” thought Sefton, as he watched the *Calder’s* erratic movements, ”but she’ll never be able to ascend the river. She’ll be barging into the banks and playing the deuce with everything.”

He could think of nothing to check the damaged destroyer’s behaviour. A scope of the cable trailing from the hawse-pipe might have served, had not anchors, struck by several projectiles, been immovably jammed in the hawse-pipes.

The same problem also confronted the skipper of the *Basher*, but he quickly settled it by wirelessing for a tug.

Dawn was just breaking when the *Calder* arrived off Tynemouth. A powerful paddle-tug was lashed alongside, and the voyage up the river began.

In the busy shipyards on either side of the Tyne, the night shifts were still hard at work turning out new vessels for the British navy at the rate of one and a half a week, in addition to effecting urgent repairs to ships damaged in action or by floating mines.

”Lads,” shouted a burly iron-caulker in stentorian tones, ”here be a German

prize bein' towed up t' river."

"Garn!" retorted his mate. "German prize, my aunt! You don't see no German flag a-flyin; under that British ensign. She's one of our plucky 'uns. Give her three times three, mates!"

The cheering, caught up with redoubled energy, greeted the battered *Calder* throughout the whole length of her progress up the river. Her wounded lieutenant-commander, lying helpless in his bunk, heard the inspiring sound. He knew what it meant. A load had been lifted off his mind. His command was safe in port.

CHAPTER XVIII—Too Late!

"Eight days' leave—both watches."

The welcome order was given to the survivors of the *Calder's* crew with a promptitude that betokened official regard and appreciation of the plucky destroyer's ship's company.

The *Calder*, safe in dock, was handed over to the care of the shipyard authorities. At high pressure, the task of getting her ready for sea once more would occupy the best part of two months, so badly had she been knocked about.

When in dry dock, a discovery was made that showed how narrow her escape had been from instant destruction. A large-sized German torpedo was found in her flooded forepeak, its head flattened against the inside of the bow-plates. Fired at a distance of a few yards, it had passed completely through the thin metal hull, and, failing to penetrate the other side, had remained trapped in the waterlogged compartment. Examination showed that the safety-fan in the head of the weapon had not had sufficient time to revolve and liberate the firing-pin. A difference of a few yards would have been enough to transform the innocuous missile into a deadly weapon, capable of shattering the *Calder* like an egg-shell.

Having written up his report to the Commander-in-Chief, seen Crosthwaite safely into a shore hospital, and dispatched a telegram to his home announcing his safe return, Sefton bathed and turned in.

Six hours later he was up, feeling considerably refreshed. All that had to

be done in an official sense had been carried out, and he was free to proceed on well-earned leave.

A steam pinnacle landed him and his scanty belongings on the Gateshead side of the river. Clad in mufti, since his uniform was little more than a collection of scorched rags, the sub made his way towards the station.

Perhaps, now that the arduous period of responsibility had passed, Sefton was feeling the reaction. At any rate his usual alertness had temporarily deserted him, for, on crossing a crowded thoroughfare, he narrowly escaped being knocked down by a passing motor-car.

"Why don't you look—?" began the owner of the car; then: "Bless my soul, Sefton! Whoever expected to see you here! Thought you had been done in, 'pon my soul I did. Where's the *Calder*? And how's old Crosthwaite?"

The speaker was Sub-lieutenant Farnworth, Sefton's old shipmate on board the *Hammerer*, where both had served as midshipmen during the earlier stages of the war.

"They slung me out of the submarine service," said Farnworth, after Sefton had briefly replied to his friend's enquiries. "Why? Oh, merely a bit of bad luck! Crooked my leg, don't you know?"

Farnworth was too modest to give details. He had vivid recollections of a dirty day in the North Sea, with submarine E- lying awash, and a hostile mine foul of her bows. The plucky young officer, assisted by a couple of equally resolute seamen, succeeded in freeing the submarine from the unwelcome attentions of the metal globe, but in so doing the mooring-chain had surged, fracturing Farnworth's thigh as the heavy mine dropped clear.

It took three months at Haslar Hospital, followed by six weeks at Osborne, to set matters right, but the sub's leg was permanently shortened. To his great relief, Farnworth was not invalided out of the Service, although unfit for sea. He was given a good billet in the Intelligence Department, his district covering the Tyne ports, Hull, and Liverpool.

With a powerful car at his disposal, Farnworth was in clover. His sole regret was his inability to tread the planks of a British war-ship. The call of the sea was strong. He would willingly have relinquished his "cushy job" to be in command of the slowest little torpedo-boat flying the White Ensign.

"I'm keeping you," said Sefton at length.

"Not at all," said Farnworth, with a grin. "It's Government petrol I'm using, you know, and I'm not due at Liverpool until eight to-night. Do it on my head, so to speak. And you?"

"Just off to the station, old man," replied Sefton. "Want to get home to-night."

"Southampton? I doubt it, old bird. You've missed the express to King's

Cross. No, I'm not to blame. It had gone long before you tried to commit harakiri under my car. Look here; hop in and I'll drop you at Manchester in plenty of time to pick up the through train."

Sefton accepted the invitation with alacrity. Being whisked through the air in a comfortable car was infinitely to be preferred to being cooped up in a railway-carriage after a tedious wait in a draughty station.

The ninety odd miles to Halifax was covered in two hours and a half, for, on the open road, Farnworth let the car all out, only slowing down while passing through the big industrial towns that lay on his route.

"Now for a ripping stretch of country," exclaimed Farnworth enthusiastically. "Something to blow the cobwebs away, don't you know. I always take this road in preference to the Hebden Bridge way. It's steeper, but the car can do it hands down."

Up and up, with very little reduction of speed, the high-powered car climbed. Sefton, drowsy for lack of sufficient sleep and from the effects of the strong air, failed to share his companion's enthusiasm. Lulled by the rhythmic purr of the motor-car, he was fast becoming oblivious to his surroundings when Farnworth gave him a violent shake with his disengaged hand.

"What's wrong?" enquired Sefton.

"Scrap," replied his chum laconically. "Something more than a dog-fight. What?" he muttered under his breath as he pulled up.

Twenty yards from the road was an overturned car. Close to it lay a khaki-clad figure, while engaged in a desperate struggle were two pairs of interlocked combatants. Approaching them with stealthy steps was a short, thickset, bullet-headed man holding an automatic pistol.

This much Sefton took in with a glance as he leapt from the car. Fatigue and sleepiness had vanished in an instant. All he realized was that a party of motorists was being molested by a gang of armed roughs, and that was enough.

With Farnworth limping close at his heels, Sefton ran to the rescue. An encouraging shout from his companion caused the armed ruffian to turn.

Brandishing his pistol, he shouted a warning to the two new-comers to "clear out and mind their own business".

Undeterred by the sight of the weapon, the two subs bounded forward. A couple of bullets whizzed past Sefton's head, one of the pieces of nickel chopping a slice out of the lobe of Farnworth's left ear.

Before Hans could fire again, the deep report of a heavy revolver rang out, followed by a bluish puff of smoke from underneath the overturned car.

Clapping his hands to his side, the German spun round three times and collapsed to the ground.

As he passed, Sefton kicked the fellow's pistol, sending it flying a dozen

yards. If the Hun were playing 'possum, the sub meant to take no unnecessary risks.

In ten seconds the struggle was over. A powerful blow from Farnworth's clenched fist made George's assailant relax his grip on the lad's throat and fall like a log.

Leslie's antagonist, who was fast choking the plucky lad into a state of insensibility, broke away, and, with a yell of terror, fled for his life, hotly pursued by Jack Sefton. Realizing that he was being outstripped, the miscreant made straight for the lake and plunged in.

Vainly the sub waited for him to rise to the surface. Either the man's head had struck against some hard substance at the bottom or else he had become entangled in the weeds.

Greatly to Jack's surprise, he found that it was his young brother who had put up such a game struggle with his burly antagonist, and that Dick Crosthwaite's father and brother were of the party. Still greater was the sub's astonishment when he heard a well-known voice exclaim,

"Bear a hand, Jack. It's not at all comfortable here."

