



REINHARD SCHEER

**GERMANY'S
HIGH SEAS
FLEET
IN THE WW1**

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Preface

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The victor has the privilege of writing the story of the war; for one mistrusts the vanquished, because he will try to palliate and excuse his defeats. But we are victors and vanquished at one and the same time, and in depicting our success the difficult problem confronts us of not forgetting that our strength did not last out to the end.

Exceptionally tragic is the fate of our Fleet. It embodied the sense of power resulting from the unification of the Empire, a sense which was conscious of its responsibility to provide for the suitable security of our immensely flourishing political and economical expansion. By creating a fleet we strengthened our claim to sea-power, without which the Empire must wither away, we remained a thorn in the side of the British, and their ill-will was the constant accompaniment of our growth. The freedom of the seas, which we strove for in line with our evolution, England was never willing to grant, even if it had to come to a world-War on the point.

In the four years' struggle which Germany waged against the desire of its enemies to destroy it, the Fleet was able, beyond all foreign expectations, to hold its own, and what is more, it was our conduct of the naval war that succeeded in forcing the stubborn enemy to the brink of destruction. But, nevertheless, we have lost the war, and with the surrender of the German Fleet the expectations of an independent shaping of our destiny have vanished for long enough.

To the history of the naval war, as it presented itself to me and was for some years carried on under my guidance,

this book will add a contribution. I should like, however, along with the description of my war experiences, to give the assurance to the German people that the German Fleet, which ventured to boast of being a favourite creation of the nation, strove to do its duty, and entered into the war inspired only by the thought of justifying the confidence reposed in it and of standing on an equal footing with the warriors on land. The remembrance of the famous deeds which were accomplished on the sea will henceforth preserve over the grave of the German Fleet the hope that our race will succeed in creating for itself a position among the nations worthy of the German people.

SCHEER.

Weimar, September, 1919.

Introduction

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The origin of the world-war lies in the opposition between the Anglo-Saxon and the German conceptions of the world. On the former side is the claim to the position of unrestricted primacy in sea-power, to the dominion of the seas, to the prerogative of ocean-trade and to a levy on the treasures of all the earth. "We are the first nation of the world" is the dogma of every Englishman, and he cannot conceive how others can doubt it.

English history supplies the proof of the application - just as energetic as inconsiderate - of this conception. Even one of the greatest eulogists of the English methods in naval warfare - which best reflect English history - the American, Captain Mahan, made famous through his book, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History," characterises it in his observations on the North American War of Independence, which ended in 1783": "To quote again the [French] summary before given, their [the Allies - America, France and Spain] object was 'to avenge their respective injuries, and to put an end to that tyrannical Empire which England claims to maintain upon the ocean.' The revenge they had obtained was barren of benefit to themselves. They had, so that generation thought, injured England by liberating America; but they had not righted their wrongs in Gibraltar and Jamaica. The English fleet had not received any such treatment as would lessen its haughty self-reliance, the armed neutrality of the Northern Powers had been allowed to pass fruitlessly away, and the English Empire over the seas soon became as tyrannical and more absolute than

ever." Still, England has in process of time understood how to create an almost universal recognition of its claim. Its whole policy, based on the authority of its Fleet and the favourable situation of the British Isles, has always been adapted to the principle that all that may contribute "*ad majorem gloriam Britanniae*" is of advantage also to the progress of mankind.

The principal feature of the English character is markedly materialistic and reveals itself in a striving for power and profit. The commercial spirit, which animates the individual Englishman, colours the political and military dealings of the whole people. Their claims, to themselves a matter of course, went so far always that they never granted advantages to another, even if their utilisation was not possible to themselves at the time, but might perhaps be so later. That has manifested itself most clearly in the Colonial sphere.

The edifice of English world-importance and might has rested for a hundred years on the fame of Trafalgar, and they have carefully avoided hazarding it. They have besides, with skill and success, left untried no means of accentuating the impression of power and using it. What we should consider boastful was to the British only the expression of their full conviction and an obvious means to their end. In support of this we may mention such expressions as: "We have the ships, we have the men, we have the money, too," as well as ships' names, such as *Irresistible*, *Invincible*, *Indomitable*, *Formidable*, and many others.

