

THE ZEEBRUGGE AFFAIR

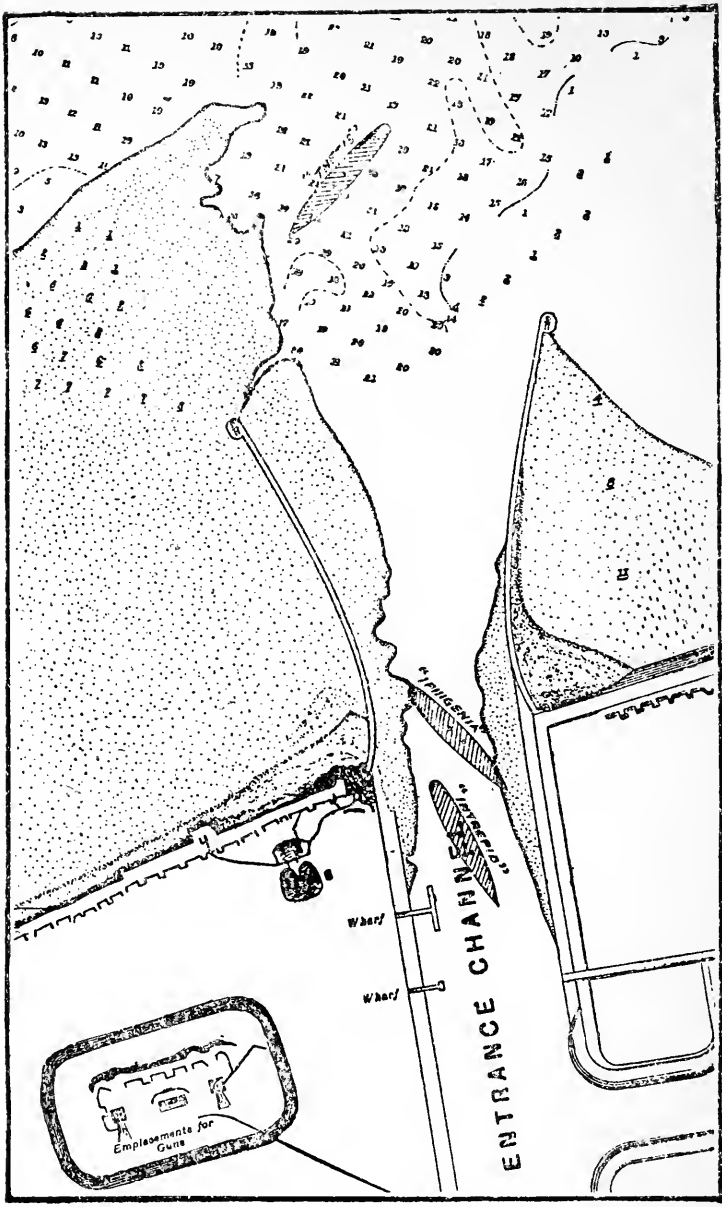


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THE ZEEBRUGGE AFFAIR



ENTRANCE CHANNEL AT ZEEBRUGGE
Showing Position of Sunken Block-ships

THE ZEEBRUGGE AFFAIR

BY

KEBLE HOWARD

(J. KEBLE BELL, 2ND LIEUT. R.A.F.)

WITH THE

BRITISH OFFICIAL NARRATIVES OF THE
OPERATIONS AT ZEEBRUGGE AND OSTEND

Exclusive and Official Photographs

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CHAPTER I

What Zeebrugge and Ostend Mean

LET me, first of all, try to tell you the story of Zeebrugge as I extracted it, not without difficulty, from several of the leading spirits of that enterprise. This is no technical story. Elsewhere in this little volume you will find the official narrative issued by the Admiralty to the Press, and that contains, as all good official documents do, names, ranks, dates, times, and movements.

I lay claim to no such precision. It is my proud yet humble task to bring you face to face, if I can, with the men who went out to greet what they regarded as *certain death*—bear that in mind—in order to stop, in some measure, the German submarine menace, and to prove yet once again to all the world that

the British Navy is the same in spirit as it was in the days of Nelson and far down the ages.

These men went out on the eve of St. George's Day, 1918, to do those two things—the one utilitarian, the other romantic. They went out to block the Bruges Canal at Zeebrugge—to stop that mouth which for so long past has been vomiting forth its submarines and its destroyers against our hospital ships, and our merchant vessels, and the merchant vessels of countries not engaged in this war. They blocked it so neatly, so effectively that it will be utterly useless as a submarine base for—I long to tell you the opinion of the experts, but I may not—many months to come.

This shall be proved for you as we proceed. Now let me explain, very briefly, the nature of the task which the Navy set itself. You imagine Zeebrugge, perhaps, as a long and dreary breakwater, flanked by flat and sparsely populated country, with a few German coastguards dotted about, and a destroyer or two in the offing. I am certain that that is the mental picture most of us had of Zeebrugge—if we had one at all.

Now think of Dover or Portsmouth as you knew them in times of peace. Conceive a garrison of no less than one thousand men ever on the breakwater. Glance at the plan of Zeebrugge reproduced in this book, and figure to yourself, at every possible coign of vantage, guns of mighty calibre, destroyers lurking beneath the Mole on the harbour side, searchlights at all points, and great land guns in the distance ready to pulverise any hostile craft that dares to show its nose within miles.

Picture all that as vividly as you can, and then ask

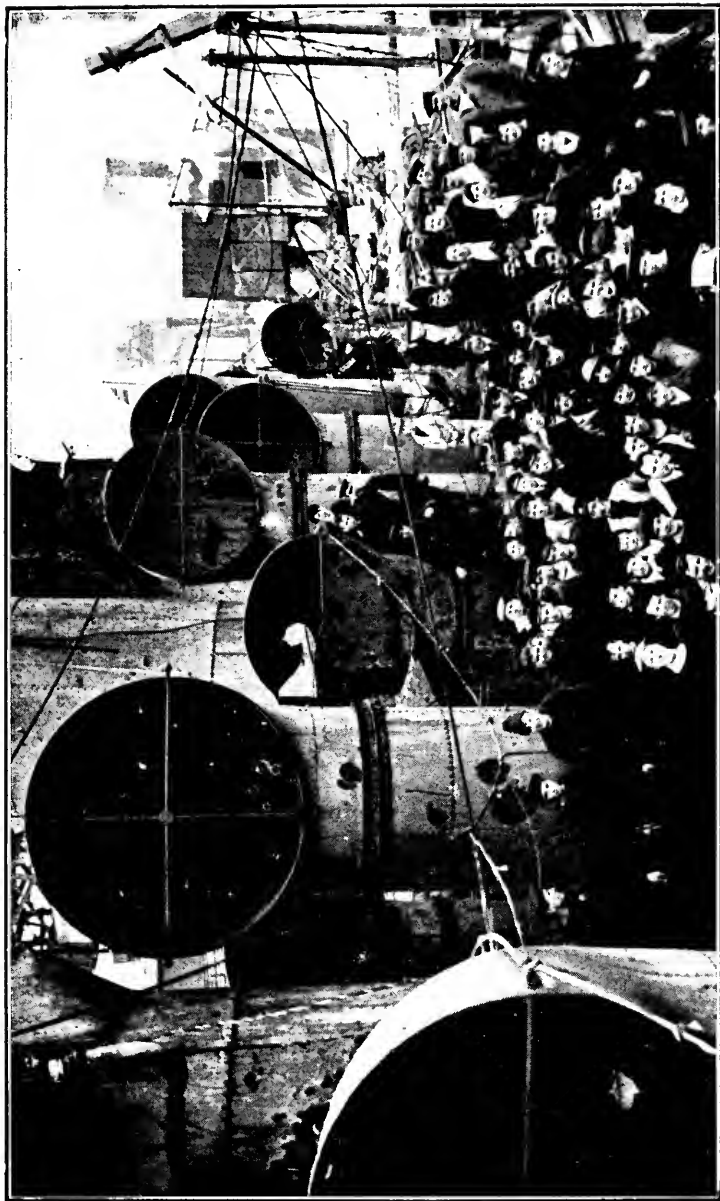


ADMIRAL SIR ROGER KEYES

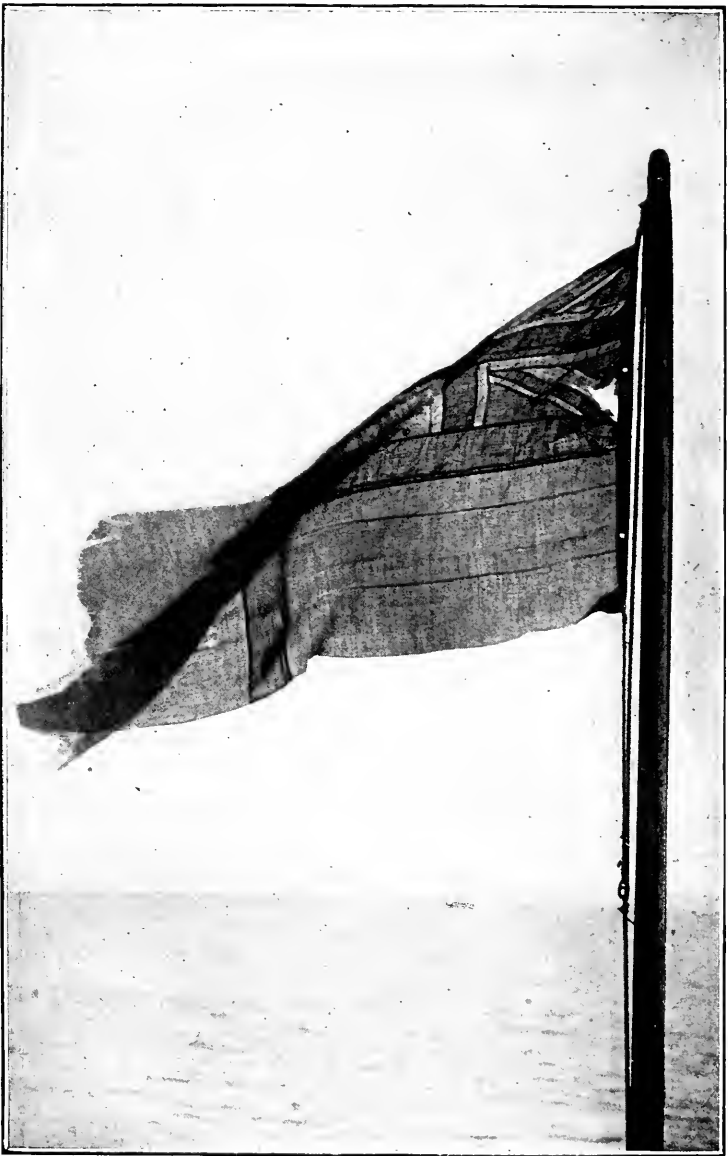
In Command of the Operations.



CAPTAIN CARPENTER OF THE "VINDICTIVE"
With one of the Ship's Mascots.



THE CREW OF THE "VINDICTIVE"
On her Return from Zeebrugge.



ENSIGN FLOWN BY THE "VINDICTIVE"
During the Engagement at Zeebrugge.

yourself the question: "Would it be possible to storm Zeebrugge so successfully that block-ships could be sunk in the very mouth of the Canal and seal it up?" How would you have set about it? With a huge force of cruisers? No, for the enemy must be taken by surprise. The action must be swift, cunning, and sure. The enemy must not be warned, or your one object, the blocking of the Canal, will be lost.

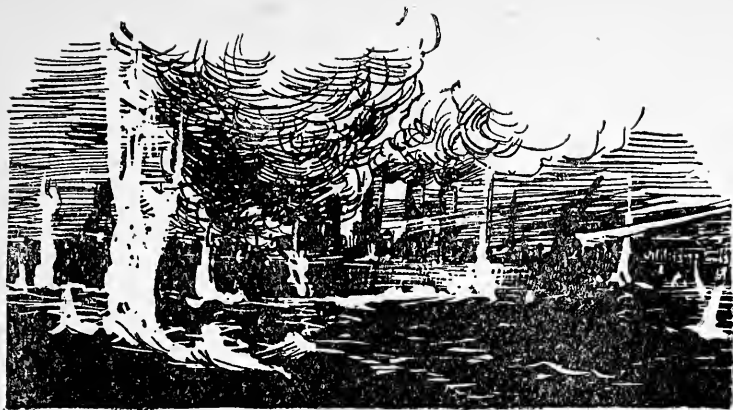
It took Lord Jellicoe and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss and Sir Roger Keyes six long and anxious months to perfect their plan, with the chance that the secret, at any moment, might slip out. But it was perfect at last, and the secret had not slipped out. Next they wanted a number of men—picked men with special qualities—who would be ready and eager to die if only this amazing coup might be achieved. Last of all they wanted a night on which all the conditions—the wind, the weather, the light—should be in their favour. They did not get that, but they went in, none the less, and did the job.

We have spoken of Dover and Portsmouth. What would you say if you heard, some fine morning, that an almost obsolete German cruiser had come and leant up against the wall of Dover Harbour, that two German officers had calmly sat astride the wall in the course of their business, that some German sailors had landed on the wall and chased our gunners away from their guns, and that, in the meantime, three quite obsolete German ships, filled with concrete, had been sunk in the mouth of the harbour and blocked it? What in the world would you say?