With assistance the admiral was extricated from the wreckage, little the worse for his adventure.

"Hang it all, my boy," exclaimed Admiral Sefton, "we were coming to look for you. We heard the *Calder* was overdue."

"Didn't you get my wire, sir?" asked Jack. "I telegraphed directly we got ashore."

"Considering I've been three days on the road," replied his father, "my postal address isn't of much use. Hulloo, Crosthwaite, what have you got?"

"Nothing much," declared the general. "A clean bullet-wound. Thought I'd been plugged through the chest. The shock knocked me out. By Jove! That was a narrow squeak."

He held his cigar case up for inspection. The bullet had penetrated the lid, and had flattened itself against the back, a bulge proving by how little the missile had missed making a complete perforation.

"The rascal has spoilt two of my choice cigars," announced Crosthwaite Senior wrathfully. "What was the object, I wonder? By George, Sefton, I see ourselves let in for a coroner's inquest."

While Jack and the admiral were attending to George and Leslie, neither of whom showed any signs of serious injury, Farnworth examined the bodies of the three men. Two were stone dead—silent testimonies to the accuracy of the admiral's aim. The third was unconscious, the blow from Farnworth's powerful fist having stunned him. Of the others, one had been drowned, while the remaining member of the gang—the one wounded by the admiral—was at that moment

limping painfully over the hills, and putting a safe distance between him and the scene of his rash and foiled exploit.

"By Jove, old man," exclaimed Farnworth, in the midst of his task of examining the contents of the dead man's pockets. "See what you make of this?"

He held up a sheet of soiled and creased paper, covered with closely-written flourishing writing, for Jack Sefton's inspection. "German, by the powers!" he added.

"Partly in cipher and partly in ordinary writing," declared Sefton. "These fellows are Huns, right enough, but what is their object?"

Farnworth did not reply. He was intently studying the minute penmanship. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"The swine!" he ejaculated furiously. "Look here—these three words—all as plain as a pike-staff."

"Well, what does it mean?" asked the admiral, his attention drawn to the discovery by Farnworth's exclamation.

"A diplomatic mission is leaving a certain port. By this time the vessel detailed to convoy the party may have sailed. The spies knew this: this paper proves that. Either they or their accomplices have designs to interfere with the plan."

"A bold surmise on your part," remarked Admiral Sefton.

"I hope I'm mistaken, sir," replied Farnworth. "We'll have to be on the move at once."

"What's your plan, old man?" enquired Jack as the party set to work to convey the wounded general to the waiting car.

"Make for the nearest telegraph office," was the prompt reply.

"And these?" enquired the admiral, indicating with a comprehensive sweep of his hand the overturned motor and the three motionless forms of their former assailants.

"Can wait, sir," replied Farnworth. "We'll send the police and a break-down gang to clear up the business. All ready, Jack?"

Away glided the car, descending the curved road at terrific speed. Approaching the bottom of the pass, another car was encountered going in the opposite direction. It contained the high personage who probably owed his life to the blunder the Germans had made in mistaking Crosthwaite's party for his. In complete ignorance, the occupants of the two cars passed. The Government official was never to learn how close he had been to a foul death by assassination on the desolate Blackstone Edge.

Over the rough setts of Rochdale, Farnworth's car tore, until the young naval officer slowed up to pass through a dense crowd gathered round the windows of a firm of newspaper proprietors, and extending more than half-way

across the street.

Instinctively the occupants of the car looked at the bold letters scrawled upon a large sheet of paper.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the admiral, hardly able to believe his eyes; "we are too late!"

CHAPTER XIX—The Smack "Fidelity"

"Be a sport, Jack!" exclaimed Leslie Sefton coaxingly.

"And take a sort of busman's holiday, eh?" rejoined the sub, regarding his young brother with a tolerant smile. "Well—I'll see."

"Thanks awfully," was Leslie's comment. Experience had taught him that Jack's "I'll see" invariably ended in acquiescence.

Two months had elapsed since the eventful encounter on Blackstone Edge. August was well advanced, bringing with it a spell of gloriously fine weather; and, since the young people must needs have holidays, even in war-time, and the Admiral felt in need of a rest after the strenuous shooting-match on the bleak Pennine Hills, the Sefton family had taken a furnished house overlooking Poole Harbour.

Sub-lieutenant Sefton had been temporarily appointed to the Portsmouth Naval Barracks, pending another term of service afloat. His fairly frequent periods of week-end leave, he invariably spent with his parents, since Poole was within easy railway distance of the senior naval port.

Young Leslie was in his element. Before he had been at Poole more than three hours he had already chummed up with the owners of several pleasure craft. But a few days of sailing in a landlocked harbour soon whetted his appetite for a trip beyond the bar, and for the present his wishes in that direction were thwarted. Owing to the war-time conditions, no pleasure-boat or yacht was permitted to leave the spacious inland cruising-ground.

Time after time, Leslie watched with yearning eyes the brown-sailed fishing-fleet steal past the patrol-boats guarding the entrance, and glide seaward to the fishing-ground off the Dolphin Bank. For the most part, the boats were

manned by grey-bearded stalwarts and young boys, worthy descendants of Harry Page, Thompson, and other Poole fishermen whose prowess against the French is still remembered by the inhabitants of the Dorset seaport. Already the British navy had claimed almost every able-bodied fisherman of fighting age, and nobly the men had responded to the call, leaving grandfathers and grandsons to work the boats in the open waters of the English Channel.

At last Leslie found an opportunity. Getting on the right side of old "Garge" Cottenham, owner and master of the five-ton smack *Fidelity*, he prevailed upon that worthy to allow him to make an all-night trip to the fishing-grounds.

Unfortunately the admiral did not see eye to eye with his energetic son. Even Leslie's declaration that he would be assisting in a work of national importance by helping to provide the nation's food left him unmoved. As a last resource the lad appealed to Jack, who had just arrived upon the scene for the week-end.

"Isn't the harbour good enough for him?" asked Admiral Sefton.

"You don't get the lift of the open sea, you know, Pater," replied the sub. "Leslie's got the old instinct, you see."

"S'pose so," admitted his parent. "A couple of centuries of sea life is bound to tell, eh? All the same, I don't like the idea of the boy knocking about in a smack. He'll get into a dozen scrapes, and end up by tumbling overboard and getting mixed up in the trawl. Now if I were there to look after him--"

The admiral paused. Had old Garge Cottenham extended the invitation to him, the bluff old sea-dog could not have resisted the call of the sea--even were it through the medium of a five-ton smack. Between the man who in the splendour of a gold-laced uniform had directed the movements of a fleet and the other who grasped the tiller of a grubby fishing-boat existed a common tie--that mysterious and overpowering freemasonry of the sea.

On second thoughts, Admiral Sefton remembered his comfortable bed and well-ordered repast, comparing them with the discomforts of a night afloat and relatively hard fare.

Here Jack stepped nobly into the breach.

"Perhaps the kid wouldn't object if I went with him," he suggested. "Not keen on it, you know, but--"

And so it came to pass that when Leslie coaxed his big brother the latter capitulated.

"But what if your fisherman pal declined to ship me with him?" he added.

"No fear," replied Leslie. "I'll make that all right; only don't tell him you're an officer."

"Oh, for why?" enquired the sub.

"I don't know exactly," was his brother's reply. "Somehow I fancy Old Garge

doesn't like naval officers."

Wherein Leslie was correct. Years ago Skipper Cottenham had fallen foul of the lieutenant-in-charge of a revenue cutter, and the memory of the meeting still rankled.

After lunch Leslie made his way to the quay, returning in an hour's time with the information that Old Garge didn't object (he was not over anxious to avail himself of a supposed amateur's offer of assistance), and that the *Fidelity* would cast off at seven o'clock that evening.

Clad in an old pair of serge trousers and a brown sweater, and carrying an oilskin coat that, despite the maker's guarantee, stuck tenaciously wherever it was folded, the sub accompanied his wildly-excited brother to the steps, where a boat was in readiness to convey them to the smack.