This method, fundamentally, is really as the Poles asunder from ours, but still it does not fail to leave an impression on many Germans owing to its pomposity and the customary embroidery of commonplaces about promoting the happiness of mankind.

On the opposite side Prussia - Germany! Its whole history filled with struggle and distress, because the wars of Europe were carried on by preference on its territory. It was the nation of the Categorical Imperative, ever ready for privations and sacrifices, always raising itself again, till it seemed at last to have succeeded through the unification of the Empire in being able to reap the fruits of its hard-won position of power. The victory over the hard times it had to pass through was due to its idealism and to its tried loyalty to the Fatherland under the oppressions of foreign rule. The strength of our defensive power rested above all things on our conscientiousness and thoroughness acquired by strict discipline.

In contrast to the inaccessibility of the English island-position was our Continental situation in the heart of Europe, in many respects without natural defence on the frontiers, Instead of having wealth pouring in from all quarters of the globe, we had to toil in the sweat of our brows to support our people on the scanty native soil ; and yet we succeeded, in defiance of all difficulties, in elevating and advancing in undreamt-of fashion the economic status of the people while at the same time effecting their political unification.

In such a situation and after such experiences, schemes of conquest were utterly absent from the minds of the German people. They sought to find satisfaction for their need of expansion in peaceful fashion, so as not to hazard lightly their hard-won position of power. That we should be regarded as an unwelcome intruder in the circle of nations who felt themselves called upon to settle the fate of Europe and the world was due, apart from the deeply-wounded vanity of the French, to the mistrust of the British, to whose way of thinking our harmlessness appeared incredible.

In order to retain our position and to ensure the maintenance of our increasing wealth we had no other choice than to secure the ability to defend ourselves according to the old-established principle of the Wars of Liberation : by efficiency to compensate for what was lacking in numbers. How could we establish armies superior to those of our neighbours otherwise than by efficiency?

With the same fundamental motive we turned to the building-up of our sea power, as, owing to the increased dependence of our Administration on foreign countries and to the investment of vaster sums in German property on and oversea, our development unquestionably required protection.

The intention imputed to us of wishing to usurp British world-power never existed; our aims were much more simply explained by the provisions of the Navy Bills of a limited number of ships, which nowhere approached the English total. Nevertheless England considered herself threatened and saw in us a rival who must at any cost be destroyed. That this sentiment prevailed over there lay indeed less in the fact of the appearance of a sea Power of the second rank in a corner of the North Sea far removed from the world-oceans, than in the estimate of its worth. They foresaw the exercise in it of a spirit of progress which characterised the German nature, by which England felt herself hampered and prejudiced.

It is not disputed that through our fleet-construction a sharper note was introduced into our relations with England than would have resulted from peaceful competition alone, but it is not a just judgement, nor one going to the foundation of the German-English relations, if the disaster of the world-war or even of the unsuccessful result of the war is attributed simply to the building of the German Fleet. To

that end it is necessary to consider the justification of our fleet-building and the reasons why the war was lost and what prospects existed for us of winning it. In that way we shall recognise the decisive role which fell to naval power after this struggle of nations grew into a world-war through England's accession to the side of Russia and France.

The mere apprehension of falling out with England could not and dare not form ground for refusing to such an important part of our national wealth as had accumulated in the undertakings bound up with our sea interests the necessary protection through a fleet, which the townsman, dependent on inland activities, enjoyed in the shape of our army and accepted as quite a matter of course.

The Empire was under an obligation to support and protect in their projects the shippers and merchants who undertook to dispose of the surplusage of our industrial energy in foreign lands and there establish new enterprises bringing profit to Germany. This connection with overseas was securing us universal benefit in so far as, by its means, the Homeland was enabled to employ and to feed all its inhabitants, so that, in spite of the great increase of population, emigration was no longer required as a safety-valve for the surplus man-strength. What the maintenance of the man-strength of a country means when converted into work, the last ten years and the war-years have shown us quite remarkably.