I think you would at first refuse to believe it. Then, when some official communication lent colour to the

story, you would tear your hair, declare that all was lost, and utter extremely unpleasant things about the British Forces and those in charge of them.

Yet this is precisely what happened at Zeebrugge. There is nothing more gallant in the annals of the British Navy. Not one man expected to come back. There is nothing more successful in the annals of the British Navy. They did to the full just what they hoped and had planned to do.



CHAPTER II

Captain Carpenter in His Attic

I CANNOT say that I enjoyed my journey to X—. Though representing an important Government Department, and duly accredited by his Majesty's Admiralty Office, I had misgivings. Should I find any of my heroes at X—? They were probably scattered, on leave, to the four corners of the kingdom. Or, having found a few, would they be persuaded to tell their story? Heroes, I remembered, are proverbially reticent, and it was quite possible they would smilingly refer me to the official account, offer me a cigarette, and inquire earnestly after the new piece at the Marathonium.

X— was no longer a pleasure resort with a naval and military flavouring. It was a place of stern busi-

ness. Gay dresses? There was hardly a feminine thing, if you except the sinister destroyers and twenty other varieties of war craft, to be seen. Men went their way quickly and full of purpose. That purpose may have been dinner, but even meals are short and businesslike at X——.

The hotel—almost the only one extant—was nicely filled with heroes in embryo. The American accent fell pleasantly on the ear.

Presently my luck began. Passing through the hall after dinner, I reaped the reward of labour in the early days of the war. In those days I filled a humble position at the Admiralty, and here, advancing towards me, was an officer under whom I had, quite inefficiently, served.

To him swiftly I imparted the purpose of my mission, and by him, in the kindest way, I was conveyed back to the Admiral's office. Things began to move. Gentlemen in blue and gold began to take a human as well as an official interest.

We had come to a halt outside a room on the first floor. There were two officers in the room, the door of which stood open. One was a boy. The other, whose face seemed vaguely familiar, wore the four broad gold bands that denote a captain in the Royal Navy. I studied him more closely, and noted a spare figure of medium height, a pale face, clear-cut features, and blue eyes that lit up the whole countenance with radiant intelligence. But there was something tired, too, about that face—a look that told of mental and physical strain, of days of great anxiety, of sleepless nights, and of an ordeal recently passed. Here, for a certainty, was one of my "objectives."

"Who's that?" I whispered to my guide.

"Captain Carpenter," was the answer.

"The man who commanded the *Vindictive*?"

"Yes. Would you like to meet him?"

"Very much."

A second—and a prodigious—stroke of luck. Captain Carpenter, one of the outstanding figures of the whole affair, was actually in X—.

Even as we conferred in whispers, however, he seemed to scent danger. With a word to the young officer, he came out of the room, ran up the next flight of stairs, and was gone. We entered the room. I repeated my little piece to the young officer.

"Oh, yes," said he. "Well, now, I wonder which people we can find for you? Nearly everybody, you see, is on leave."

"Except Captain Carpenter," I suggested.

The young officer disappeared and reappeared. He looked intensely relieved.

"Will you come up to Captain Carpenter's room?"

I floated up, and up, and up. The house was an old-fashioned one—just such a house as you will find on the front of any old-fashioned seaport town. We reached the attic—originally designed, no doubt, for a maid's bedroom. But that humble apartment is destined to become historic, for here many of the plans were drawn up that resulted in the splendid success of Zeebrugge and, later, of Ostend.

"Come in," said Captain Carpenter.



CHAPTER III

How the Plans Were Laid

HAVE a cigarette. Now, what can I do for you?"

I repeated my little piece.

"Well, I don't know that I can add much to the official account."

Two of my apprehensions had proved correct. But, before he could inquire earnestly after the new piece at the Marathonium, I pointed to a queer object on the floor. It was about four feet long and three feet wide. It was made of some malleable substance, and tinted a dull red. It was long, and sinuous, and decorated with tiny turrets. The base of the whole affair was painted a bluish colour. The extreme edges on the far side sagged off into a dirty brown.

"What's that?" I asked abruptly.

"That? Oh, that's the Mole, you know."

"Is this the model from which they worked out the plans?"

"Yes. Does it interest you?"

"Enormously," I said. And so it did, but the main point was that it still interested him. It was bad for him, no doubt, to have Zeebrugge on the brain after all the terrible experiences he had endured, but it was my duty to my Department—possibly to a larger audience—to take advantage, if I could, of this very natural obsession.

"Then let's sit down and have a look at it."

We drew our chairs close to the model, and he began to tell me about it. It was the sailor talking, the keen navigator, the born fighter.

"Here," said Captain Carpenter, digging with his cane at the model, "is the Mole, which is eighty yards wide and about a mile long. It's divided up into portions, and you must understand that we knew all about it in peace times.

"This thin piece at the end we call the Lighthouse Pier. There are powerful searchlights, of course, at the end of that pier. Next we come to the end of the Mole proper, where we knew they had at least three very big guns. Coming along towards the land we have two sheds, one containing naval stores. So the Mole goes on in a curve until we get to the Viaduct. That's the thing we blew up with the submarine. It connects the Mole with the shore end, and took an immense time to build on account of the strong current."

"Why," I asked, "did they have a viaduct? Why not have built the Mole solid all the way along?"

“Because of the silt in the harbour. They found that unless they allowed for the flow of the tide—I’m talking, of course, of when Zeebrugge was built, long before the war—they could not prevent the harbour from silting up, which, however they might dredge, would soon have blocked the entrance to the Canal. So they made that viaduct. It took, as I say, an unconscionable time to construct, even under peace conditions. There were railway lines across it, and so on. Now it’s in ruins, and they’ll have the pleasant job of reconstructing it, if they can, under showers of bombs from our aeroplanes.

“Well, now, here is the entrance to the Bruges Canal. That, also, was tremendously strongly fortified with big guns and searchlights. There were also guns along the banks of the Canal, and very powerful guns protecting the whole harbour from the shore. Then you must take into account the destroyers lying in the harbour. There were also some of those. We sank one. Just lobbed things over the Mole and sank it. No doubt whatever about that.

“Our job, however, was to block that Canal.”

“Just a moment. Would you say that Zeebrugge was as strongly fortified as X——?”

“It was as strongly fortified,” he replied, “as the Germans could fortify it, and they know something about fortification. The strength of the garrison was never less than a thousand men.”

“How long did it take to make the plans?”

“We began last November, and we were at it all the time until the thing came off. I was at the Admiralty when the work started, after three and a half years with the Fleet.”

"Then you practically came from a desk at the Admiralty to take command of the *Vindictive*?"

"Yes, thanks to Sir Roger Keyes, one of the finest and most gallant men that ever breathed. Not a man under him that wouldn't cut off his right hand for him. He'd have been in this up to the neck if he'd been allowed to take the risk. But that wouldn't have done, of course. He had to be in charge of the whole operation. So he very kindly told me I might command the *Vindictive*." His eyes shone with gratitude for the chance.

"There must have been a terrific lot of preliminary work!"

Captain Carpenter opened a drawer and pulled out a huge bundle of typewritten matter. "Those are the instructions," he said. "Some of them were drawn up in this room. This is where Captain Halahan and I used to work."

I remembered that Captain Halahan was one of the first killed after the *Vindictive* came alongside the Mole, and I looked at the plain wooden desk in the little attic where he had sat so many nights and worked so eagerly at the great scheme.

"Yes," said Captain Carpenter thoughtfully, but without a trace of sentimentality—he was tenderly smiling, indeed, as he thought of his friend—"he went early, and so did a good many other fine chaps, but I don't think they'd mind that. None of us expected to come back."

"How did you select the men?"

"Oh, they were all picked men—picked from volunteers. We tried them out under intensive training until we got exactly the men we wanted. That, natu-

rally, was a long and anxious job. At first they thought it was for a hazardous operation in France, and they were keen enough then; but later, when we entrusted them with the real secret, and they knew we were after Zeebrugge and Ostend, there was no holding them! Keeness is not the word for it! They were amazing! And didn't they behave splendidly! Every man! Every single man! By Jove, one can't say too much about the way those fellows did their jobs!"

"I read in the official account that there were two previous attempts."

"Yes. We actually started twice—the whole lot of us—the old *Vindictive*, the *Daffodil*, the *Iris*, the block-ships, the smoke-boats, the motor-launches, the monitors, and the destroyers. Once we got within fifteen miles of Zeebrugge and then had to turn back."

"Rather a blow!"

"Oh, rotten, of course. We were all strung up to it, but the conditions weren't what we wanted, and the Admiral wouldn't risk failure. It really wanted more pluck on his part to turn back than to go on. It was so easy for anyone to say he'd fuked it. Not that he'd care twopence for that!"

"But the night came at last!"

"Yes, it came at last. Even then the conditions weren't perfect. It was touch and go whether we started. We wanted low visibility, you see, but it was a very clear day. Still, if we waited for absolutely perfect conditions, we should never go at all. 'All right,' said the Admiral; 'off you go.' And off we went."



CHAPTER IV

The Great Fight

SOME people," said Captain Carpenter, "have called this affair audacious. That isn't the word I should use for it."

"What word would you use?"

"Impertinent," he replied, laughingly. "Just imagine this Armada of smoke-boats, motor launches, ferry-boats, obsolete submarines, and ancient cruisers laden with concrete, headed by the old *Vindictive*, setting out in broad daylight to attack the mighty fortress of Zeebrugge."

"In broad daylight!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. We timed ourselves to reach the Mole by midnight, so, owing to our slow speed, we had to do three hours of the oversea passage in daylight."

"How were the men? Excited?"

"Oh, no; quite calm, and immensely relieved to

be at it at last. Well, so soon as it got dark, it *was* dark! We could hardly see a thing, and when the smoke-boats got to work, pouring out great waves of dense smoke at regular intervals, which the light north-east wind carried right across the Mole and the harbour, pitch doesn't describe it!"

"What about the mine-field?"

"H'm! Anyway, we dodged it. My job, you understand, was to get alongside the Mole, land my Marines, help *Iris* and *Daffodil* to do the same, stay there drawing the fire of the batteries and diverting attention while the block-ships got into the Canal and sunk themselves, then get the Marines back on board, shove off, and clear out as quickly as possible. Incidentally, of course, we meant to put out of action as many Huns as was convenient by fire from our guns. You've seen the picture of the fighting-top? That was filled with Marines armed with Lewis guns. They did capital work. I'll come to that later.

"We got pretty near the Mole before they saw us, and then the fun began! Up went the star-shells, the guns began blazing, and we went pell-mell for the old Mole like that." A savage dig at the model with his cane. "I had intended to fetch up just here"—he indicated a spot on the exterior of the great wall pretty near the head of it—"but actually came in here"—a little further inland.

"We'd had things called 'brows' constructed—a sort of light drawbridge with a hinge in the middle. These were lowered away, but the current was so strong against the Mole, and the *Vindictive* bounced up and down so nimbly, that the men had the devil of a job to drop the ends of these brows on the wall.

“All this time, naturally enough, the Huns were blazing at us with everything they’d got. If you have a look at the *Vindictive* in the morning, you’ll soon see what they were doing to us. We were just swept with fire from two sides. Even before the party could begin to land, Colonel Elliot and Captain Halahan, poor chaps, who were in charge of that part of the business, were killed.

“The *Iris* went ahead of me and came alongside the Mole just here”—a little nearer the shore end. “They tried to hang on with their grapnels, but couldn’t quite manage it, so Lieut.-Commander Bradford and Lieut. Hawkins scrambled ashore and sat on the parapet, trying to fix the grapnels. They were both killed. . . .

“In the meantime, owing to the difficulty of securing to the Mole when alongside, I ordered the *Daffodil* to continue pushing, according to plan, so as to keep us in position. This was a pity, because she was full of men, and they couldn’t land to help with the fighting. Eventually, some of them scrambled across the *Vindictive* and landed that way.

“The wind had changed about fifteen minutes before we came alongside the Mole; all the smoke had cleared off and the harbour was plain to the eye. That helped the Huns to pot at us, and they took fine advantage of it. The din, as you can guess, was terrific, and I think they got the old *Vindictive* in every visible spot.

“Suddenly the thing happened for which we had been, semi-consciously, waiting. There was a tremendous roar, and up went a huge tower of flame and *débris* and bodies into the black sky! My fellows

cheered like mad, for they knew what it meant. Sandford had got home beneath the viaduct with his ancient submarine and touched her off. I never saw such a column of flame! It seemed a mile high!

"I must tell you a curious feature of this affair. As he approached the Mole they got the searchlights on to him and began firing at him. That was a nasty position, because she was stuffed full of explosives, and also had a big quantity of petrol on board. But when they saw him still coming on, and dashing straight at the Mole, they stopped firing and simply gaped. I suppose they thought he was mad.

"Anyway, they paid for their curiosity. On the viaduct itself there were a whole lot of Huns—masses of them. There they stood, staring at Sandford in his submarine. The searchlights lit them up. Then, presently, came the explosion, and bang went the whole lot to glory! They must have been the most surprised Huns since the war started.