In the boat was a freckled, chubby-faced, flaxen-haired youngster of about thirteen, whom Leslie introduced to his brother as Tim, great-grandson of the owner and master of the registered fishing-boat *Fidelity*.

"Where's the *Fidelity* lying?" enquired the sub, after the youngster had sculled the heavy boat for nearly two hundred yards.

"Down Stakes," was the mysterious reply. "Us'll see her in a minute or so, when us gets round t'bend."

Working the long single oar vigorously, and aided by the strong ebb tide, Tim quickly urged the heavy boat along.

"There he be," he announced. "Third in the row from here."

Sefton looked in the direction indicated. The fishing-fleet was already making preparations for a start. Most of the boats had their mainsails set. Two or three had already slipped moorings, and were gliding down the main channel under the lee of the wooded Brownsea Island.

With the practised eye of a true seaman, the sub realized that, in spite of her sombre garb of grey paint, mottled with tar marks, the *Fidelity* was "all a boat".

With a sharp entry and fine run aft, noticeable despite the squat stern and heavy transom, the smack showed every promise of speed combined with stiffness. Built with a view of encountering the short steep seas of Poole Bar, she was typical of the weatherly boats that have justly earned a splendid reputation for seaworthiness.

"Evenin'!" was Old Garge's greeting. "Come aboard. Look alive, Tim, an' make fast the boat's painter. Then do 'ee cast off. There's Bill Moggridge an' Peter Wilson under way already. Us mustn't let 'em get across t' Bar ahead of the *Fidelity*."

Quickly, as the result of much practice, young Tim cast off the heavy mooring-chain from the bitts, and trimmed the head-sails. Heeling slightly to the light south-westerly breeze the smack gathered way, leaving hardly a ripple

in her wake as she glided almost noiselessly through the calm water.

The sub revelled in the movement. Vividly it recalled long-past days in the *Britannia's* cutters, racing in the landlocked estuary of the Dart. Since then opportunities for fore-and-aft sailing had been few and far between. Contrasted with the terrific vibration of a swiftly moving destroyer, the gentle movement was peaceful and soothing.

A short spell of close-hauled work, as the smack tacked towards the entrance, was followed by a run, full and by, down the buoyed channel to the bar buoy. From the heights above Studland a stiff breeze swept down, causing the water to foam at the *Fidelity's* sharp stem.

"That be good!" ejaculated Old Garge. "Us be overtakin' them," and he nodded in the direction of the two boats that were still leading by less than a cable's length. "Wind'll drop afore long, I's afraid."

"It will go down with the sun," said Sefton. "But we'll get the first of the east-going tide outside."

The skipper of the *Fidelity* stared at his guest. Already he had come to the conclusion that the tall bronzed young fellow was no mere landlubber. The sub's deliberate pronunciation of the word "tackle" during a previous conversation had told him that.

"Patrol," announced the skipper laconically, indicating a steam trawler as she rounded the detached chalk pinnacle known as "Old Harry". "She's there to keep Garmin submarines away, you know. Ever seen a Garmin submarine, mister?"

"Have you?" enquired Sefton, countering the old fellow's curiosity.

"Only one, and 'er was no good to nobody," replied Old Garge. "They sunk 'er away down Christchurch Bay. Seed the navy chaps a-getting her up, only the patrol boat ordered me away. That was away back last summer. Since then they submarines 'ave given this part a wide berth."

"I'd like to see one getting properly strafed," declared Leslie. "What would you do, Jack, if one showed its nose up just now?"

"Chuck it," ejaculated the sub good-humouredly. "We're supposed to be on the way to the fishing-ground, not chasing U boats. Hallo! There's The Needles Light."

By this time the sun had set in a haze of vivid crimson. Against the dark grey of the eastern sky, the coastwise lights of The Needles and St. Catherine's were beginning to assert their presence in the rapidly waning twilight. Contrary to expectation the breeze still held, although under the shadow of Hengistbury Head, bearing three miles to the nor'ard, a number of fishing-craft lay completely becalmed.

"Evenin', Peter!" shouted Old Garge cordially, as the *Fidelity* drew ahead of

the hitherto leading boat. Peter waved his arm in reply. His response was not so cordial, seeing that his boat had been outstripped, greatly to the glee of Leslie and young Tim.

For the next quarter of an hour all hands were busily engaged in paying out the nets. Then, under triced-up mainsail, the smack floundered slowly through the water, towing the length of fishing-gear astern.

The first haul produced very indifferent results. Leslie began to think that it was poor sport, since the catch consisted of less than a dozen medium-sized whiting and a couple of small bass. Nor did the second cast fare much better.

”’Tis this east’ly wind we’ve a-been havin’ that’s done the mischief,” explained the skipper of the *Fidelity*. ”I thought when it veered we’d be in luck. Howsomever, we’ll have another shot.”

Again the nets were paid out, and the smack, hampered with her tow, stood off in the direction of the distant St. Catherine’s Light.

”Mighty slow, isn’t it?” confided Leslie to his brother. ”Wish Old Garge would up nets and make for home. Sailing’s all right, but this almost bores me stiff.”

”Patience!” rejoined Sefton. ”This is your choice. How would you care to go fishing for months, blow high, blow low? No matter whether it be summer or winter, you’ve got to go on fishing—fishing for a brute that will bite you pretty hard at the first favourable opportunity.”

”You mean submarines?” asked the lad. ”I should like to see one. It must be fine sport.”

”Not on board this hooker, though,” added the sub. ”Give me something that can hit back.”

Force of habit made the young officer glance to windward. He would not have been altogether surprised had a pair of twin periscopes appeared above the surface of the moonlit water. After all, he reflected, there wasn’t much chance of that. The fishing-ground was well out of the recognized steamer tracks. A U boat, especially in the English Channel, where she ran an almost momentary risk of destruction, would not waste time over the shallow Dolphin Bank to look for insignificant fishing-smacks. Still, Hun submarines did erratic things sometimes.

Then the sub laughed at his fancies. The possibility was so remote that he ridiculed the suggestion.

Meanwhile Old Garge had disappeared under the half-deck. A wreath of smoke from the dilapidated iron chimney, and the banging of several iron utensils, announced the fact that he was preparing some sort of repast. Tim, mechanically sawing the tiller to and fro, kept the smack on her course.

The *Fidelity* was now well to the east’ard of the rest of the fleet. A couple of miles separated her from the nearest of the brown-sailed boats, whose dark

canvas showed up distinctly in the slanting rays of the moon.

"We're giving them the slip, aren't we?" enquired Leslie, indicating the still busily engaged smacks.

Tim glanced over his shoulder.

"Granfer," he called out; "we'm a long way down t' east'ard. Shall us up nets?"

"No; you just carry on," replied Old Garge, his voice muffled in the confined space. "I'll be with you in a minute. I'm fair busy just now."

Another half-hour passed, but the skipper still remained out of sight. The wind had now dropped, and the smack, with her main-sheet slacked right off, floundered heavily, dipping her boom-end at every roll. Already the day was breaking beyond the chalk cliffs of the Isle of Wight. Momentarily, the search-lights from The Needles Channel batteries were growing fainter in the grey dawn.

"Isn't it grand!" exclaimed Leslie, inspired by the sight of daybreak at sea.

The sub merely shrugged his shoulders. Untold spells of duty as officer of the watch had made him regard the spectacle with complete indifference.

But the next instant Jack Sefton's lassitude fell from him like a discarded mask, for, at less than a hundred yards on the *Fidelity's* port quarter, appeared the pole-like periscopes of a submarine.

CHAPTER XX—Captured

For a few seconds the optics of the submerged craft remained trained upon the isolated smack. Although the submarine was forging slowly ahead, the periscopes rose no higher out of the water. Evidently those in charge of the vessel were not anxious to rise to the surface until they had satisfied themselves that it was fairly safe to do so.

His attention attracted by his brother's fixed gaze, Leslie sprang to his feet and grasped the weather shrouds.

"What's that, Jack?" he asked.

"What you wanted to see—a submarine."

"One of ours?"

"Hope so," replied the sub laconically; but he had great misgivings on that

score. Had it been a British submarine making for Portsmouth, she would almost certainly be running on the surface, in order to make her number before approaching the heavily-defended Needles channel.