It is expected of every small State that it should make whatever efforts lie in its power to justify a claim to consideration of its independence. On this is based the guarantee, won in the international life of peoples with the advance of civilisation, that the weaker will not unjustifiably be fallen upon by the stronger.

The conduct of a Great Power which left its sea-interests without protection would have been as unworthy and contemptible as dishonourable cowardice in an individual; but it would have been most highly impolitic also, because it would have made it dependent on States more powerful at sea. The best army we could create would lose in value if Germany remained with the Achilles-heel of an unprotected foreign trade amounting to thousands of millions. Although the purpose of our competition on a peaceful footing followed from the modesty of our colonial claims, our policy did not succeed in removing England's suspicion ; but, considering the diversity of the claims of both peoples, having its roots in their world views, all the art of diplomacy could not have succeeded in so far bridging over the antagonisms that the recourse to arms would have been spared us.

Was there perchance still another method of creating, for ourselves the necessary protection against attacks at sea, which did not bear the provocative character that in England was attributed to the building of our High Sea Fleet ? Just as the desire for a German Fleet had for a long time been popular, so has the average German had little idea of the meaning of sea power and of its practical application. This is not to be wondered at, in view of the complete absence of national naval war-history. It will hence be necessary, in order to answer the question whether we chose the suitable naval armament for the condition of affairs in which the new Germany saw itself placed, to enter somewhat more closely into the peculiarities of naval warfare.

It has been held as an acknowledged axiom, proved from war-history, that the struggle at sea must be directed to gaining the mastery of the sea, i.e. to removing all

opposition which stands in the way of its free and unhindered use.

The chief resisting strength lies in the enemy Fleet, and a successful struggle against it first renders possible the utilisation of the mastery of the seas, for thereupon one's own Fleet can go out with the object of attacking the enemy coasts or oversea possessions, of carrying out landings or preparing and covering the same on a larger scale (invasion). Finally, it can further shut off the enemy by means of a blockade from every sort of import from overseas and capture his merchant-ships with their valuable cargoes, until they are driven off the open sea. Contrary to the international usage in land warfare of sparing private property, there exists the principle of prize-right at sea, which is nothing more than a relic of the piracy which was pursued so vigorously in the form of privateering by the freebooters in the great naval war a hundred years ago.

The abrogation of the right of prize has hitherto always been frustrated by the opposition of England, although she herself possesses the most extensive merchant-shipping trade. For she looks for the chief effect of her sea power to the damaging of the enemy's sea-trade. In the course of time England, apparently yielding to the pressure of the majority of the other maritime States, has conceded limitations of the blockade and naval prize-rights - with the mental reservation, however, of disregarding them at pleasure - which suited the predominant Continental interest of these States. It deserves especially to be noticed that England has held inflexibly to this right to damage enemy (and neutral) trade because she was convinced of her superiority at sea. When our trade-war began, unexpectedly, to be injurious to the island-people they set

all the machinery possible in motion to cause its condemnation.

It is possible in certain circumstances for the less powerful maritime States, according to position, coast-formation and ocean traffic, to protect themselves at their sensitive and assailable points by measures of coast-defence.

With us this course has found its zealous champions, first on account of cheapness, partly from a desire not to provoke the more powerful States, and finally on the ground of strategical considerations which lay in the same direction as those of the *jeune école* in France. The idea was to check an opponent by means of guerilla warfare and through direct attack on enemy trade, but the only result of the *jeune école* in France has been that the French Navy has sunk into insignificance. A system of guerilla warfare remains a struggle with inadequate means, which does not guarantee any success. England rightly did not at all fear the cruiser-war on her shipping trade, otherwise she would have given way on the question of the naval prize-right. As regards coast defence, we did not consider that policy, as it could not hinder the English from harming us, while it in no way affected them, seeing that our coasts do not impinge on the world-traffic routes, and did not come within the range of operations.

If the damage caused to one's own sea-trade (including that of the Colonies) becomes intolerable, as in our own case, means of coast-defence provide no adequate protection.