"All this time, of course, a lot of other things were happening. Many of the seamen and Marines had landed on the Mole and were making fine play with the astonished Germans. Some went right to the head of the Mole and found the guns deserted. One gun, I must tell you, had not even been uncovered, which is clear proof that the garrison was taken by surprise. Others were chasing the enemy all down the Mole towards the viaduct, which they were never to cross, and some went into the shed I told you about and dealt with such people as they found.

"The men in the fighting-top were also doing fell work. All along the Mole, you see, and close under the fifteen-foot parapet, there are dug-outs or funk-

holes. At first the Huns popped into these, but by-and-by it occurred to them that they would certainly be found and spitted if they stayed there, so the bright idea occurred to them of nipping across the Mole and dropping down the side into their own destroyers lying there. An excellent scheme but for our fellows in the fighting-top, who picked them off with their Lewis guns as they ran.

“Those chaps in the fighting-top had to pay for it, though, in the end. They were attracting a lot of attention, and the Huns were constantly trying to drop a shell amongst them. They succeeded at last, I’m sorry to say, and laid out every man jack but one—Sergeant Finch. He was wounded badly, but dragged himself out from under the bodies of his pals and went on working his little gun until he couldn’t work it any longer.

“Now we come to the block-ships. We saw *Thetis* come steaming into the harbour in grand style. She made straight for the opening to the Canal, and you can imagine that she was a blaze of light and a target for every big thing they could bring to bear. She was going toppingly, all the same, when she had the rotten luck to catch her propeller in the defence-nets. Even then, however, she did fine work. She signalled instructions to the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia*, and so they managed to avoid the nets. It was a gorgeous piece of co-operation!

“And, by the way, I’m not at all sure that *Thetis* won’t give even more trouble to the enemy than the other two. I told you something, I think, about the tendency of the harbour to silt up. Well, *Thetis* is lying plump in the channel that must always be kept

clear of silt. The consequence is that the silt will collect all round her and over her, and I doubt whether she will *ever* be removable.

“To get back to the other block-ships. In went *Intrepid*, and in after her went *Iphigenia*. They weren't content, you know, to sink themselves at the mouth of the Canal. That was not the idea at all. They had to go right in, with guns firing point-blank at them from both banks, sink their ships, and get back as best they could. And they did it. They blocked that Canal as neatly and effectively as we could have wished in our most optimistic moments, and then, thanks to the little motor-launches, which were handled with the finest skill and pluck, the commanders and men got back to safety. To-morrow I'll show you some aeroplane photographs which are due in from France, and you'll see for yourself how beautifully *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* are lying.”

“And how long will it take to clear them away?”

“We've had the opinion of the most expert salvage-men from Liverpool, and they say —— months. Personally, I'm prepared to swear that it won't be less than —— months.”

“What may I say?”

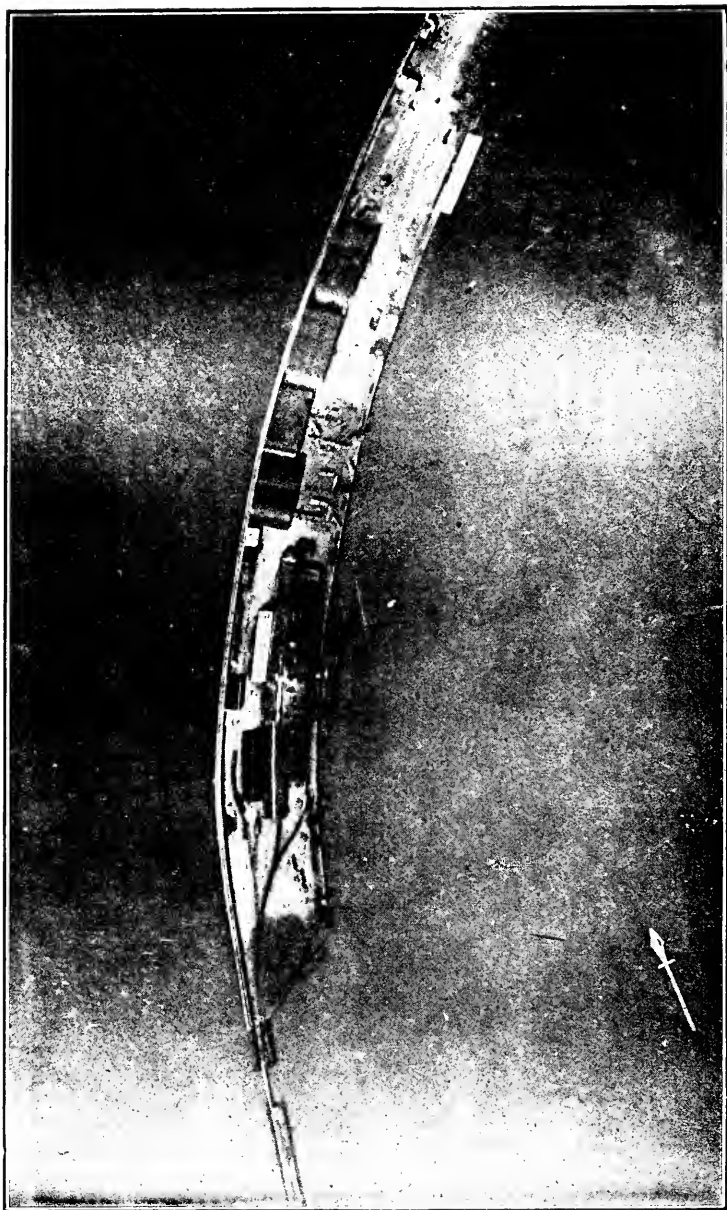
“Say 'some' months.”

“Can't they blow them up?”

“Not a bit of it. How can you blow up a thing that's already blown up?”

“I don't know. Let's get back to the fight.”

“Right. As soon as we saw that the block-ships were sunk we knew that our job was done. Now came the most ticklish part of the business—to get away. Up to this point we had been protected, so far as our



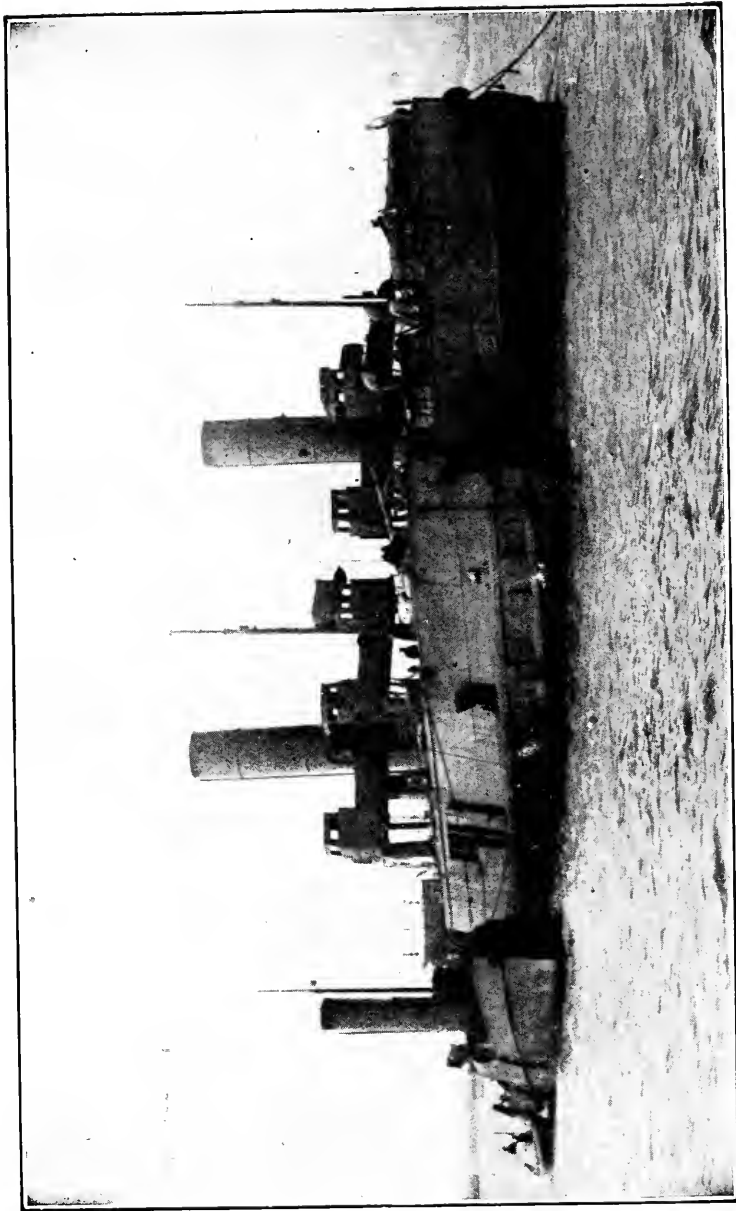
OFFICIAL SEA-PLANE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE VIADUCT

Destroyed by Lieut.-Commander Sandford, showing the Serious Gap and the Temporary Planking.

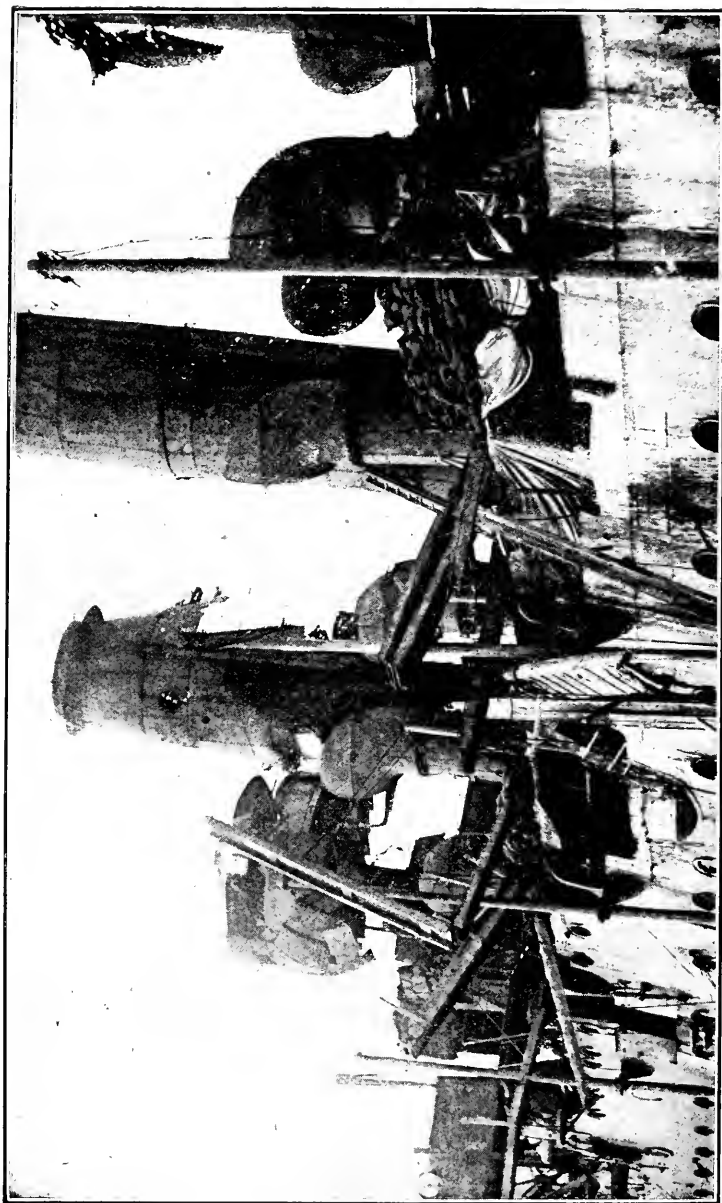


LIEUT.-COMMANDER SANDFORD

The Hero of the Submarine Exploit, recovering from his Injuries.



THE FERRY-BOATS "IRIS" AND "DAFFODIL"
On their Return to Harbour.



VIEW OF THE "VINDICTIVE" AFTER HER RETURN
Showing Improvised Brows used for Landing at Zebrugge.

hull was concerned, by the Mole. We knew that, directly we left the Mole, we should be in for it.

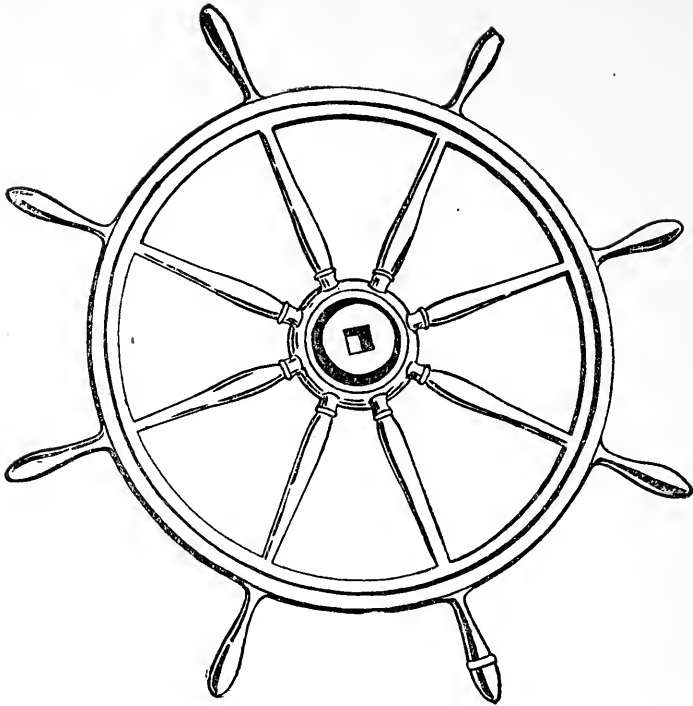
“The signal arranged for the men to re-embark was a long blast from *Vindictive’s* siren. But that had gone with a lot of other tackle, so we did the best we could with *Daffodil’s* little hooter. (Ferry passengers across the Mersey must know it well.) It wasn’t much of a hoot, but the fellows heard it, and made for the scaling-ladders.