Wildly excited, Tim forgot that he was steering and, putting the helm down, allowed the smack to gybe "all standing". The thud of the heavy boom as it swung across and brought up with a violent jerk, had the effect of making Old Garge emerge from the cuddy in a state of nautical profanity.

"What be you up to, you young lubber?" he shouted.

"Submarine, granfer," replied his youthful relative.

"No excuse for gybing," continued the skipper. "Do you mind what you are up to. Where be she?"

He shaded his eyes, expecting to see one of the British "C" or "E" class running awash. Instead, he saw only the tips of the periscopes.

"Drat it!" he ejaculated. "'Tain't for no good. Anyways, we're too small for her to trouble about we."

Apparently his conjectures were correct, for, with a feather of white foam, and a sullen swirl well in the wake of the periscope, the submarine disappeared wholly from sight.

"Er's afeard of fouling our nets," declared Old Garge. "Now, if we gives the patrol-boat notice, an' that submarine is done for, there's fifty pun' at least for me. A matter of a couple o' months back my friend Peter—"

But what happened to Peter was a story that Jack Sefton was not permitted to hear, for with a quick, unhesitating motion the submarine reappeared at less than three cables' lengths ahead of the smack. Shaking herself clear of the water, she displayed the unmistakable outlines of a German *unterseeboot*, although no number was visible on her grey conning-tower.

With remarkable celerity an officer and half a dozen seamen appeared from below, while at the same time a quick-firer was raised from its "housing", for'ard of the conning-tower, and trained upon the luckless *Fidelity*.

Steadily the U boat approached within hailing distance, then, making a half-circle, slowed down on a parallel course to that of the smack.

"Fishing-boat ahoy!" shouted the German officer. "Cut adrift your nets and run alongside, or I'll have to sink you."

Old Garge gave a gasp of astonishment and looked enquiringly at Jack Sefton.

"Them nets cost a sight o' money," he exclaimed ruefully. "Now if I had a gun—"

"Hurry, there!" came the stern mandate from the U boat.

"You'll have to obey, I fancy," said the sub. "There's no escape. Perhaps they'll let you off, as the smack is only a very small one. If you give them any lip

they'll cut up rough."

Deliberately Old Garge cut the trailing line of nets, bent the outward part to a life-buoy and cast it overboard. As he had remarked, nets were expensive affairs, and he was not going to cut them adrift without a means of recovering the gear should the Huns let him off lightly.

"Back your head-sails, Tim!" ordered the skipper, at the same time putting the helm hard down and allowing the *Fidelity* to come up motionless into the wind, within a couple of yards of the bulging side of the U boat.

"Throw us a line!" was the peremptory greeting.

Agilely a fair-haired unter-leutnant boarded the smack, followed by three of his men. Giving a cursory glance at the fish-well, he said something in German to one of the seamen. In less than a minute the night's haul had been transferred to the captor.

"Low-down robbers!" muttered Old Garge under his breath, but the unter-leutnant caught the imprecation.

"Have a care," he said sternly, "or we sink your boat. What these men? You carry a large crew for a little ship, Captain."

"They are my men," declared Old Garge loyally.

"Perhaps," drawled the German, then, suddenly turning, he strode up to Sefton and his brother.

"Hold your hand out!" he ordered.

Leslie sniggered. In his opinion the uniformed Hun ought to have added the words "Naughty boy". The lad was enjoying the novel experience. His one regret was that George Crosthwaite was not present to share in the adventure.

Critically the unter-leutnant examined Jack's extended hand. In spite of the fact that it was discoloured with tar, and reeked of fish, the sub's hand showed that it belonged to a person not of the ordinary working class. The long, tapering fingers, manicured nails, and absence of horny protuberances on the palm "gave him away".

"What is your name?" demanded the German.

"Smith," replied Sefton promptly.

Again the irritating, dubious, and speculative "Per-haps". The sub realized that he was in a tight corner.

"What this wound-how caused?" enquired the unter-leutnant, indicating the white scar on the young officer's wrist-the legacy of the affair off Jutland. "Ach! Shell wound, hein? You are of military age. Stand aside."

In spite of the brown jersey and the soiled serge trousers, the keen-witted Hun had come to the correct conclusion, that the tall, bronzed man was not a genuine smack hand. Not satisfied with the self-styled Smith's replies, he decided to interrogate his companion.

"Your name?" he demanded of Leslie, with a fierceness that effectually quenched all further inclination on the part of the youth to snigger.

"Smith, too," replied Leslie. "He's my brother."

Again a display of palmistry. Leslie's hands, though grubby, were also unmistakably unused to rough work.

"How old?"

"Fifteen?"

"You lie."

"On my word of honour," declared Leslie.

"No matter," rejoined the unter-leutnant. "You old enough to fight. Suppose—"

A hail came from the U boat. Herr Kapitan had mounted the platform in the wake of the conning-tower and was calling attention to the mist that was bearing down in detached patches. Already the rest of the fishing-boats were lost to sight.

"You go on board there," continued the German unter-leutnant, indicating the submarine. Then, turning to Old Garge, he added:

"We let you go. Too much trouble to sink your little fischer-boat, and you have no skiff. Stop here one hour. If you move or make signal, then we return and blow you to pieces. You onderstan'?"

Without condescending to notice Tim, who was watching the course of events with wide-open eyes, the unter-leutnant signalled to the two Seftons to board the submarine. Then, followed by his men, the Hun regained his own craft.

A minute later, with Jack and Leslie prisoners of war, the U boat slid quietly beneath the surface.

Old Garge obeyed instructions until the tips of the periscopes vanished. Then he began to gather in the mainsheet.

"Trim your heads'ls, Tim," he ordered. "Us'll be off as hard as we can."

"How about the nets, grandfer?" asked Tim.

"Can bide," declared the old man as the *Fidelity*, gathering way, sped to give the alarm that another U boat had been active in the Channel.

Three-quarters of an hour later, the smack ran alongside one of the patrol-boats operating in Christchurch Bay, and reported the incident. Quickly the news was wirelessly, and a regular fleet of swift motor-boats was soon upon the scene, while overhead a couple of sea-planes hovered, in the hope of detecting the shadow of the U boat against the white sandy bottom.

But in vain. The unter-leutnant's threat that he purposed remaining in the vicinity for an hour was a mere piece of bluff. Without loss of time, the submarine was running at her maximum submerged speed in a south-westerly direction, intent upon putting as great a distance as possible between her and

the hornets whose activities had already taken a heavy toll from these modern pirates of the Black Cross Ensign.

U99 was one of the most recent type of *unterseebooten*. Possessing a great radius of action, she combined the roles of mine-layer and submerged torpedo-craft. She was one of nine detailed for operations in the English Channel, and, since the passage through the Straits of Dover had long been regarded as "unhealthy" by the German Admiralty, the flotilla had been ordered to proceed and return via the Faroe Isles and the west coast of Ireland.

Although the U99 had disposed of her cargo of mines without mishap—several of the German submarines having been "hoist with their own petards"—her efforts had not met with marked success. Beyond torpedoing a tramp, and sinking another by gun-fire, she had failed to carry out the work of frightfulness that had been expected of her. Having exhausted her stock of torpedoes, and making only one effective hit, she was on her way home.

After three hours of terrible suspense, when she found herself enmeshed in a net somewhere off the back of the Wight—a predicament from which she freed herself by means of the specially-devised wire-cutters on her bows—U99 was forced to come up for a breather early in the morning. Provisions were running short, and the sight of the solitary fishing-smack tempted her commander to investigate, with the result that Sub-lieutenant Sefton and his brother found themselves in the unenviable position of prisoners in the hands of the enemy. More, they were cooped up in a wretched U boat, faced with the possibility of being hunted by their fellow-countrymen and consigned to Davy Jones in the undesirable company of a crew of piratical Huns.

No wonder that Jack felt like kicking himself for having embarked upon the ill-starred voyage in the smack *Fidelity*.

"Yes, by Jove!" he muttered. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish—and the lid on with a vengeance."