If it comes to the point that one must decide antagonisms by arms, the foremost consideration is no longer "how can I defend myself?" but "how can I hit the

enemy most severely?" Attack, not defence, leads most quickly to the goal.

The best deterrent from war is, moreover, to impress on the enemy the certainty that he must thereby suffer considerably.

The method adopted by us of creating an efficient battle-fleet, an engagement with which involved a risk for England, offered not only the greatest prospect of preventing war, but also, if war could not be avoided, the best possibility of striking the enemy effectively. Of the issue of a fleet action it could with certainty be stated that the resultant damage to the English supremacy at sea would be great and correspond proportionately with our losses. Whilst we at need could get over such a sacrifice, it must exercise an intolerable effect on England, which relied on its sea power alone. How far these considerations, on which the construction of our Fleet was based, were recognised as correct on the English side, can be judged from the tactics of England's Fleet in the world-war, which throughout the struggle were based on the most anxious efforts to avoid suffering any real injury.

How our Fleet conducted itself in opposition to this, and succeeded in making the war at sea an effective menace to England will be evident from the following account of the war.

Chapter 1

The Outbreak of the War

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The visit of an English squadron for the Kiel Week in June, 1914, seemed to indicate a desire to give visible expression to the fact that the political situation had eased. Although we could not suppress a certain feeling of doubt as to the sincerity of their intentions, everyone on our side displayed the greatest readiness to receive the foreign guests with hospitality and comradeship.

The opportunity of seeing great English fighting-ships and their ships' companies at close quarters had become so rare an event that on this account alone the visit was anticipated with the liveliest interest. All measures were taken to facilitate the entrance of the English into Kiel Harbour and make it easy for them to take up their station and communicate with the shore, and it goes without saying that they were allotted the best places in the line, close to the Imperial yacht. Accustomed as we were from early times to regard the English ships as models, the external appearance of which alone produced the impression of perfection, it was with a feeling of pardonable pride that we now had an opportunity of making comparisons which were not in our disfavour. The English ships comprised a division of four battleships under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir George Warrender, who was flying his flag in the battleship King George V., which was accompanied by Audacious, Ajax, and Centurion, and a squadron of light cruisers, Southampton, Birmingham, and Nottingham, under Commodore Goodenough..

While the time of the senior naval officers was fully taken up with official visits and ceremonies, the juniors largely made use of the facilities afforded them to visit Hamburg and Berlin by rail. Friendly relations were soon established between the men, after the way of seafaring folk, and these were further promoted by games and festivities to their taste.

The feeling of camaraderie which, as my experience went, had marked intercourse between German and English naval officers, as men of similar ways of thought and capacity, up to the year 1895, had now disappeared as a result of the attitude of hostility towards our progress which had been displayed by English statesmen, especially in recent years. Every attempt to sham a relationship to which our inmost feelings did not correspond would have compromised our dignity and lowered us in the eyes of the English. It is also easy to realise that there could be no question of making an impression by a full-dress muster of every possible ship. For this occasion only those of our ships were assembled at Kiel which were based thereon.

As our Fleet increased, it had become necessary to distribute the various squadrons between the two main bases, Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, both with a view to using simultaneously the available docking facilities and also to keeping the ships' companies in touch with their nucleus crews on land. The families, too, resided at the headquarters of these nucleus crews, to which the long service men, especially the warrant and petty officers, returned on receiving a special order and there awaited fresh employment. The ships spent the unfortunately all too short periods which the annual training permitted, at their bases.

The disturbing element in this gay and peaceful picture, in which the only note of rivalry was sounded by competitions in skill in the realms of sport, was the news of the murder of the Austrian heir, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The Kaiser left Kiel the very next day and travelled to Berlin. The English ships departed on June 29, their light cruisers using the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal. They thus had an opportunity of making a close acquaintance with the new waterway which had only been completed a few weeks before. Whether it could be also used by our heavy ships was one of their questions which must be laid to the account of untimely curiosity. The deepening and widening of the Canal and the construction of the new locks at the entrances had been completed only just in time. They had become necessary to permit the passage of the big ships, the building of which had been imposed upon us by the introduction of the "Dreadnought" type. The unsuitability of this highway for battle-cruisers like the *Blücher* and the battleships of the "Nassau" class had been a matter of much concern to our naval High Command since 1909, on account of the injurious effect on the strategic situation. It also involved laying an unnecessary burden on our main base in the North Sea, which could not keep pace with the growing number of ships assigned to it.