“This was the Hun’s chance. The fire turned on those chaps as they chambered up the ladders, most of them trying to carry a dead or wounded pal, was awful. Talk about heroism! Every man was a hero! You must ask some of them who actually landed to tell you about that. Wonderful!

“We got them aboard at last, and stayed to make certain that nobody was left behind. Then we shoved off from the Mole, which had had enough of us for one night, and made for home at our best speed. Instantly the big shore-guns and everything else vicious blazed away, but the very wind which had turned against us when we arrived now stood our friend. We worked all our smoke-boxes like mad, and the smoke saved us. They landed some shells home, of course, and a lot of poor fellows in the *Iris* were killed by one shell just as they were leaving the Mole. But most of the stuff aimed at the *Vindictive* fell short, thank God, and we finally ran out of range.

“It was a good fight. I think the Huns had the wind up that night. . . .

“Where are you staying? . . . Good. So am I. We’ll walk along together.”



[From a special photograph.
The Steering-wheel of H.M.S. *Vindictive*.

CHAPTER V

A Museum in a Trunk

THE clocks of X— were pointing to midnight when we came down from Captain Carpenter's little office under the roof. The night was dark, but out to sea there were strange lights which boded ill, one felt, to hostile and inquisitive strangers.

We had been talking for about an hour—or, rather, Captain Carpenter had been patiently explaining the details of the attack, adapting his terms to the intelligence of a mere landsman. Anyway, I know that my

head ached with the concentrated excitement of it all, and we both grasped eagerly at the two last bottles of ginger ale from the night porter's store.

"Incidentally," I remarked, "you have told me nothing at all of your own experiences and sensations."

"Oh," he laughed, "they were so confused that I couldn't possibly analyse them. I know there was the very devil of a row, and vast quantities of smoke, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't quite understand how it was that you, personally, were not killed."

"Neither do I. It's a trite phrase, I know, but I must have had a charmed life. Fellows on each side of me were cut to bits with bursting shells. Yet I got nothing worse than a flesh wound in the shoulder from a fragment of shell."

"By the way," I observed, "I read somewhere that you actually brought away a huge piece of the Mole on the deck of the *Vindictive*?"

"Quite right. Like to see a bit of it?"

"To-morrow?"

"To-night, if you like. I've got some up in my bedroom."

Thus it happened that we went up in the lift to have a look at the Mole. There was a trunk at the foot of the Captain's bed. Unlocking this, he produced a large lump of crumbly substance and placed it in my hands. I had heard of people chipping fragments off Shakespeare's house and Canterbury Cathedral, but this went one better.

"Yes. I think you were right in using the word 'impertinence.'"

He wrapped the fragment in cotton-wool, explain-

ing that it crumbled so very easily and was intended as a gift. The huge block that fell on the deck of the *Vindictive* was to be divided up. Sir Roger Keyes, of course, would claim a share, and the Lords of the Admiralty, but the main bulk he had decided to present to the War Museum in London, for memorial purposes.

I was still peering into the trunk. A miscellaneous jumble met the eye—a cap, a flag, a leather case for binoculars, two pairs of goggles, a broken watch (or was it a chronometer?), and a roll of tattered charts.

“Don’t shut it for a moment,” I begged. “Are these more souvenirs?”

“Well, just one or two little things of personal interest. Care to see ’em?”

“If you don’t mind showing them.”

“That’s the cap I was wearing at the time. It’s rather a shabby old thing, but I thought it hardly worth while to put on a good cap for a job of that sort. Good thing I didn’t.”

It had been perforated from back to front and from side to side with bullets. In each case the bullet quite obviously missed the scalp by the fraction of an inch.

“Just as well,” I agreed. “Pity to waste a really good cap on a place like Zeebrugge. You were evidently there. What happened to the binocular case?”

“Well, that’s rather interesting. I had my glasses in my hand most of the time, so far as I remember, and the leather case, of course, was slung at my back. A bullet went right through it, and yet I knew nothing at all about it. Wasn’t that rum?”

"The gods apparently want you on earth a little longer. The barometer went as well, I observe."

"It did. All in bits. I don't know how or when. Oh, here are the old charts." He unrolled three large charts that looked as if rats had been feeding on them for six months. From each chart huge pieces had entirely disappeared, and what was left looked particularly mangy.

Captain Carpenter called my attention to the chart of Zeebrugge.

"We had mapped out three courses, you see, to allow for the wind and tide. Eventually we came round here, and the tide carried us alongside the Mole—there. Sorry they're in such a rotten state, but the chart-house was a nasty mess. Quite chewed up."

Last of all he showed me the flag—the glorious ensign—blackened with smoke and considerably holed. "We kept it flying all the time," he explained. "We thought we might as well."

I gazed at it—as many thousands of people will gaze at it when it finds a suitable home—in reverence. Then, the hour being nearly one o'clock, I took a grateful and respectful leave.

"See you in the morning," said the Captain. "I breakfast about eight-thirty. You've got to look at those aeroplane photographs, and then we'll send you off in a car to inspect the *Vindictive*. Good-night."

At my last glimpse of him, he was bundling his priceless souvenirs back into the trunk at the foot of his bed.



CHAPTER VI

On Board H.M.S. *Vindictive*

WE returned next morning to the Admiral's office, and I was presently staring through a powerful glass at the aeroplane photographs of the sunken block-ships. Unless you are accustomed to studying photographs taken from aeroplanes, they are at first a little puzzling, but I soon made out the *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia* quite clearly. The former was lying almost dead across the narrow channel, and had heeled over. Her nose rested on the mud-bank one side, and her stern on the mud-bank on the other side. As for the *Iphigenia*, she lay bang across the bed of the Canal. Both ships, in short, were in such a position that nothing much heavier than a cork could possibly pass them. I have laid stress upon this, because

so many people have asked, "Did the expedition succeed? Is the Canal blocked?" I can certify that the expedition did succeed, and that the Canal is utterly and completely blocked.

I now hopped into the Staff Car (with an acute sense of my unworthiness), and, accompanied by a Commander and a Lieutenant, who were all that the historic courtesy of the Navy could lead one to expect, went off to view the remains of the *Vindictive*.

I say "remains" advisedly, for no ship that had withstood for one solid hour that fearful bombardment could hope to return anything else but a wreck, if she returned at all.

The great shell-torn funnels first caught the eye, with the smoke even then pouring out at a hundred holes. Next one noticed the famous "brows," one or two intact, others splintered. The false deck, built to enable the storming party to gain the Mole, was still in position, lined with protective sandbags. I saw the ruined chart-house, and the shell-torn bridge, and the specially constructed flame-throwing huts.

Men swarmed everywhere, trying (as I then thought) to restore chaos to order. And one was struck with the apparent hopelessness of it all. The old ship had done her job, and might, one felt, be allowed to rest in peace—perhaps alongside the *Victory*. But, as we now know, there was a far greater end in store for her!

Peculiarly interesting was the fighting-top—a circular nest high above the bridge. Here it was that the Marines with the Lewis guns were stationed. One pictured that tiny fortress filled with men, every man a picked shot. Suddenly comes the crash of the enemy

shell—a lucky shot that penetrates the armour of the fighting-top and lays low every man but one. The story of that man has been already touched upon. An hour later I was by his bedside in a hospital some miles away.

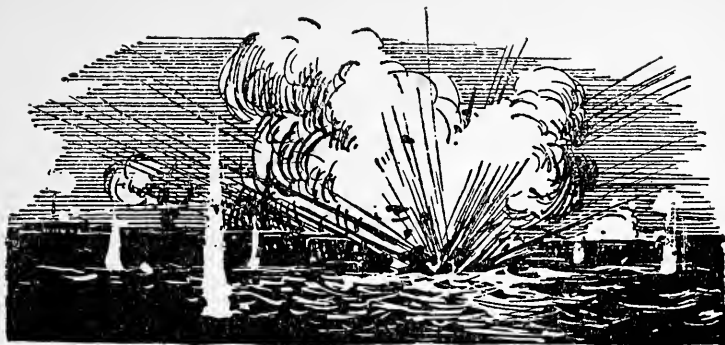
Yes, you had only to look at the *Vindictive* to realise what that night attack on Zeebrugge really meant. You could picture the landing-parties dashing across those narrow, oscillating “brows” on to the parapet, whence they must drop sixteen feet before getting to grips with the enemy. And you could picture the return of the grimy survivors, each man with a pal in his arms.

You could picture the decks strewn with the dead and wounded. You could see brave men, mortally hurt, raising themselves in agony to cheer on their comrades as they rushed to the battle. You could see the gunners, and the firemen, and the gallant fellows who were there to work the rockets and the smoke-boxes.

Finally, you could see the pale, eager face of the Commander, now on the bridge, now visiting the wounded, now issuing directions through his megaphone to the tiny attendant ferry-boats. And all the while the guns roar, and the shells shriek and crash, and the bullets hail on the dead and on the living.

“Bit knocked about, isn’t she?” said the Commander.

“Rather a mess,” I agreed.



CHAPTER VII

The Man Who Felt Frightened

IT was a military atmosphere into which I was plunged at Y——. The Marines, whose gallant share in the Zeebrugge exploit ranks equal to that of the Navy, and will never be forgotten, were ready for me. I was taken first of all to the office of Major Carpenter—a cousin, oddly enough, of Captain Carpenter, R.N.

“Now,” said he, “one of the men I want you to see is Captain Arthur Chater. Why he isn’t here I don’t know, but if you’ll wait a few minutes——”

“Could I see anybody else in the meantime?”

“Well, there are two interesting men in the hospital. One is Lieut.-Commander Sandford, who was

in charge of the submarine that blew up the viaduct——”

“I must see him at all costs!”

“I think I can arrange that. The other is Sergeant Finch, who’s going to get the V.C. I’ll telephone over to the hospital and let them know you’re coming. Then I’ll have Chater here by the time you get back.”

Off I went to the hospital. Sergeant Finch, they told me, was downstairs, and Commander Sandford—he was Lieutenant Sandford when he went for the Mole—in a cubicle upstairs.

The sister in charge of Finch’s ward met me in the passage.

“I’m afraid you can’t see Finch just at present.”

“He is engaged, perhaps?”

“Yes, with the barber.”

I peeped through the glass panel, and there, sure enough, was my hero with his face half-smothered in lather. So I climbed the stairs and was shown into Lieut.-Commander Sandford’s tiny apartment.

“A friend to see you,” announced the nurse.

“A stranger at present,” I corrected her, “but not for long, I hope.”

Lieut.-Commander Sandford seemed pleased to see me. I gathered that he was dull. It was a hard thing, I reflected, to be dull after charging into the Mole. However, somebody, no doubt, will make that up to him by and by.

He was young, this hero, and of a merry temperament. Our interview developed into quite a jovial affair.

“Badly wounded?” I asked.

"Oh, not so very. My hand, as you see, and I got one through the thigh."

"You'll soon be out and about, the doctor tells me. In the meantime, you've made a horrid mess of that viaduct."

"Have I?" he chuckled.

"Don't you know? Well, I can give you the latest information. It's all gone to glory. The Huns are creeping backwards and forwards on a single plank."

"That's good." He laughed again.

"What exactly happened? I gather that you perched your submarine in the very middle of the woodwork beneath the viaduct?"

"There was no woodwork, so far as I know. You see, the Huns had covered all that over with a sort of steel curtain, but they'd left a hole in this curtain for the tide to run through. You know about the silt and all that? Well, as soon as we saw that hole we made straight for it."

"Were you on deck?"

"Oh, yes. We were all on deck."

"But how was it you weren't swept off the deck by the steel curtain?"

"Why, don't you see, we rammed her in as far as the conning-tower, and then she stuck. All I had to do after that was to launch a boat, get the men into it, touch the button that fired the fuse, climb into the boat after the men, and get clear away before the explosion took place."

"Oh! That was all, was it?"

"Yes. Unluckily we fouled the propeller of the boat, and so two of us had to row. There were only two oars. I don't suppose," he added, with a specially

deep chuckle, "any two men ever pulled so hard before."

"You knew what was going to happen in a minute?"

"Rather! I'd pressed the button!"

"They let you get right up to the Mole, I understand?"

"Yes. They all stopped firing. It was rather rum. I suppose they took it for granted we'd gone mad."

"They stood and watched you? I presume you know the actual viaduct was crowded with Huns?"

"No, I didn't. I'm glad I didn't."

"Why? Would you have felt some compunction in blowing them up?"

"Lord, no! But I was quite frightened enough as it was!"

We both laughed at that.

"Was it a good explosion?"

"I think so. I should have enjoyed it more, only just before it happened I got wounded."

"That was a pity. I was having a little chat with Captain Carpenter last night, and he tells me the flames were a mile high."