CHAPTER XXI—U99

During the first hour of their captivity Jack Sefton and his brother were left alone, locked in a narrow, ill-lighted compartment in the after part of the sub-

marine. Overhead they could hear the ceaseless clank of the steering-gear, while the crowded space within the hull echoed to the noisy clatter of the propelling machinery.

Outwardly calm, the sub was raging furiously. Yielding to his sense of discretion, and realizing the importance of reassuring his young brother, he made a brave show at keeping up his spirits. On several occasions he had found himself in a tight corner, but now there was the humiliation of being captured in a most ignominious fashion, without being able to raise a hand in self-defence.

"Upon my word!" he remarked. "Really, Leslie, you will have something to remember. Experiences like this don't fall to the lot of many youngsters, you know."

"More exciting than that scrap on Blackstone," rejoined Leslie. "Even George would have to admit that. Makes a fellow feel quite bucked. But what do they intend doing with us, I wonder?"

"Events will prove that," replied the sub gravely. "Recollect that we have to conceal our identity as much as possible. These chaps must not be allowed to find out that I am a naval officer. Hark!"

A rasping sound, as the bolt securing the door was shot back, interrupted the conversation before Sefton had time to mature his immediate plans. The metal panel slid open and a petty officer appeared and spoke rapidly in German.

Drowned by the noise of the machinery, the words were inaudible, but by the man's gestures the prisoners clearly understood that they had to follow him. Along a narrow, steel-enclosed passage, then through a maze of intricate machinery, the sub and his brother were conducted, until they found themselves in a small cabin almost immediately underneath the grating that formed the floor of the raised conning-tower.

"You will at once take off your clothes," ordered the petty officer.

At this unexpected command the brothers looked at each other in surprise. The order could not be ignored, despite its apparent inconsequence. However unwilling to submit to the indignity, the prisoners obeyed promptly.

Under the stern glare of the German petty officer, Jack Sefton stripped off his brown jersey, shirt, and singlet.

"Rough luck!" he muttered. "Now these brutes will tumble to it; my name is marked on each of these garments."

Which was exactly what the Huns were intent upon finding out, for, giving a keen glance at the tell-tale lettering, the petty officer without waiting for the rest of the disrobing process made his way aft.

Sefton was not long left in doubt, for presently an officer in uniform corresponding to that of a lieutenant-commander entered the cabin.

"So!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as he thumbed the pages of a British Navy

List. "We fine bag have made. 'Sefton, John B. G.' That not the same as Smith, hein?"

The sub vouchsafed no remark. He felt horribly humiliated by his position and by the easy manner in which he had been bowled out. Also, he realized that now the chances of the prisoners being set on board a passing vessel had been entirely knocked on the head.

"We take you back to Zhermany," continued the kapitan of the submarine. "Day after to-morrow we land you at Wilhelmshaven at exactly nine o'clock."

The day after to-morrow—at nine o'clock. That would be Monday, and at that hour Sefton was due for "divisions" at Portsmouth Naval Barracks. The irony of his position ate into his soul.

"If not, you will be a corpse at the bottom of the sea," rejoined the German pointedly. "Now get your clothes on, and take good care to yourselves behave."

The kapitan quitted the cabin, leaving Sefton and his brother to resume their garments. This they did in silence, for Leslie had noticed his brother's dependency and chagrin.

Except for the periods when they were ordered forward for meals, the prisoners were left severely alone. Of the passing of time they had but a remote idea, since the sub had wisely left his watch ashore before proceeding on the ill-starred trip in the *Fidelity*. Certain it was that, for nearly twelve hours, U99 remained submerged, running on her electric power.

Then she rose to the surface. The petrol engines were coupled up, and at an increased speed the submarine proceeded, in what direction Sefton had no idea. Without means of consulting a compass, and confined below, he was in total ignorance of the vessel's course.

At length, dead-tired, for neither of the twain had slept the previous night, Jack and Leslie threw themselves down on the floor. There was no need for bedding. The heat of the confined space was too oppressive for that. For a long while the sub tossed uneasily on his hard couch, finally dropping off into a fitful slumber.

He was awakened by a seaman shaking him vigorously. For some moments he was unable to realize his surroundings. Sleeping in the hot and almost fetid air had benumbed his brain. He felt fuddled, his eyes seemed strained and dim, his throat burned painfully.

"On deck for exercise," ordered the man, speaking in German.

Sefton staggered to his feet, feeling stiff and cramped in his limbs. Leslie was still asleep, and when disturbed took even longer than his brother to be fully aroused.

"By Jove," thought the sub, "if the crew are all like this, early morn is the time to catch them napping! Well, here goes."

The two captives followed their jailer through an oval-shaped hatchway, gaining the deck by means of a steel ladder.

Lounging on the long, narrow platform were more than a dozen men, some stretched upon their backs, others lying with their heads pillowed upon their arms, but in every case one hand was outstretched to grasp the stanchions. The precaution was necessary, for the boat was floundering heavily in the long, sullen rollers.

Instinctively Sefton gave a glance in the direction of the sun. It was now broad daylight. The orb of day, high in the heavens, betokened the fact that it was approaching the hour of noon. By the direction of the shadows cast upon the deck, it was now apparent that the U boat's course was a little east of north. Away on the starboard hand was a seemingly interminable range of frowning cliffs, the nearest being but two or three miles distant. They were the rock-bound shores of Donegal.

Holding Leslie tightly by the arm, for the lad was not accustomed to the Atlantic swell, Sefton marched him up and down the deck between the after end of the conning-tower and the stern. Although the limited promenade was still further curtailed by the prone bodies of the crew, the latter paid no attention to the two prisoners.

On the platform surrounding the conning-tower was the unter-leutnant who had ordered their arrest. Scanning the horizon with his binoculars, he, too, seemed indifferent to the presence of the two Englishmen. With him, and stationed at a small wheel in the wake of a binnacle, was a quartermaster. The conning-tower hatchway was closed, owing possibly to the spray that literally swept the fore part of the submarine, and was flung high over the domed top of the "brain of the ship".

"Where are we now?" asked Leslie.

"Off the Irish coast," replied his brother.

"Wish one of our destroyers would put in an appearance," remarked Leslie wistfully.

The sub made no audible reply. His views upon the matter, based upon actual experience, told him pretty plainly that the captain of a British war-ship would not be likely to ascertain whether there were compatriots on board the craft he purposed to destroy. Also, there had been fully authenticated cases of the Huns locking the prisoners down below before they abandoned the sinking ship. Sefton did not mind running legitimate risks in action, but he had a strong objection to being "done in" by British guns.

His reveries were interrupted by a shrill whistle from the conning-tower. Instantly the somnolent men were roused into activity. In less than thirty seconds Sefton and his brother were tumbled below, the decks were cleared, and the

hatches closed.

By the inclination of the floor of the compartment that served as a cell Sefton realized that the U boat was diving. Almost at the same time there was a muffled detonation as a 12-pounder shell, fired from a destroyer at a distance of 7500 yards, exploded immediately above the spot where the submarine had disappeared.

"Good heavens, she holed!" ejaculated the sub, as the U boat quivered and dipped to an alarming angle. Momentarily he expected to hear, above the rattle of the machinery, the irresistible inrush of water and the shrieks of the doomed crew.

But in this he was mistaken. The nearness of the explosion of the shell had urged upon the submarine's kapitan the necessity for haste. Thrusting the diving-planes hard down, he caused the U boat to dive with unusual abruptness, never bringing the vessel upon an even keel until she had descended to a depth of twelve fathoms.

The rest of the day was passed in utter monotony as far as the prisoners were concerned. Although it was two hours before the U boat dared to expose the tips of her periscopes above the surface, the greater part of the day was spent in running submerged.

Towards evening U99 ascended, and, altering course, stood in pursuit of a small tramp. After a short chase, for the former had the advantage of 15 knots in speed, the submarine approached sufficiently near to be able to fire a shot close to her quarry.

Almost immediately the tramp slowed down and hoisted American colours. It did not take U99 long to range up alongside, and the unterleutnant and half a dozen seamen proceeded on board.