About a week later the Kaiser returned to Kiel, and on July 5 started out for his usual cruise to Norway. As the situation could by no means be considered reassuring, exhaustive conferences were held between the Naval authorities in Berlin and the Fleet to discuss the various contingencies of war. As subsequent events showed, the most noteworthy of these was the hypothesis that England would remain neutral in the collision with Russia, and most probably her Ally, France, with which we were threatened. It

was on this account that the Fleet was allowed to leave for the summer cruise to Norway at the time provided for in the annual scheme.

This decision, as indeed that of the Kaiser, can only be attributed to carelessness or an intention to show no nervousness. That intention, in turn, can only have been due to a firm conviction of England's neutrality.

In the annual scheme the summer cruise represented the high watermark of the development attained. As a reward for the effort shown in daily work, the individual training of the ships and the handling of separate squadrons as well as the whole Fleet, it ended with a visit to foreign ports instead of a sojourn in our own harbours.

This excursion abroad not only served the purpose of keeping up interest in the work but also helped us to maintain our political prestige by showing the flag, especially when an impression of power was thereby created.

When a single gunboat turned up on a distant shore to show the German flag there, the foreigner at once professed to regard it as obvious that this ship was the emissary of the Imperial Government which, for the matter of that, had at home an imposing Fleet and a great Army to secure our position in Europe. A corresponding display of power on the spot was far more convincing and at the same time revealed the capabilities of our shipbuilding industry and refuted the widespread legend that England alone had the best and largest ships.

In view of the uncertain political situation since the summer of 1909 we had discontinued the practice of sending the whole Fleet, or substantial parts of it, to great distances such as the Mediterranean, to Spanish or Portuguese harbours, Cape Verde and the Azores. Thus for

our purpose the principal country for us to visit was Norway, in the numerous fjords of whose coast it was possible to distribute the ships to the satisfaction of all concerned and avoid overwhelming the inhabitants with a mass of sailors on leave. The distribution also made a greater variety of excursions available to the men, as each ship had its particular place of call.

There had only been one break - in the summer of 1912 - in our annual visit to the Norwegian coast since 1910. In this year, 1914, the general political situation required that the visit of the Kaiser and the Fleet should have its usual objective. A cruise to the coasts of the eastern Baltic, even a hasty call at our harbours in that region, does not appear to have been in keeping with the policy we were pursuing at this critical moment.

With the cruise to Norway we abandoned the chance of sending our Fleet east and thus bringing pressure to bear on Russia to induce her to stop her preparations for war. The use of the floating army, which requires no special mobilisation, is ideal for such a purpose. In that case Danzig Bay would have offered us a firstclass base, as the larger units could have deployed from there with extreme ease in contrast to the difficult exits from the estuaries of the North Sea rivers - the Elbe, Weser, Jade and Ems, while the light forces attached to the Fleet would have found a fortified base in the harbour of Neufahrwasser.

How Norway could have been chosen for the goal of our cruise in the situation at that moment seems incredible and gives one the impression that we deliberately intended to shut our eyes to the danger. The chance of appearing with a strong naval force, first as a demonstration and later in dead earnest, in our eastern waters was from the start not given the consideration its importance merited.

On July 14 Squadron II, of which I had assumed command at the beginning of February in the previous year, in succession to Vice-Admiral von Ingenahl, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, left Kiel Bay to rendezvous off Skagen with the ships coming from Wilhelmshaven and then carry out extensive fleet exercises which were principally concerned with the solution of tactical problems. Through the addition of a third squadron to the High Sea Fleet these exercises were of particular importance for this cruise, as this newly-formed third squadron had as yet had no chance of taking part in combined exercises.