"A mile?" mused Mr. Sandford. "Golly! Some bang!"

"One of the best bangs on record," I assured him. "Now I must pop downstairs and see Sergeant Finch."

"Righto! I say, are you going to write about this stunt?"

"If I'm spared."

"Shall we have a chance of seeing it?"

"You shall," I promised him, and left him contentedly chuckling.



CHAPTER VIII

What the Marines Told the Huns

SERGEANT FINCH, V.C., had finished his shave, and looked as clean and neat as any hero out of a fighting-top could expect.

"They tell me," I began, "that you've got the V.C. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, sir. But I don't know what I did to get it, and that's a fact. Seems to me if *one* has the V.C., the whole lot ought to have it."

"Still, that being impossible, they've made you the victim. How's the hand?"

"Going on a treat. I didn't want to come here. I wanted to go back to barracks with my pal. I never noticed I was hurt."

"Pretty hot in that fighting-top, wasn't it?"

"Pretty fair."

"I saw it this morning."

"Oh, did you, sir?" He was more interested now. "Then you saw where the shell came through, I sup-

pose? We all went down in a bunch, and I had a job to get out from underneath."

"And then you went on working the gun?"

"I suppose I did, but I don't really know what I did. One of my pals was badly hit, and I tried to get him down on deck. I know that. But it's a fact I don't really know what I did. All I do know is I'm dreading this business that's coming."

"Don't you worry about that," I reassured him. "You'll find Somebody very charming to you."

"Oh, it isn't that part," replied the Sergeant. "It's getting back to the barracks."

He had visions, I could see, of impetuous and quite strange ladies flinging their arms about his modest neck.

"I shall look out for the snapshots."

Finch shrugged his shoulders, and I left him anticipating the worst.

Captain Chater, who had been the Adjutant of the Fourth Battalion Royal Marines, was busy down at the stables, but he very kindly came along to the Mess and made sketches on a piece of blotting paper. He was about twenty-three years of age, and had the same healthy delight in every kind of bang as Lieutenant-Commander Sandford. I understood him to say that the two senior officers, Colonel B. N. Elliot, D.S.O., R.M.L.I., and Major A. A. Corder, were both killed on the port side of the bridge of the *Vindictive* whilst that vessel was approaching the Mole, and within only a hundred yards of it. (He was standing with them at the time.) This catastrophe left Major B. G. Weller, D.S.C., in command of the battalion.

"The most awkward part of the business," Captain Chater explained, "was that sixteen-foot drop. One didn't know, you see, what might be below. Not that the men minded. They were simply grand! Yelled like mad all the time, and went for the Huns as though the whole thing was a football match. The Marines are rather bucked about the show."

"We all know about the Marines—including the enemy! How did you feel on the way over?"

"Oh, I didn't feel much. We'd had two previous shots, you know. One was getting used to it."

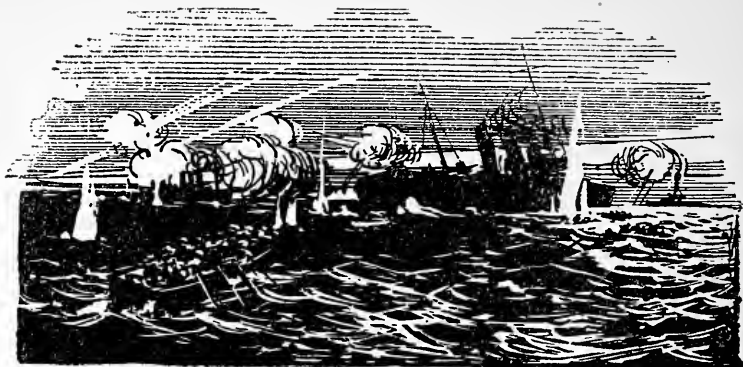
"Did it seem a long time that you were on the Mole?"

"No. Awfully short! We were quite surprised when the signal came for us to get back. Getting back was the worst part. We had scaling ladders and ropes, but the fire was very heavy, and the men wouldn't go without their pals. They insisted on taking everybody, living or dead. You can imagine that that took time."

"Anyway," I suggested, "seeing that it's all over, what about hopping into the car with me and coming back to X——?"

For the first time during our conversation he grew serious.

"To tell you the truth," he admitted, in a low tone, "I've been racking my brains for an excuse to do that, and can't think of one!"



CHAPTER IX

I Hear They Want More

TWO very brief conversations, and this imperfect and unpretentious chronicle of Zeebrugge comes to a close.

The first is with Commander E. O. B. Seymour Osborne, who had charge of the gunnery operations aboard the *Vindictive*. I found him at lunch with another officer in a pleasant apartment on the sea-front at X—.

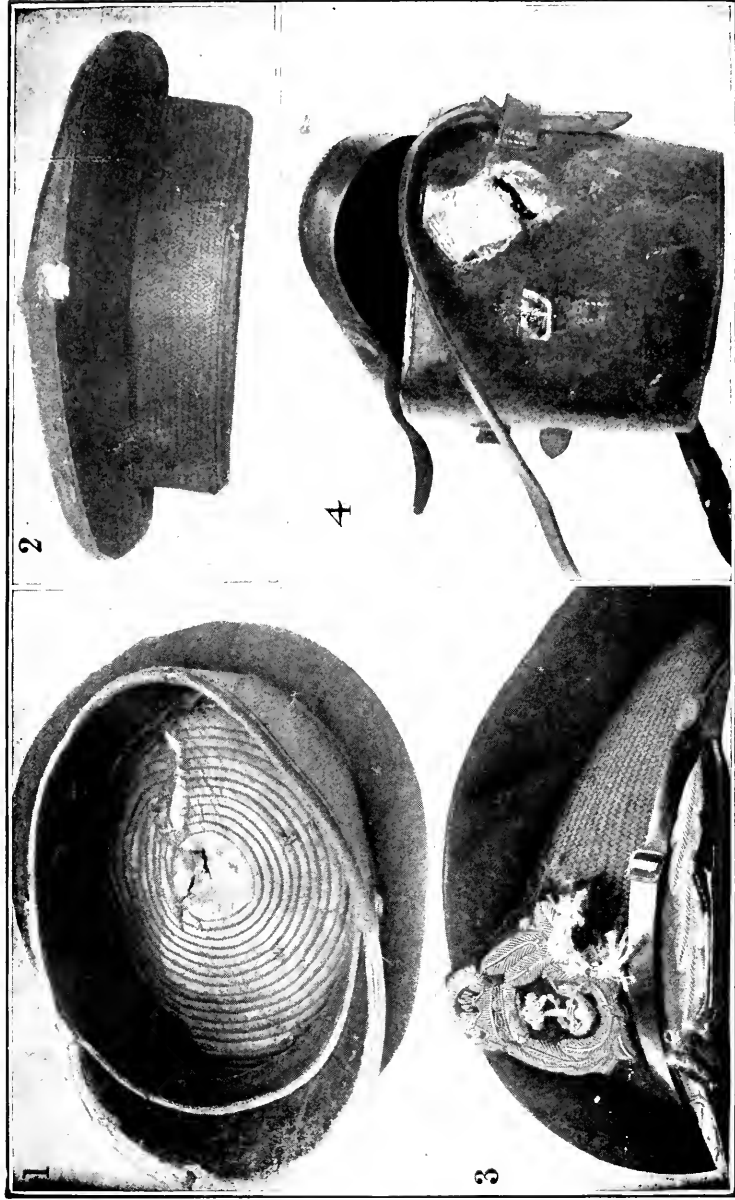
“I was told,” I began, “that I must not leave without seeing you.”

“Oh? I don’t quite know why.”

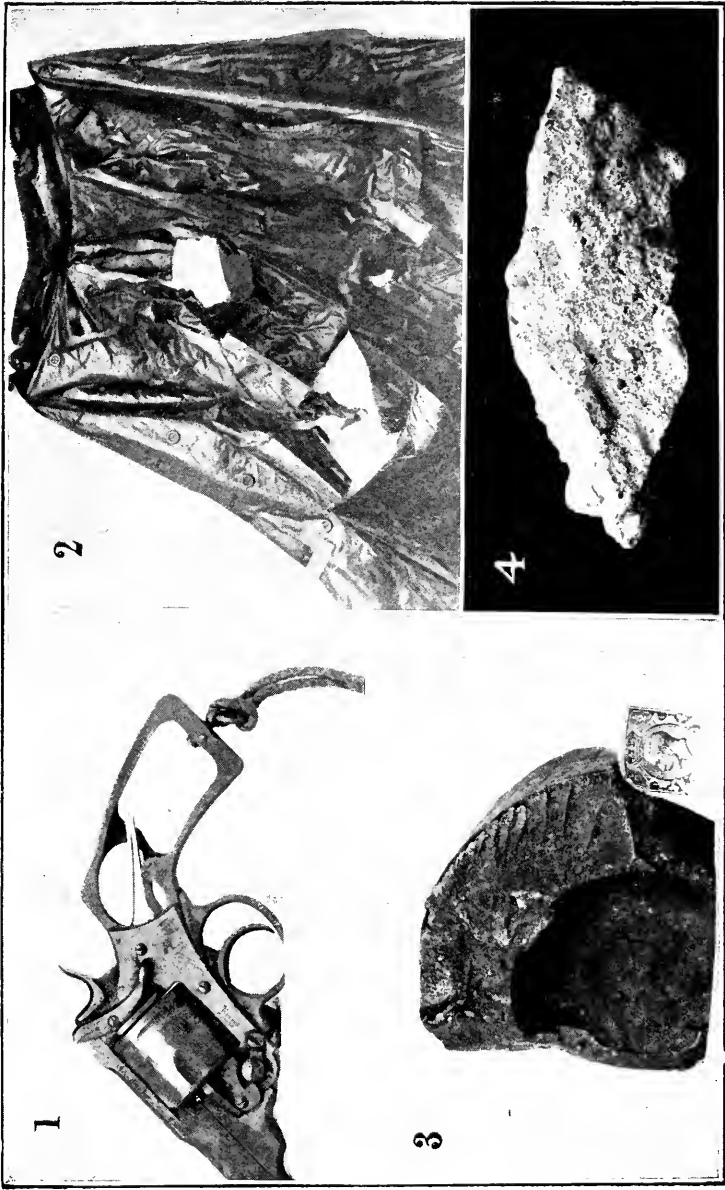
“You were in it, weren’t you?”

“Yes, I was in it.”

“And well in it, I believe?”



SOUVENIRS OF THE GREAT FIGHT: (1), (2) and (3) Cap worn by Captain Carpenter during the Attack on Zeebrugge; (4) His Binocular Case pierced by Bullet or Shrapnel.

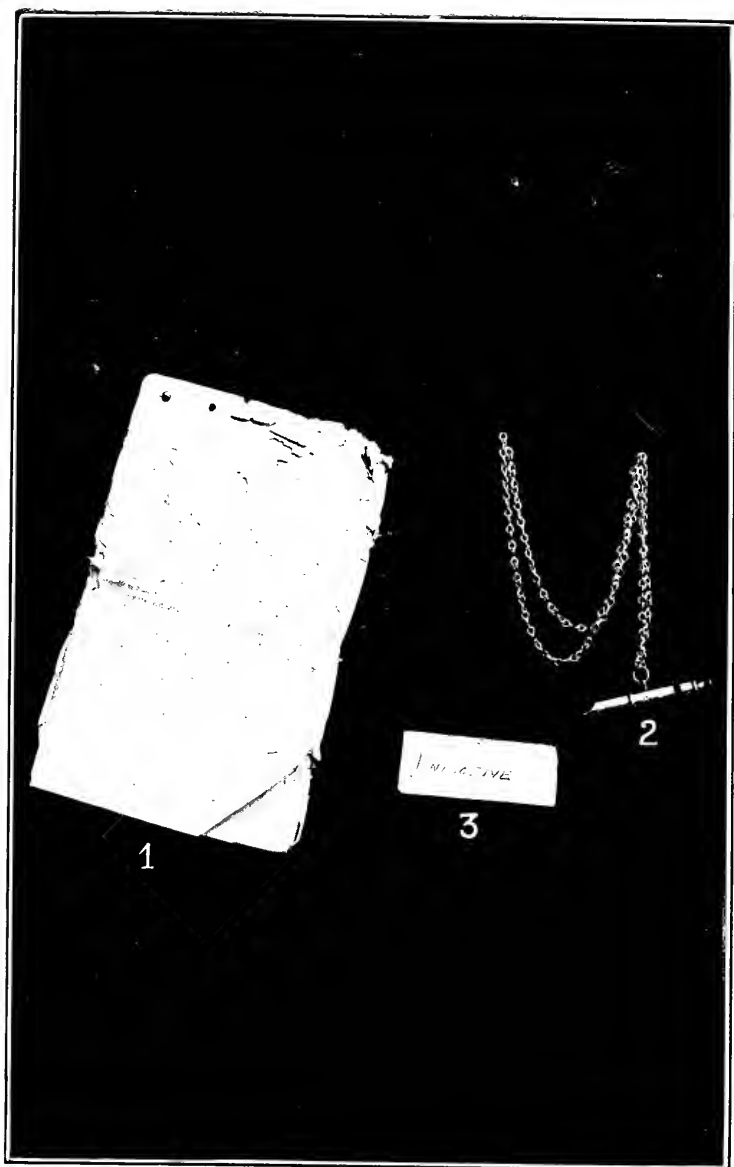


SOUVENIRS OF THE GREAT FIGHT: (1) Captain Carpenter's Revolver; (2) His Oilskin; (3) Piece of the German Shell which shattered the "Vindictive's" Chart-house; (4) Fragment of Zebrugge Mole blown on board the "Vindictive" by a German Shell.