The prize was a Yankee, bound from Boston to Liverpool with a cargo of warlike stores. According to arrangements, she should have been met and escorted by a patrol vessel; but, although the latter was hourly expected, something had occurred to delay her.

"We'll have to sink you," declared the German officer.

The "old man"—a typical New Englander—shrugged his shoulders.

"Wal, I reckon yer can," he replied coolly.

"You don't seem concerned by the fact."

"Not I, stranger. This hyer ship an' cargo is jest insured up to the hilt in 'The Narragut Marine Assurance Company'. An' since the bulk of the shareholders are Huns—wal, I guess it's 'nuff said."

"Ach! Then I suppose I must let you go," exclaimed the baffled German officer. "If you fall in with any British war-vessels you might tell them that we have two Englishmen on board."

"Maybe you'd care to let us give 'em a passage?" hazarded the Boston skipper.

"If that had been our intention we should have done so without asking a favour," rejoined the unter-leutnant.

"Perhaps you would care to examine the ship's papers?" enquired the master. His keen eyes had detected a small, swiftly moving object on the horizon—the expected patrol boat. Cap'n Hiram Goslow, although a tough Republican, was quite in sympathy with the Allies. On previous voyages he had fallen foul of the Huns, and the treatment he had received still rankled. "Maybe you aren't quite satisfied about the 'Narragut Marine Assurance Company' stunt?"

For the next half-minute the fate of U99 with all on board trembled in the balance. The unterleutnant, only too pleased to have the opportunity of finding a flaw in Captain Goslow's statement, was about to accept the invitation, when a warning shout from the kapitan of the U boat brought the boarding-party scrambling on board with the utmost alacrity.

To the accompaniment of a chorus of jeers and laughter from the American crew, the submarine submerged and was lost to sight.

Although Jack Sefton and his brother were in ignorance of the precise nature of the meeting with the tramp and the imperturbable Captain Goslow, they knew by the unwonted noises and the shutting-down of the motors that something had transpired. The sudden closing of the hatchways, and the hasty dive taken, told the sub that once again the ceaseless vigilance of the British navy had been responsible for a bad quarter of an hour for the Germans.

The kapitan's boast to the effect that his prisoners would be landed at Wilhelmshaven at nine o'clock was an empty one. Wildly exciting moments, when the U boat found herself foul of a maze of steel nets, delayed her progress, until at length U99 arrived at a position forty-five miles N.N.W. of Heligoland.

Here a wireless message was received, the purport of which was not hailed with any degree of enthusiasm by the weary and almost exhausted crew. They were on the point of completing a fortnight's cruise of strenuous discomfort, physical exertion, and mental strain. Now, instead of proceeding to Wilhelmshaven for a period of recuperation, they were ordered to make for a certain rendezvous and await the submarine depot-ship *Kondor*.

Officers and crew knew what this meant. Heavy losses amongst the German *unterseebooten* flotillas had necessitated the U99 being pressed into an extension of present service. She was to replenish stores and torpedoes, and to be attached to the submarine flotilla operating with the High Seas Fleet. Evidently another big movement was contemplated in the North Sea.

Something had to be done to bolster up the rapidly crumbling tissue of lies by which the German Admiralty had gulled the Teutonic world. Never in the

history of naval warfare had a victorious fleet been compelled to remain inactive in its home ports beyond the period necessary for revictualling, replenishing of warlike stores, and making defects good. Nine weeks or more had elapsed since the glorious victory off Jutland, and still the Hun fleet clung tenaciously to its moorings. Even the fat-headed burghers who frequented the *bier-gartens* of Berlin began to realize that the crushing defeat of the British in the North Sea had not resulted in any increase of provisions or in the abolition of the hated food tickets.

There was a fly in the ointment. Steps had to be taken to counteract its baneful influence.

Almost in desperation, several German Dreadnoughts, accompanied by light cruisers and destroyers, emerged from the Heligoland Bight. Amongst them were the *Westfalen* and *Nassau*, sister ships, whose scars received in the Jutland fight had been hurriedly patched up in the Wilhelmshaven dockyards. Escorted by several Zeppelins, the Hun fleet steamed westward—not to give battle, but to make an attempt to copy Beatty's incomparable strategy.

Night was falling when U99 made fast alongside the *Kondor*. She was not alone. In the vicinity were a dozen or more *unterseebooten* of a similar type, awaiting wireless orders from the giant airship that was scouting fifty miles or so in the direction of the shores of Great Britain.

"Up on deck!" ordered the petty officer in whose particular charge the two Seftons had been placed.

The sub and his brother obeyed promptly. Had they lingered, their movements would have been accelerated by a kick from the Hun's heavy sea-boot.

The transformation from the artificially-lighted compartment to the rapidly gathering night made it impossible for Sefton to take in his surroundings until his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. At first he was under the impression that the submarine was berthed in harbour, until he discerned the towering outlines of the sea-going depot-ship and the absence of wharves and buildings.

Far away to the eastward the horizon was streaked with the rapidly-moving search-lights of a large fleet. The skyward-directed rays were a direct challenge to Beatty's squadrons. In unlike conditions to those of the Jutland battle, the Huns made no attempt to steal off under cover of darkness. They had a set purpose in exposing their position to the British fleet.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sefton. "The Huns are out again. What's the game this time?"

He glanced westward, half expecting to see the misty outlines of the Grand Fleet silhouetted against the last faint streak of crimson on the horizon, but the sky-line was unbroken.

"Hurry, pigs of Englishmen!" ordered the German petty officer, indicating

a "Jacob's ladder" that hung from the side of the *Kondor*. "We have had enough of you. Soon you will see—" He stopped abruptly, fearing that his words might be overheard by the grim kapitan of the submarine.

Agilely Leslie ascended the swaying rope-ladder, the sub following close behind in case the inexperienced lad should lose his hold. But young Sefton acquitted himself wonderfully. The Huns had no chance of a laugh at his expense.

Contrary to their expectations, the two prisoners were not conducted below. With an armed seaman standing behind them they were stationed on the raised poop, from whence they could see as much of the operations as the feeble light permitted.

Promptly hoses were coupled up, pumping volumes of petrol into U99's tanks. Fully charged accumulators were hoisted out and lowered down the submarine's after hatchway, while the forward hatch was opened to receive a dozen large torpedoes closely approaching the British 21-inch weapons.

At midnight a wireless operator handed the kapitan of the *Kondor* a message, the text of which caused the officer to issue a string of orders. Quickly the hawsers securing the submarine to the depot-ship were cast off, and U99, forging slowly ahead, picked up her station in line with the rest of the flotilla. Then, at a given signal, the submarines proceeded in a north-westerly direction, while the *Kondor* steamed toward the invisible German battleships.

At this stage of the proceedings, Sefton and his brother were ordered below, and placed in a cell on the orlop deck, twelve feet or more below the waterline. In utter darkness, for even the luxury of a single light was denied them, they sat, listening to the splash of the waves against the side, until sleep came as a welcome relief to the strain of the day.

Several times the sub awoke with a start. A nightmare gripped him. Normally strong nerved, the cramped and dark cell, and the almost certain fate that awaited him should the *Kondor* be sunk, filled him with vague terrors. In vain he tried to rally himself. The ordeal of the shell-swept bridge of the *Calder* seemed as naught compared with the gruesome atmosphere of the below-water-line prison.

The hours wore on, but the unexpected torpedo attack was not forthcoming. No thunder of guns broke the almost uncanny silence. No longer the waves dashed themselves against the side plating of the hull. Only a sullen, rolling motion and the faint tremor of the twin propeller shafting betokened the fact that the vessel was still under way.

CHAPTER XXII—The British Submarines at Work

A succession of long-drawn hoarse cheering aroused both Seftons from their light sleep. Leslie's outstretched hands came in contact with his brother's face, for, in the utter darkness, only the senses of touch and speech made the twain aware of each other's presence.

"What's that noise, Jack?"

"Only the crew getting excited about something," replied the sub inconsequently. At the same time, he felt pretty certain that something in the nature of a successful naval engagement had been responsible for the outburst of noisy enthusiasm on the part of the German crew.