The practical application of theoretical tactics to the circumstances arising out of battle is inexhaustible and provides fresh material from year to year.

The new squadron required training in that respect. In war games, indeed, very useful preliminary work can be done in this department" but that tactical insight which knows how to exploit a favourable situation is itself first trained on the open sea and in the last resort it is the sum of the impressions received which first enables the commander to come to the right decision in the time available, which is often only a matter of seconds. For such decisions there are no rules, however valuable certain tactical principles may be, which have been sanctified by experience.

In the era of sailing ships it was a simple matter, owing to the slow deployment for battle and the small range of the guns. But to-day it is altogether different, in view of the great speed of the ships and the huge range of the guns. The first shells usually arrive the moment the enemy is seen, and we have known cases in which the impact of the enemy's projectiles is the first notification of his being in the

vicinity, and he has not become visible until some time afterwards.

With regard to England, we were faced with a particularly difficult, indeed almost insoluble problem. We had to deal with our enemy in such a way as to give greater effect to our smaller calibre guns at short range and be able to use a torpedo wherever possible. From the English we had to expect that in view of the greater speed possessed by their ships of every type and their heavier artillery, they would select the range that suited them and fight a "holding-off" action. That, indeed, is exactly what happened in the war. The necessity of practical training in this department illustrates the importance of the addition of a third squadron.

Further, Squadron III, comprising our latest battleships, was not at full strength, but just formed a division consisting of the Prinz Regent Luitpold, (flagship), and the battleships Kaiser, Kaiserin, and König Albert. In the course of the winter, beginning at the end of December, the Kaiser and König Albert had been away on a longish cruise in foreign waters. The ships had paid a visit to our colonies - the Cameroons and German South-West Africa - visited the harbours of Brazil and the Argentine, and then passed through the Straits of Magellan to the west coast of South America and Chile. The ships had behaved very well on the distant cruise, which was particularly arduous on account of the long sojourn in the tropics. In particular, the engine-room personnel had had an opportunity of becoming thoroughly familiar with the internal arrangements. On the other hand battle-practice could not be carried out to the extent that it was at home, where no diversions were involved.

At the same time as we were starting on our Scandinavian cruise the English Fleet had assembled for a great test-mobilisation at Spithead. It was thus ready and thereafter continued so.

On our way north two French destroyers which we passed on July 16 so close that we could make out their names Stilette and Trombeau—reminded us that the President of the French Republic, Poincaré, was on his way from Dunkirk to St. Petersburg in the battleship France, accompanied by the cruiser Jean Bart, and might pass us at any time. We did not like the prospect of having to show him the usual courtesies on the high-seas—a salute—prescribed by international usage, so we drew ahead in order to avoid any chance of a meeting.

Our battle-practice was continued until July 24, on which day the high cliffs of the Norwegian coast were for the most part visible, thanks to the clear, fine weather. On July 22 we had crossed the 60th degree of latitude, which forms the boundary of home waters, but not for long. We stayed quite a short time in Norwegian waters, in fact just long enough to allow coaling from colliers sent to meet us at certain anchorages. My flagship Preussen and the battleship Schlesierr, which together formed one division, were looked after by the Dutch steamer Willi. The First Division was in the Nordfjord by Olde, the Second, comprising Hessen and Lothringen, was also in the Nordfjord, by Sandene, while the other half of the squadron, the Fourth Division, had called at Molde. In the same way the battle-cruisers and light cruisers of the Fleet, as well as the battleships of Squadrons I and II, were distributed among other inlets, notably the Sogne and Hardanger Fjords. The, very day we left, Saturday, July 25 the news reached us of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. In view of that we were not at all surprised to get an order to

hold ourselves ready to put to sea immediately. In the afternoon of the next day, Sunday, we left for the rendezvous appointed for the whole Fleet, about 250 nautical miles from the entrance to the Nordfjord.