SOUVENIR OF THE GREAT FIGHT

The Shot-riddled Chart of the "Indictive" as recovered from the wreck of the Chart-house.



SOUVENIRS OF THE GREAT FIGHT: (1) "Vindictive's" Operation Orders as Recovered from the Wrecked Chart-house; (2) Whistle blown as a Signal to Storm the Mole; (3) Token to be given to the Chief Engineer of the "Vindictive" to Scuttle the Ship if she became Disabled.

"Pretty well in it. Have a glass of port?"

"No, thanks."

"It will do you a lot of good."

"If you really think that——. Now, please tell me something."

"I'll tell you one thing. The men were great. I saw one chap come staggering on board with a pal in his arms. Whether the pal was alive or dead I couldn't say, and I doubt whether he could. But I heard him murmuring to him, 'I wouldn't leave yer, Bill! Did you think I would?'"

That's all. The other remark, which has since proved highly significant, came from an officer who very courteously gave me a lift to the station in his car. No less a personage than the Admiral came out to see him off.

"The Admiral tells me," he observed, as we drove away, "that the standard was very high in this affair."

I made no comment. None was needed.

"By the way," he went on, "have you noticed that a lot of the chaps seem a bit used up? Rather nervy and all that?"

"Not surprising, is it?"

"Well, it looks to me as though they want more of it."

They got it.

* * *

A thrill ran through England when it heard that the *Vindictive* had been sunk in the very jaws of Ostend Harbour. The imagination dwelt on the old battleship—scarred, battered, broken, covered with glory. They wanted to make a show of her, and a

fine show she would have made; but her work was not yet done. One final honour was in store for her. Just as so many gallant men had died on her decks for the Cause of Freedom, so she, too, could perish in the same cause.

ZEEBRUGGE AND OSTEND

First Attack

24th April, 1918.

THOSE who recall High Wood upon the Somme—and they must be many, as it was after the battles of 1916—may easily figure to themselves the decks of H.M.S. *Vindictive* as she lies to-day, a stark, black profile against the sea haze of the harbour amid the stripped, trim shapes of the fighting ships which throng these waters. That wilderness of debris, that litter of the used and broken tools of war, that lavish ruin and that prodigal evidence of death and battle, are as obvious and plentiful here as there. The ruined tank nosing at the stout tree which stopped it has its parallel in the flame-thrower hut at the port wing of *Vindictive's* bridge, its iron sides freckled with rents from machine-gun bullets and shell-splinters; the tall white cross which commemorates the martyrdom of the Londoners is sister to the dingy, pierced White Ensign which floated over the fight of the Zeebrugge Mole.

Looking aft from the chaos of her wrecked bridge, one sees, snug against their wharf, the heroic bourgeois shapes of the two Liverpool ferry-boats (their captains' quarters are still labelled "Ladies Only") *Iris* and *Daffodil*, which shared with *Vindictive* the honours and arduous of the fight. The epic of their

achievement shapes itself in the light of that view across the scarred and littered decks, in that environment of grey water and great still ships.

Their objectives were the canal of Zeebrugge and the entrance to the harbour of Ostend—theirs, and those of five other veteran and obsolete cruisers and a mosquito fleet of destroyers, motor-launches and coastal motor-boats. Three of the cruisers, *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia* and *Thetis*, each duly packed with concrete and with mines attached to her bottom for the purpose of sinking her, *Merrimac*-fashion, in the neck of the canal, were aimed at Zeebrugge; two others, similarly prepared, were directed at Ostend. The function of *Vindictive*, with her ferry-boats, was to attack the great half-moon Mole which guards the Zeebrugge Canal, land bluejackets and marines upon it, destroy what stores, guns, and Germans she could find, and generally create a diversion while the block-ships ran in and sank themselves in their appointed place. Vice-Admiral Keyes, in the destroyer *Warwick*, commanded the operation.

There had been two previous attempts at the attack, capable of being pushed home if weather and other conditions had served. The night of the 22nd offered nearly all the required conditions, and at some fifteen miles off Zeebrugge the ships took up their formation for the attack. *Vindictive*, which had been towing *Iris* and *Daffodil*, cast them off to follow under their own steam; *Intrepid*, *Iphigenia*, and *Thetis* slowed down to give the first three time to get alongside the Mole; *Sirius* and *Brilliant* shifted their course for Ostend; and the great swarm of destroyers and motor craft sowed themselves abroad upon their multifari-

ous particular duties. The night was overcast and there was a drift of haze; down the coast a great searchlight swung its beams to and fro; there was a small wind and a short sea.

From *Vindictive's* bridge, as she headed in towards the Mole with her faithful ferry-boats at her heels, there was scarcely a glimmer of light to be seen shorewards. Ahead of her, as she drove through the water, rolled the smoke-screen, her cloak of invisibility, wrapped about her by the small craft. This was a device of Wing-Commander Brock, R.N.A.S., "without which," acknowledges the Admiral in Command, "the operation could not have been conducted." The north-east wind moved the volume of it shoreward ahead of the ships; beyond it, the distant town and its defenders were unsuspecting; and it was not till *Vindictive*, with her bluejackets and marines standing ready for the landing, was close upon the Mole that the wind lulled and came away again from the south-west, sweeping back the smoke-screen and laying her bare to the eyes that looked seaward.

There was a moment immediately afterwards when it seemed to those in the ships as if the dim coast and the hidden harbour exploded into light. A star shell soared aloft, then a score of star shells; the wavering beams of the searchlights swung round and settled to a glare; the wildfire of gun flashes leaped against the sky; strings of luminous green beads shot aloft, hung and sank; and the darkness of the night was supplanted by the nightmare daylight of battle fires. Guns and machine-guns along the Mole and batteries ashore woke to life, and it was in a gale of shelling that *Vindictive* laid her nose against the thirty-

foot high concrete side of the Mole, let go an anchor, and signed to *Daffodil* to shove her stern in. *Iris* went ahead and endeavoured to get alongside likewise.

The fire, from the account of everybody concerned, was intense. While ships plunged and rolled beside the Mole in an unexpected send of sea, *Vindictive* with her greater draught jarring against the foundation of the Mole with every plunge, they were swept diagonally by machine-gun fire from both ends of the Mole and by heavy batteries ashore. Commander A. F. B. Carpenter (now Captain) coned *Vindictive* from her open bridge till her stern was laid in, when he took up his position in the flame-thrower hut on the port side. It is to this hut that reference has already been made; it is marvellous that any occupant of it should have survived a minute, so riddled and shattered is it. Officers of *Iris*, which was in trouble ahead of *Vindictive*, describe Captain Carpenter as "handling her like a picket-boat."

Vindictive was fitted along the port side with a high false deck, whence ran the eighteen brows, or gangways, by which the storming and demolition parties were to land. The men were gathered in readiness on the main and lower decks, while Colonel Elliot, who was to lead the Marines, waited on the false deck just abaft the bridge, and Captain H. C. Halahan, who commanded the bluejackets, was amidships. The gangways were lowered, and scraped and rebounded upon the high parapet of the Mole as *Vindictive* rolled; and the word for the assault had not yet been given when both leaders were killed, Colonel Elliot by a shell and Captain Halahan by the machine-gun fire which swept the decks. The same shell that killed

Colonel Elliot also did fearful execution in the forward Stokes Mortar Battery.

“The men were magnificent.” Every officer bears the same testimony. The mere landing on the Mole was a perilous business; it involved a passage across the crashing, splintering gangways, a drop over the parapet into the field of fire of the German machine-guns which swept its length, and a further drop of some sixteen feet to the surface of the Mole itself. Many were killed and more were wounded as they crowded up to the gangways; but nothing hindered the orderly and speedy landing by every gangway.

Lieutenant H. T. C. Walker had his arm carried away by a shell on the upper deck and lay in the darkness while the storming parties trod him under. He was recognised and dragged aside by the Commander. He raised his remaining arm in greeting. “Good luck to you,” he called, as the rest of the stormers hastened by; “good luck.”

The lower deck was a shambles as the Commander made the rounds of his ship; yet those wounded and dying raised themselves to cheer as he made his tour. The crew of the howitzer which was mounted forward had all been killed; a second crew was destroyed likewise; and even then a third crew was taking over the gun. In the stern cabin a firework expert, who had never been to sea before—one of Captain Brock’s employees—was steadily firing great illuminating rockets out of a scuttle to show up the lighthouse on the end of the Mole to the block ships and their escort.

The *Daffodil*, after aiding to berth *Vindictive*, should have proceeded to land her own men, but now Commander Carpenter ordered her to remain as she

was, with her bows against *Vindictive's* quarter, pressing the latter ship into the Mole. Normally, *Daffodil's* boilers develop eighty pounds' pressure of steam per inch; but now, for this particular task, Artificer Engineer Sutton, in charge of them, maintained a hundred and sixty pounds for the whole period that she was holding *Vindictive* to the Mole. Her casualties, owing to her position during the fight, were small—one man killed and eight wounded, among them her Commander, Lieutenant H. Campbell, who was struck in the right eye by a shell splinter.

Iris had troubles of her own. Her first attempts to make fast to the Mole ahead of *Vindictive* failed, as her grapnels were not large enough to span the parapet. Two officers, Lieut.-Commander Bradford and Lieutenant Hawkins, climbed ashore and sat astride the parapet trying to make the grapnels fast till each was killed and fell down between the ship and the wall. Commander Valentine Gibbs had both legs shot away and died next morning. Lieutenant Spencer, R.N.R., though wounded, coned the ship and Lieutenant Henderson, R.N., came up from aft and took command.

Iris was obliged at last to change her position and fall in astern of *Vindictive*, and suffered very heavily from the fire. A single big shell plunged through the upper deck and burst below at a point where fifty-six marines were waiting the order to go to the gangways. Forty-nine were killed and the remaining seven wounded. Another shell in the ward-room, which was serving as sick bay, killed four officers and twenty-six men. Her total casualties were eight officers and sixty-nine men killed and three officers and a hundred and two men wounded.

The storming and demolition parties upon the Mole met with no resistance from the Germans, other than the intense and unremitting fire. The geography of the great Mole, with its railway line and its many buildings, hangars, and store-sheds, was already well known, and the demolition parties moved to their appointed work in perfect order. One after another the buildings burst into flame or split and crumpled as the dynamite went off.

A bombing party, working up towards the Mole extension in search of the enemy, destroyed several machine-gun emplacements, but not a single prisoner rewarded them. It appears that upon the approach of the ships, and with the opening of the fire, the enemy simply retired and contented themselves with bringing machine-guns to the shore end of the Mole. And while they worked and destroyed, the covering party below the parapet could see in the harbour, by the light of the German star shells, the shapes of the block ships stealing in and out of their own smoke and making for the mouth of the canal.

Thetis came first, steaming into a tornado of shell from the great batteries ashore. All her crew, save a remnant who remained to steam her in and sink her, had already been taken off her by the ubiquitous motor launches, but the remnant spared hands enough to keep her four guns going. It was hers to show the road to *Intrepid* and *Iphigenia*, who followed.

She cleared the string of armed barges which defends the channel from the tip of the Mole, but had the ill-fortune to foul one of her propellers upon the net defence which flanks it on the shore side. The propeller gathered in the net and rendered her prac-

tically unmanageable; the shore batteries found her and pounded her unremittingly; she bumped into a bank, edged off, and found herself in the channel again, still some hundreds of yards from the mouth of the canal, in a practically sinking condition. As she lay she signalled invaluable directions to the others, and here Commander R. S. Sneyd, D.S.O., accordingly blew the charges and sank her. A motor launch, under Lieutenant H. Littleton, R.N.V.R., raced alongside and took off her crew. Her losses were five killed and five wounded.

Intrepid, smoking like a volcano and with all her guns blazing, followed; her motor launch had failed to get alongside outside the harbour, and she had men enough for anything. Straight into the canal she steered, her smoke blowing back from her into *Iphigenia's* eyes, so that the latter, blinded and going a little wild, rammed a dredger with a barge moored beside it, which lay at the western arm of the canal. She got clear though, and entered the canal pushing the barge before her. It was then that a shell hit the steam connections of her whistle, and the escape of steam which followed drove off some of the smoke and let her see what she was doing.

Lieutenant Stuart Bonham-Carter, commanding the *Intrepid*, placed the nose of his ship neatly on the mud of the western bank, ordered his crew away, and blew up his ship by the switches in the chart-room. Four dull bumps was all that could be heard; and immediately afterwards there arrived on deck the engineer, who had been in the engine-room during the explosion and reported that all was as it should be.

Lieutenant E. W. Billyard-Leake, commanding

Iphigenia, beached her according to arrangement on the eastern side, blew her up, saw her drop nicely across the canal, and left her with her engines still going to hold her in position till she should have bedded well down on the bottom. According to latest reports from air observation, the two old ships with their holds full of concrete are lying across the canal in a V position; and it is probable that the work they set out to do has been accomplished and that the canal is effectively blocked.