He was not left long in doubt, for the door of the cell was thrown open and a seaman bearing a lantern ordered the prisoners to follow him.

Arriving on the upper deck, the sub discovered that the *Kondor* had undergone a transformation. Everything that denoted her part as a fleet auxiliary had disappeared. Aft she flew Swedish colours, and a distinctive band encircled her wall sides, with the words: "Gefle-Sverige" conspicuously displayed. Most of the crew had discarded their German uniform, and were rigged out in the cosmopolitan gear usually favoured by merchant seamen.

The crew had ceased cheering, but by their bearing it was quite evident that they were still labouring under the excitement of good news.

Pointing to a notice pinned to a board on the main hatchway, around which several men still lingered, the seaman, who had been told off to guard the prisoners, indicated that his charges should acquaint themselves with the information.

"What's it all about, Jack?" asked Leslie.

The message was the copy of a wireless report to the effect that German submarines had been successful in torpedoing two British cruisers of the "Chatham" class.

"Do you think it's true?" asked young Sefton anxiously, when the sub had translated the report.

"It may be a case of exaggeration," was the reply. "Of course, it is possible. At any rate, don't let these fellows see we are down-hearted. Keep a stiff upper lip, old sport."

Turning their backs upon the distasteful notice-board, the two prisoners strolled to the side, their guard following but making no attempt to prevent them.

The *Kondor* was not alone. About two miles on the starboard hand, and steaming rapidly, were the two Dreadnoughts that Sefton had noticed on the previous day. Behind were three light cruisers, while, still farther astern, six sea-going torpedo-boats were tearing along in that close formation beloved of German torpedo-flotilla officers.

As the flagship passed, she threw out a signal to the disguised *Kondor*, which was quickly acknowledged. At the relative rates of speed, it was certain that the battleships were overhauling the pseudo *Gefle* hand over fist.

Sub-lieutenant Sefton was witnessing part of the strategy of the German High Seas Fleet. It had ventured out with the express intention of luring Beatty's squadron in pursuit, knowing that the gallant Beatty would not decline the challenge. But, with admirable discretion, the British admiral made no effort to send the swift battle-cruisers in pursuit, merely contenting himself by ordering the light cruisers and destroyer flotillas to keep in touch with the retreating Huns.

There were risks of mines and torpedoes, but these were unavoidable. By keeping well out of the wake of the German ships, the danger of bumping over a hastily dropped mine was obviated, while a quick use of the helm would enable the swift cruisers to minimize the chances of successful submarine attack.

In the early hours, the British light-cruisers and destroyers encountered the *unterseebooten* purposely detailed by von Hipper to intercept the pursuing vessels. Three, at least, of the German submarines were sent to the bottom by gun-fire or by use of the ram; but, unfortunately, the *Falmouth* and *Nottingham* fell victims to torpedo attack.

Even as Sefton was watching the retreating warships, a column of water was thrown high in the air close to the port quarter of the German Dreadnought *Westfalen*. Before the muffled roar of the explosion was borne to his ears, the sub saw the huge battleship reel under the terrific blow.

Regardless of the consequences, he cheered lustily; but, thrown into a state of consternation by the magnitude of the disaster to one of their capital ships, the crew of the *Kondor* made no attempt to hurl the rash Englishman to the deck.

Spellbound, they watched the throes of the stricken Dreadnought, to whose assistance the six German destroyers were making at full speed. As for the rest of the German battleships and cruisers, they steamed off as hard as they could, lest a like fate should befall them.

The *Kondor* slowed down and stood by, making no effort to close to the aid

of the torpedoed ship, while two destroyers circled aimlessly in a vain search for the daring British submarine.

Then, very slowly, under her own steam, the *Westfalen*, with a heavy list, crawled toward the distant German shore, the four destroyers in her wake ready to rush alongside, and rescue the battleship's crew, should the vessel founder.

"Think they'll get her back to port?" Leslie asked excitedly.

"Fraid so," replied his brother. "She shows no signs of an increasing list. A lot depends upon the condition of her bulkheads. When the *Marlborough*--"

Before the sub could complete the sentence, another cloud of smoke and water shot up alongside the damaged battleship. Lurching heavily, this time to starboard, the *Westfalen* was hidden from sight by a dense volume of steam and smoke from her engine-rooms.

The attacking submarine had evidently meant to see the job done properly. Mindful of the risk of being sent to the bottom by the attendant German destroyers, the British craft had stealthily exposed her periscope for a brief instant, yet sufficient for her to send a deadly torpedo on its errand of destruction.

By this time the crew of the *Kondor* had come to the conclusion that their prisoners had seen much more than was desirable. Peremptorily Jack and Leslie were ordered below. The latter, unable to restrain his delight, pointed mockingly at the boastful writing on the notice-board, receiving a brutal kick on his shins for his temerity.

"I don't mind, Jack," remarked Leslie, when, left alone by their captors, the sub examined the angry abrasion on his brother's leg. "I'd let them give me another hack without a murmur if I could see another German battleship go the same way home."

After a long interval, a meal consisting of very dry tinned meat and hunks of black bread was provided for the famished prisoners, the unpalatable food being washed down with a pannikin of warm and insipid water.

The unappetizing repast over, the two prisoners were again allowed on deck. By this time there were no signs either of the stricken battleship or her attendant destroyers. The *Kondor*, alone on the wide North Sea, was steaming at about 12 knots on an easterly course. The rest of the crew had by now discarded their German uniforms. There was nothing to denote that the vessel had ever sailed under the Black Cross Ensign of the Imperial German Navy.

Suddenly, and right in the frothing wake of the *Kondor*, appeared two pole-like objects—the periscopes of a submarine. Then, without the hesitancy generally displayed by *unterseebooten* when about to attack a merchantman, a British submarine of the "E" class shook her conning-tower and deck clear of the water. Her hatches were flung open, and a number of duffel-clad seamen appeared. Quickly a light signalling-mast was set up, from which two flags fluttered in the

breeze.

There was no mistaking the meaning of that yellow square flag with the black ball, hoisted above a triangular blue pennant with a white spot. As plainly as if a shot had been fired across the *Kondor's* bows, the signal "ID" told her to "stop instantly or I will fire into you". Besides, it saved ammunition, and the lieutenant-commander of the submarine did not consider the prize worth powder and shot.

But the German skipper was not a man to own that the game was up without making an effort to save himself and his ship. A stumbling-block in his way was Jack Sefton and his brother.

At a sign four burly Huns threw themselves upon the prisoners. For a full minute the sub resisted stoutly, while Leslie put up a tough struggle against odds. Others of the crew came to their compatriots' aid, and, still struggling, the two captives were taken below and locked in the cell in the for'ard hold.

CHAPTER XXIII—And Last

"There's a bit of a dust-up on board, sir," reported Sub-lieutenant Devereux of Submarine E-, as the British craft steadily overhauled the *Kondor*, whose engines had already been stopped in response to the peremptory signal. "Fellows scrapping like billy-ho. I can just see their heads at intervals above the taffrail."

"They can scrap as much as they like while they have the chance," remarked Lieutenant-Commander Huxtable grimly. "You know your instructions, Mr. Devereux? Any rumpus, then signal us, and we'll give them our last torpedo."

A canvas collapsible boat had been brought up from below, and in this the boarding-officer and five seamen, all armed, took their places. Both the *Kondor* and the submarine were almost without way, lying at two cables'-lengths apart, E-'s two quick-firers covering the prize as the boat made for the German vessel.

Devereux was received with well-feigned affability by the soi-disant Swedish skipper, a politeness that the sub thought fit to reciprocate, at least for the present.

But when Devereux had examined the supposed *Gefle's* papers his manner underwent a change.

"Thanks for letting me see them, Herr Kapitan," he remarked, "but now I must ask you to order your crew below and consider yourself a prisoner of war. I warn you that at any attempt at resistance your ship will be sent to the bottom."

"But—," began the astonished Hun. "I—I do not understand. This Swedish merchant-ship. You mistake make."