A motor launch, under Lieutenant P. T. Deane, R.N.V.R., had followed them in to bring away the crews, and waited further up the canal towards the mouth against the western bank. Lieutenant Bonham-Carter, having sent away his boats, was reduced to a Carley float, an apparatus like an exaggerated lifebuoy with a floor of grating. Upon contact with the water it ignited a calcium flare, and he was adrift in the uncanny illumination with a German machine-gun a few hundred yards away giving him its undivided attention.

What saved him was possibly the fact that the defunct *Intrepid* was still emitting huge clouds of smoke, which it had been worth nobody's while to turn off. He managed to catch a rope as the motor launch started, and was towed for a while till he was observed and taken on board. Another officer jumped ashore and ran along the bank to the launch. A bullet from the machine-gun stung him as he ran, and when he arrived, charging down the bank out of the dark, he was received by a member of the launch's crew who attacked him with a hammer.

The whole harbour was alive with small craft. As

the motor launch cleared the canal, and came forth to the incessant geysers thrown up by the shells, rescuers and rescued had a view of yet another phase of the attack. The shore end of the Mole consists of a jetty, and here an old submarine, commanded by Lieutenant R. D. Sandford, R.N., loaded with explosives, was run into the piles and touched off, her crew getting away in a boat to where the usual launch awaited them.

Officers describe the explosion as the greatest they ever witnessed—a huge roaring spout of flame that tore the jetty in half and left a gap of over 100 feet. The claim of another launch to have sunk a torpedo-boat alongside the jetty is supported by many observers, including officers of the *Vindictive*, who had seen her mast and funnel across the Mole and noticed them disappear.

Where every moment had its deed and every deed its hero, a recital of acts of valour becomes a mere catalogue. "The men were magnificent," say the officers; the men's opinion of their leaders expresses itself in the manner in which they followed them, in their cheers, in their demeanour to-day while they tidy up their battered ships, setting aside the inevitable souvenirs, from the bullet-torn engines to great chunks of Zeebrugge Mole dragged down and still hanging in the fenders of the *Vindictive*. The motor launch from the canal cleared the end of the Mole and there beheld, trim and ready, the shape of the *Warwick*, with the great silk flag presented to the Admiral by the officers of his old ship, the *Centurion*. They stood up on the crowded decks of the little craft and cheered it again and again.

While the *Warwick* took them on board, they saw

Vindictive, towed loose from the Mole by *Daffodil*, turn and make for home—a great black shape, with funnels gapped and leaning out of the true, flying a vest streamer of flame as her stokers worked her up—her, the almost wreck—to a final display of seventeen knots. Her forward funnel was a sieve; her decks were a dazzle of sparks; but she brought back intact the horseshoe nailed to it, which Sir Roger Keyes had presented to her commander.

Meantime the destroyers *North Star*, *Phæbe*, and *Warwick*, which guarded the *Vindictive* from action by enemy destroyers while she lay beside the Mole, had their share in the battle. *North Star* (Lieut.-Commander K. C. Helyar, R.N.), losing her way in the smoke, emerged to the light of the star-shells, and was sunk. The German *communiqué*, which states that only a few members of the crew could be saved by them, is in this detail of an unusual accuracy, for the *Phæbe* (Lieut.-Commander H. E. Gore-Langton, R.N.), came up under a heavy fire in time to rescue nearly all. Throughout the operations monitors and the siege guns in Flanders, manned by the Royal Marine Artillery, heavily bombarded the enemy's batteries.

The wind that blew back the smoke-screen at Zeebrugge served us even worse off Ostend, where that and nothing else prevented the success of an operation ably directed by Commodore Hubert Lynes, C.M.G. The coastal motor boats had lit the approaches and the ends of the piers with calcium flares and made a smoke-cloud which effectually hid the fact from the enemy. *Sirius* and *Brilliant* were already past the Stroom Bank buoy when the wind changed, revealing

the arrangements to the enemy, who extinguished the flares with gunfire.

The *Sirius* was already in a sinking condition when at length the two ships, having failed to find the entrance, grounded, and were forced therefore to sink themselves at a point about four hundred yards east of the piers, and their crews were taken off by motor launches under Lieutenant K. R. Hoare, R.N.V.R., and Lieutenant R. Bourke, R.N.V.R.

The motor launches here were under the command of Commander Hamilton Benn, R.N.V.R., D.S.O., M.P., while those at Zeebrugge were commanded by Captain R. Collins, R.N. (the Vice-Admiral's Flag-Captain).

All the coastal motor boats were commanded by Lieutenant A. P. Wellman, D.S.O., R.N. The torpedo-boat destroyer flotilla was commanded by Captain Wilfred Tomkinson, R.N.

The difficulty of the operation is to be gauged from the fact that from Zeebrugge to Ostend the enemy batteries number not less than 120 heavy guns, which can concentrate on retiring ships, during daylight, up to a distance of about sixteen miles. This imposes as a condition of success that the operation must be carried out at night, and not late in the night. It must take place at high water, with the wind from the right quarter, and with a calm sea for the small craft. The operation cannot be rehearsed beforehand, since the essence of it is secrecy, and though one might have to wait a long time to realise all the essential conditions of wind and weather, secrecy wears badly when large numbers of men are brought together in readiness for the attack.

OSTEND

Second Attack

DUNKIRK, 11th May, 1918.

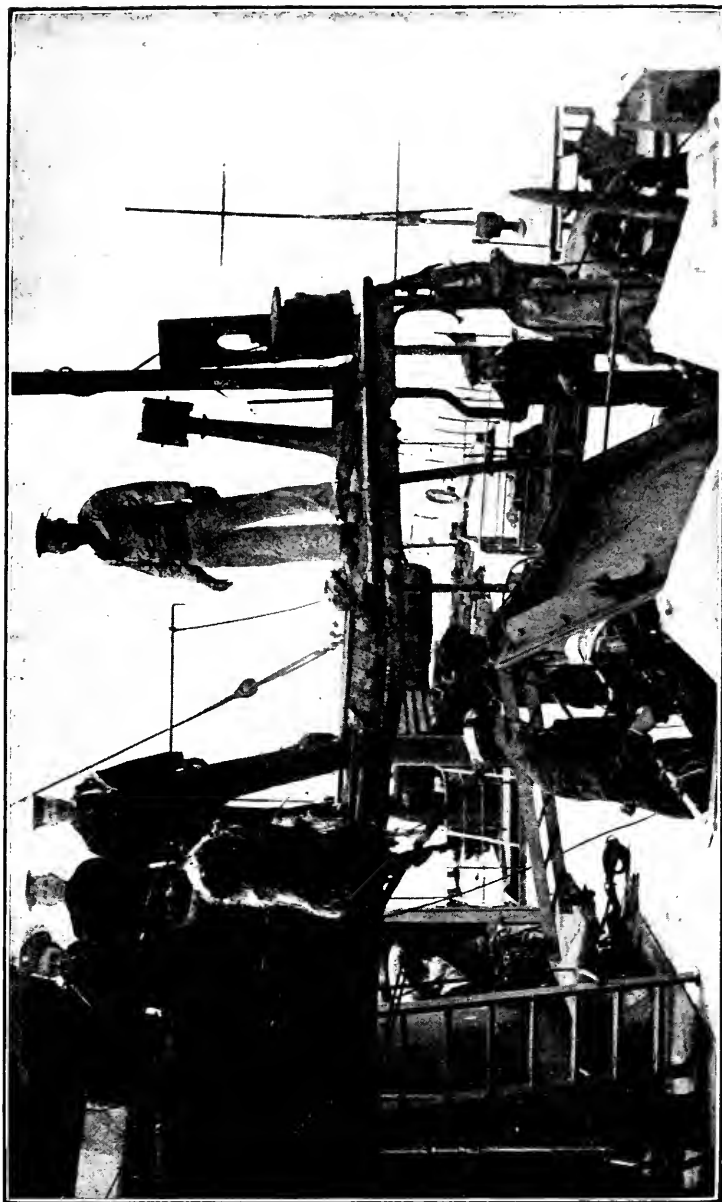
THE *Sirius* lies in the surf some two thousand yards east of the entrance to Ostend Harbour, which she failed so gallantly to block; and when, in the early hours of yesterday morning, the *Vindictive* groped her way through the smoke-screen and headed for the entrance, it was as though the old fighting-ship awoke and looked on. A coastal motor-boat had visited her and hung a flare in her slack and rusty rigging; and that eye of unsteady fire, paling in the blaze of the star-shells or reddening through the drift of the smoke, watched the whole great enterprise, from the moment when it hung in doubt to its ultimate triumphant success.

The planning and execution of that success had been entrusted by the Vice-Admiral, Sir Roger Keyes, to Commodore Hubert Lynes, C.M.G., who directed the previous attempt to block the harbour with *Sirius* and *Brilliant*. Upon that occasion, a combination of unforeseen, and unforeseeable, conditions had fought against him; upon this, the main problem was to secure the effect of a surprise attack upon an enemy who was clearly, from his ascertained dispositions, expecting him. *Sirius* and *Brilliant* had been baffled by the displacement of the Stroom Bank buoy, which

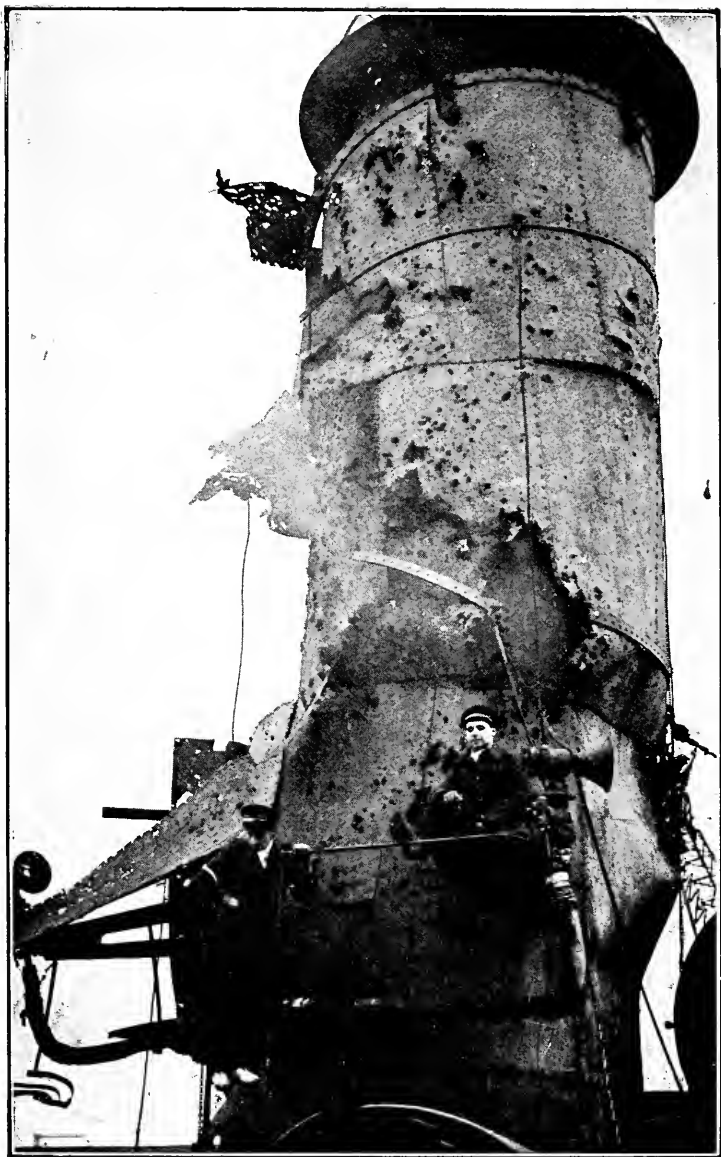
marks the channel to the harbour entrance, but since then aerial reconnaissance had established that the Germans had removed the buoy altogether and that there were now no guiding marks of any kind. They had also cut gaps in the piers as a precaution against a landing; and, further, when towards midnight on Thursday the ships moved from their anchorage, it was known that some nine German destroyers were out and at large upon the coast. The solution of the problem is best indicated by the chronicle of the event.

It was a night that promised well for the enterprise—nearly windless, and what little breeze stirred came from a point or so west of north; a sky of lead-blue, faintly star-dotted, and no moon; a still sea for the small craft, the motor launches and the coastal motor-boats, whose work is done close in shore. From the destroyer which served the Commodore for flagship, the remainder of the force was visible only as swift silhouettes of blackness, destroyers bulking like cruisers in the darkness, motor-launches like destroyers, and coastal motor-boats showing themselves as racing hillocks of foam. From Dunkirk, a sudden and brief flurry of gunfire announced that German aeroplanes were about—they were actually on their way to visit Calais; and over the invisible coast of Flanders the summer-lightning of the restless artillery rose and fell monotonously.

“There’s *Vindictive!*” The muffled seamen and Marines standing by the torpedo-tubes and the guns turned at that name to gaze at the great black ship, seen mistily through the streaming smoke from the destroyer’s funnels, plodding silently to her goal and her end. Photographs have made familiar that high-



THE WRECKED BRIDGE OF THE "IRIS"

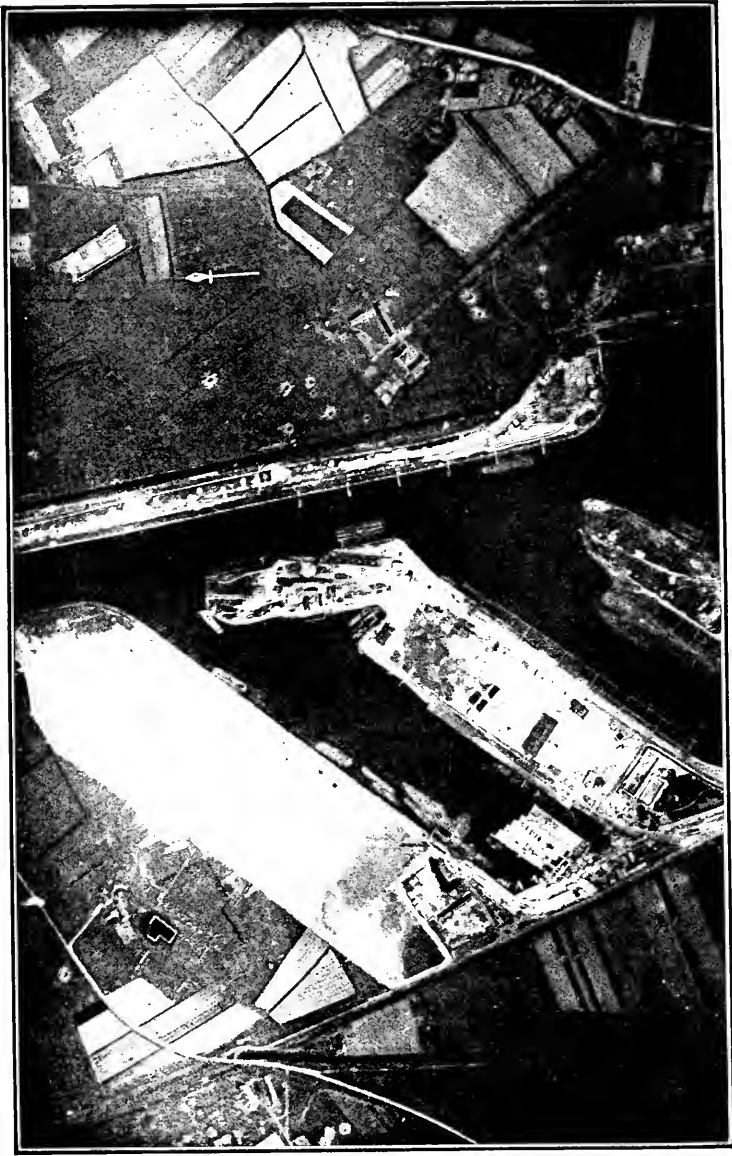


ONE OF THE FUNNELS OF THE "VINDICTIVE"
After the Engagement.



OFFICIAL SEA-PLANE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE LOCK-GATES

And the Approach to the Lock at Zeebrugge, showing the Sunken Block-Ships.



OFFICIAL SEA-PLANE PHOTOGRAPH OF BRUGES
Storing Torpedo-boats, Torpedo-boat Destroyers, and Submarines "bottled up."

sided profile and the tall funnels, with their Zeebrugge scars, always with a background of the pier at Dover against which she lay to be fitted for her last task; now there was added to her the environment of the night and the sea and the greatness and tragedy of her mission.

She receded into the night astern as the destroyer raced on to lay the light buoy that was to be her guide, and those on board saw her no more. She passed thence into the hands of the small craft, whose mission it was to guide her, light her, and hide her in the clouds of the smoke-screen.

There was no preliminary bombardment of the harbour and the batteries as before the previous attempt; that was to be the first element in the surprise. A time-table had been laid down for every stage of the operation; and the staff work beforehand had even included precise orders for the laying of the smoke barrage, with plans calculated for every direction of wind. The monitors, anchored in their firing-positions far to seaward, awaited their signal; the great siege batteries of the Royal Marine Artillery in Flanders—among the largest guns that have ever been placed on land-mountings—stood by likewise to neutralise the big German artillery along the coast; and the airmen who were to collaborate with an aerial bombardment of the town waited somewhere in the darkness overhead. The destroyers patrolled to seaward of the small craft.

The *Vindictive*, always at that solemn gait of hers, found the flagship's light-buoy and bore up for where a coastal motor-boat, commanded by Lieutenant William R. Slayter, R.N., was waiting by a calcium flare

upon the old position of the Stroom Bank buoy. Four minutes before she arrived there, and fifteen minutes only before she was due at the harbour mouth, the signal for the guns to open was given. Two motor-boats, under Lieutenant Darrel Reid, R.N.R., and Lieutenant Albert L. Poland, R.N., dashed in towards the ends of the high wooden piers and torpedoed them. There was a machine-gun on the end of the western pier, and that vanished in the roar and the leap of flame and debris which called to the guns. Over the town a flame suddenly appeared high in air, and sank slowly earthwards—the signal that the aeroplanes had seen and understood; and almost coincident with their first bombs came the first shells whooping up from the monitors at sea. The surprise part of the attack was sprung.

The surprise, despite the Germans' watchfulness, seems to have been complete. Up till the moment when the torpedoes of the motor-boats exploded, there had not been a shot from the land—only occasional routine star-shells. The motor-launches were doing their work magnificently. These pocket-warships, manned by officers and men of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, are specialists at smoke-production; they built to either hand of the *Vindictive's* course the likeness of a dense sea-mist driving landward with the wind. The star-shells paled and were lost as they sank in it; the beams of the searchlights seemed to break off short upon its front. It blinded the observers of the great batteries when suddenly, upon the warning of the explosions, the guns roared into action.

There was a while of tremendous uproar. The coast about Ostend is ponderously equipped with bat-

teries, each with its name known and identified: Tirpitz, Hindenburg, Deutschland, Cecilia, and the rest; they register from six inches up to monsters of fifteen-inch naval pieces in land-turrets, and the Royal Marine Artillery fights a war-long duel with them. These now opened fire into the smoke and over it at the monitors; the Marines and the monitors replied; and, meanwhile, the aeroplanes were bombing methodically and the anti-aircraft guns were searching the skies for them. Star-shells spouted up and floated down, lighting the smoke banks with spreading green fires; and those strings of luminous green balls, which airmen call "flaming onions," soared up to lose themselves in the clouds. Through all this stridency and blaze of conflict, the old *Vindictive*, still unhurrying, was walking the lighted waters towards the entrance.

It was then that those on the destroyers became aware that what had seemed to be merely smoke was wet and cold, that the rigging was beginning to drip, that there were no longer any stars—a sea-fog had come on.

The destroyers had to turn on their lights and use their syrens to keep in touch with each other; the air attack was suspended, and *Vindictive*, with some distance yet to go, found herself in gross darkness.

There were motor-boats to either side of her, escorting her to the entrance, and these were supplied with what are called Dover flares—enormous lights capable of illuminating square miles of sea at once. A "Very" pistol was fired as a signal to light these; but the fog and the smoke together were too dense for even the flares. *Vindictive* then put her helm over and started to cruise to find the entrance. Twice in her wander-

ings she must have passed across it, and at her third turn, upon reaching the position at which she had first lost her way, there came a rift in the mist, and she saw the entrance clear, the piers to either side and the opening dead ahead. The inevitable motor-boat dashed up (No. 22, commanded by Acting Lieutenant Guy L. Cockburn, R.N.), raced on into the opening under a heavy and momentarily growing fire, and planted a flare on the water between the piers. *Vindictive* steamed over it and on. She was in.

The guns found her at once. She was hit every few seconds after she entered, her scarred hull broken afresh in a score of places and her decks and upper works swept. The machine-gun on the end of the western pier had been put out of action by the motor-boat's torpedo, but from other machine-guns at the inshore ends of the pier, from a position on the front, and from machine-guns apparently firing over the eastern pier, there converged upon her a hail of lead. The after-control was demolished by a shell which killed all its occupants, including Sub-Lieutenant Angus H. MacLachlan, who was in command of it. Upper and lower bridges and chart-room were swept by bullets, and Commander Godsall, R.N., ordered his officers to go with him to the conning-tower.

They observed through the observation slit in the steel wall of the conning-tower that the eastern pier was breached some two hundred yards from its seaward end, as though at some time a ship had been in collision with it. They saw the front of the town silhouetted again and again in the light of the guns that blazed at them; the night was a patchwork of fire and darkness. Immediately after passing the breach

in the pier, Commander Godsall left the conning-tower and went out on deck, the better to watch the ship's movements; he chose his position, and called in through the slit of the conning-tower his order to star-board the helm. The *Vindictive* responded; she laid her battered nose to the eastern pier and prepared to swing her 320 feet of length across the channel.

It was at that moment that a shell from the shore batteries struck the conning-tower. Lieutenant Sir John Alleyne and Lieutenant V. A. C. Crutchley, R.N., were still within; Commander Godsall was close to the tower outside. Lieutenant Alleyne was stunned by the shock; Lieutenant Crutchley shouted through the slit to the Commander, and, receiving no answer, rang the port engine full speed astern to help in swinging the ship. By this time she was lying at an angle of about forty degrees to the pier, and seemed to be hard and fast, so that it was impossible to bring her further round.

After working the engines for some minutes to no effect, Lieutenant Crutchley gave the order to clear the engine-room and abandon ship, according to the programme previously laid down. Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Wm. A. Bury, who was the last to leave the engine-room, blew the main charges by the switch installed aft; Lieutenant Crutchley blew the auxiliary charges in the forward six-inch magazine from the conning-tower. Those on board felt the old ship shrug as the explosive tore the bottom plates and the bulk-heads from her; she sank about six feet and lay upon the bottom of the channel. Her work was done.

It is to be presumed that Commander Godsall was killed by the shell which struck the conning-tower.

Lieutenant Crutchley, searching the ship before he left her, failed to find his body, or that of Sub-Lieutenant MacLachlan, in that wilderness of splintered wood and shattered steel. In the previous attempt to block the port, Commander Godsall had commanded *Brilliant*, and, together with all the officers of that ship and of *Sirius*, had volunteered at once for a further operation.

Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Bury, who was severely wounded, had been in *Vindictive* in her attack on the Zeebrugge Mole; he had urged upon the Vice-Admiral his claim to remain with her, with four Engine-room Artificers, in view of his and their special knowledge of their engines. The names of these four are as follows: H. Cavanagh, H.M.S. *Vindictive*, wounded; N. Carroll, Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham, wounded; A. Thomas, H.M.S. *Lion*, missing; H. Harris, H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*.

The Coxswain was First-Class Petty Officer J. J. Reed, Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham, who had been with Commander Godsall in *Brilliant*, and whose urgent request to be allowed to remain with him had been granted. The remainder of the crew were selected from a large number of volunteers from the ships of the Dover patrol.

Most of the casualties were incurred while the ship was being abandoned. The men behaved with just that cheery discipline and courage which distinguished them in the Zeebrugge raid.

Petty Officer Reed found Lieutenant Alleyne in the conning tower, still unconscious, and carried him aft under a storm of fire from the machine-guns. Lieutenant Alleyne was badly hit before he could be got

over the side, and fell into the water. Here he managed to catch hold of a boat-fall, and a motor-launch, under Lieutenant Bourke, R.N.V.R., succeeded in rescuing him and two other wounded men.

The remainder of the crew were taken off by Motor-Launch 254, under Lieutenant Geoffrey H. Drummond, R.N.V.R., under a fierce fire. When finally he reached the *Warwick* the launch was practically in a sinking condition; her bows were shot to pieces; Lieutenant Drummond was himself severely wounded, his second in command, Lieutenant Gordon Ross, R.N.V.R., and one hand were killed; a number of others were wounded. The launch was found to be too damaged to tow, and day was breaking; she and the *Warwick* were in easy range of the forts; so as soon as her crew and the *Vindictive's* survivors were transferred, a demolition charge was placed in her engine-room and she was sunk.

Always according to programme, the recall rockets for the small craft were fired from the flagship at 2.30 a.m. The great red rockets whizzed up to lose themselves in the fog; they cannot have been visible half a mile away; but the work was done, and one by one the launches and motor-boats commenced to appear from the fog, stopped their engines alongside the destroyers and exchanged news with them. There were wounded men to be transferred and dead men to be reported—their names called briefly across the water from the little swaying deck to the crowded rail above. But no one had seen a single enemy craft; the nine German destroyers who were out and free to fight had chosen the discreeter part.

Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes was present at the operation in the destroyer *Warwick*. Commander

Hamilton Benn, R.N.V.R., D.S.O., M.P., was in command of the motor-launches, and Lieutenant Francis C. Harrison, D.S.O., R.N., of the coastal motor-boats. The central smoke-screen was entrusted to Sub-Lieutenant Humphrey V. Low, R.N., and Sub-Lieutenant Leslie R. Blake, R.N.R. Casualties, as at present reported, stand at two officers killed and six men; two officers and ten men, all of *Vindictive*, missing, believed killed; and four officers and eight men wounded.

It is not claimed by the officers who carried out the operation that Ostend Harbour is completely blocked; but its purpose—to embarrass the enemy and make the harbour impracticable to any but small craft and dredging operations difficult—has been fully accomplished.

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