"Perhaps," drawled the sub. "If I have, I'll take full responsibility. If you can satisfactorily explain to the British naval authorities why you were surrounded by Hun submarines yesterday, why you supplied them with munitions of war, why you were then His Imperial Majesty's ship *Kondor*, and why you are now the s.s. *Gefle*—."

"Donnerwetter!" ejaculated the German skipper furiously, then, before Devereux could interpose, he dashed out of the chart-house and shouted to one of the officers stationed aft.

Almost immediately a muffled explosion was heard, and the *Kondor*, giving a violent shudder, began to settle by the stern. Rather than surrender, their captain had given orders for a bomb to be exploded in the after hold.

"We have cheated you, Englishman!" he exclaimed in a shrill falsetto.

There was a wild rush for the boats. Hastily those in davits were lowered, with the result that one was capsized, while in the confusion a German seaman leapt headlong into the submarine's collapsible boat and overturned it.

To do him credit, the kapitan made no attempt to quit the bridge. Regarding the British officer with a leer of triumph, he waited while the panic-stricken men got clear of the doomed ship.

Meanwhile, having witnessed the swamping of her dinghy, E—had approached with the intention of taking off her boarding-party.

"What's that?" exclaimed Devereux, as, during a temporary lull in the clamour, the sound of a voice appealing for help was borne to his ears. The words were shouted in unmistakable English.

"Someone cooped up down below, sir," declared one of the submarine's crew.

Devereux looked enquiringly at the German skipper of the *Kondor*. The latter too had heard the shout. The self-assurance and air of contemptuous indifference faded instantly.

"You murderous swine!" ejaculated the sub. "What dirty game have you been up to? Come along down below with me."

The Hun, trembling violently, clung desperately to the bridge rail. The risk of going below and being taken down by the sinking ship was nothing compared with the fear of a just retribution.

It was not a suitable occasion for arguing the point. Devereux, a huge, loose-limbed fellow, was a giant beside the little, podgy Hun.

Wrenching the kapitan's hand from the rail, Devereux dropped him to the deck like a sack of flour, then, skipping down the bridge ladder, he picked him up and carried him, screaming and struggling, down the companion.

Guided by the sounds, the sub bore his captive forward, two of the submarine's crew following their youthful officer.

Already the stern of the *Kondor* was almost level with the water, while her decks inclined at a steep angle. Above the noise of the intruding water and the hiss of escaping steam, could be heard the now frantic appeal for help.

At the door of the cell Devereux was confronted by a grave problem. The place was locked, and the kapitan, asserting truthfully that he did not possess a key, was clamouring incoherently that the mistake in overlooking the fact that there were prisoners below was not his, but that of some of his subordinates.

"Stand aside there!" shouted Devereux to the inmates of the cell.

Whipping out his revolver he sent a bullet crashing through the lock, then, heedless of the cry of agony that came from the German skipper, he charged the splintered door with his shoulder.

In the half light he was dimly aware that two people were scrambling between the debris.

"Any more?" he asked.

"No," was the reply, as the two rescued men, assisted by the sailors, reeled along the sloping alley-way to the ladder.

Having seen the would-be victims of German *Kultur* safely on their way to the upper deck, Devereux realized that it was quite time to make good his own escape, for the water was beginning to surge forward along the sombre orlop deck. As he turned to make his way aft he became aware that the kapitan, moaning dismally, was staggering in the opposite direction, whence there was no outlet.

"Where are you off to, you blithering idiot?" shouted the young officer.

In a couple of strides he overtook the Hun, gripped him round the waist, and carried him on deck. Then, to his surprise, Devereux found that the kapitan's face was streaming with blood. A sliver of lead from the bullet that had demolished the lock of the cell had struck him in the right eye, completely destroying the optic nerve.

"Can't say I feel sorry for you," thought the sub-lieutenant, recollections of the cold-blooded cruelty of the Hun vividly in his mind. Nevertheless, still holding the injured skipper, he leapt overboard, whither the rest of the boarding-party had preceded him.

Strong as he was, Devereux had a hard tussle to swim to the submarine. Caught by vicious eddies, swirled to and fro like a straw on the surface of a mountain torrent, he was almost exhausted when hauled into safety.

Giving a glance over his shoulder as he was assisted to the deck of his own

craft, Devereux saw that the *Kondor* was making her last plunge. Throwing her bluff bows high in the air, she disappeared in a smother of foam and a pall of black smoke mingled with steam.

Then, to his surprise, upon going aft to report to his commanding officer, Devereux found Huxtable shaking, like a pump-handle, the hand of one of the men he had rescued.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the astonished Devereux. "Blest if we haven't—! Why, it's Sefton!"

"Guilty, m'lud!" replied that worthy.

"And Crosthwaite—he wasn't on that hooker?" asked Devereux anxiously.

"No, thank heaven," replied Sefton fervently. "He's still in hospital. This is my young brother. I've got to blame him for this business, the young rascal. It was a narrow squeak for the pair of us."

"It was," assented Huxtable gravely. "We spotted the *Kondor* yesterday and kept her under observation."

"Then you bagged that Hun battleship?" enquired Sefton.

"No, worse luck," replied the lieutenant-commander of E-. "She altered helm just as we were having a shot at her, and some other fellows did the trick. Mustn't complain, though. We are all members of the same co-operative society in the trade. The *Kondor's* crew? A few hours in the boats won't hurt them, and I'll wireless our destroyers. They are too villainous a crew to slip out of our hands. Come below, old man, and we'll rig the pair of you out in dry kit. With luck, you ought to be in Pompey again within twenty-four hours."

Pacing the diminutive quarter-deck of H.M.T.B.D. *Boanerges*, as she swung to the first of the flood-tide, were two naval officers. It was too dark to distinguish their features, even in the red glow of their cigarettes.

Three months had elapsed since the desperate struggle on Blackstone Edge. The *Boanerges*, a brand-new destroyer recently delivered from the Clyde, had just commissioned at Portsmouth for service with the Grand Fleet.

"My dear Boxspanner," remarked the taller of the twain, "I've come to the conclusion that life ashore isn't worth the candle. In common parlance, I'm fed up. The last straw is the abominable petrol tax. Just fancy, the blighters allow me two gallons a month—"

"You weren't on leave for more than three weeks, Pills," interrupted the engineer-lieutenant.

"Just so; that's the rub. I could have done with a three months' allowance, and used the lot in a week. By the way, talking of that new carburetter—"

"Boat ahoy!" came a hoarse hail from the fo'c'sle as the lynx-eyed look-out detected a dark object approaching under oars towards the destroyer.

"Aye, aye!" was the orthodox reply, given in clear, decisive tones.

The boat was brought smartly alongside the accommodation-ladder, and a young officer came briskly over the side. Jack Sefton, "sub" no longer but a full-fledged "luff", as the two gold rings, surmounted by a curl, on each of his sleeves denoted.

"Well?" enquired Boxspanner eagerly. "Have you seen Crosthwaite?"

"Saw him this afternoon," was the reply. "Passed the medical board with flying colours. He's reported fit for duty on the 8th."

"Good business!" ejaculated Stirling fervently.

"And," continued Sefton, "I'm in the know. Our owner's due for promotion. He'll be given a light cruiser; and unless I'm very much mistaken we'll have Crosthwaite as our skipper before long."

"Quartermaster!" said Sefton, as he turned to descend the companion-ladder.

"Sir," replied that worthy, already known to our readers as Thomas Brown, A.B., but now a promising petty officer.

"See that I am turned out at 5.45."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The three officers disappeared below. The quartermaster smiled grimly as the faint words of the chorus of "They don't run corridor cars on our branch line" caught his ear, followed by an emphatic "Chuck it, old bird."

"Proper jonnick they are, every mother's son of 'em," muttered P.O. Brown, as he walked for'ard. "Chaps as us fellows would go through 'ell with, if we ain't done so already," his thought reverting to that memorable action in the North Sea when the Huns fled before Jellicoe's armed might.

And thus we say "Adieu," or perhaps "Au revoir," to three gallant gentlemen who had so worthily played their parts in upholding the honour of the White Ensign with Beatty off Jutland.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WITH BEATTY OFF JUT-
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