After the Fleet had assembled the Flag Officers of the squadrons had a conference on the Fleet-Flagship, at which Admiral von Ingenohl explained the political situation and the necessity for our being prepared for the immediate outbreak of war. He also told us that England would probably remain neutral. On this subject we had received a report that King George of England had expressed himself in that sense to Prince Henry of Prussia. Notwithstanding this, every possible warlike precaution was taken for the rest of our homeward journey. But the Fleet was divided in such a way that Squadron I, under the command of Vice-Admiral von Lans, and comprising the four ships of the "Ostfriesland" class and the four of the "Nassau" class, with the battle-cruisers, steamed to Wilhelmshaven through the North Sea, while Squadrons II and III with the Fleet-Flagship returned to Kiel through the Kattegat. This distribution of the Fleet is manifest proof of our confidence that no attack threatened us from the side of England. It was only in the East that danger was visible, and accordingly it seemed inadvisable to remove all our big ships from the Baltic.

On July 29 the ships lay in Kiel Harbour and were engaged in effecting the pre-arranged measures which as a rule precede a regular mobilisation, measures which were ordered on account of the increasing tension of the political situation.

All our preparations were inspired by the impression that what we had to face was a war with Russia and France. Fuelling and taking in supplies took up the whole of July 29. We had not yet recalled the men on leave, as all hope of the

maintenance of peace had not by any means yet been abandoned. It was only on the following day that the news became more menacing and England's attitude more hostile. Squadron III accordingly made preparations to go through the Canal into the North Sea, while the final steps were now taken to make the ships ready for the change to battle conditions, which might at any time become necessary.

On July 31 the Commander-in-Chief in the Friedrich der Grosse passed into the Canal on his way to the North Sea. It was obvious from this step that for us the centre of gravity of the war at sea now lay in the west. Shortly before his departure I had an interview with Admiral von Ingenohl in which he told me that in case of war my task with Squadron II would be to deal with Russia.

It is easy to understand that this commission, which put me in a position to lead and execute the first naval enterprises independently, had a great attraction for me. The appointment of a new Commander-in-Chief for the Baltic in the person of Prince Henry of Prussia had no material effect on my freedom of action at sea, once we had set out for enemy waters; and, besides, Prince Henry's professional knowledge, his whole mode of thought and conception of responsibility offered a guarantee that his appointment could only serve a useful purpose. It may here be said at once that the royal Commander-in-Chief grasped and carried out in the most typical fashion the difficult and thankless task of our defensive operations in the Baltic, for which we disposed of very limited resources, both as regards numbers and efficiency, after England had appeared on the scene as the principal enemy. A Russian invasion like that of East Prussia, which might easily have been followed by another from the sea, and would have meant the total

destruction of numerous important and beautiful places on the Baltic coast, was spared us.

But our hopes of an independent Baltic operation were destroyed the very same day by the order to Squadron II to follow the others immediately to the North Sea. The High Sea Fleet was accordingly concentrated in the Jade on August 1 and at 8 o'clock in the evening the mobilisation order arrived, which was greeted by the crews of the ships with loud cheers.

Meanwhile, opinion had veered round completely as to the probable attitude of England, and it was accepted as certain in the Fleet that she would join the two opponents with whom we had alone been concerned at the outset. This view corresponded to the temper prevailing in the Fleet. We were fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, and that we should now be faced with a contest in which an honourable defeat might well be our only prospect. But nowhere was there the slightest sign of despondency over the enemy's overwhelming superiority, but rather a burning enthusiasm and lust of battle, worked up by the feeling of indignation at the oppression which that superiority had meant, and the conviction that our duty was now to put in our last ounce of strength lest we leave the Fatherland in the lurch. The crews needed no special exhortation to give of their best, for the joy of battle shone in their eyes. The leaders, calmly weighing up the prospects of battle, could only feel that the men's confidence in victory encouraged them to dare to the uttermost. The whole service was carried away by the feeling that we were under a duty to fulfil the expectations to which expression had many a time been given in peace.

During its history of barely more than fifty years, the Prussian and German Fleet had not been permitted an

opportunity of matching itself in a serious campaign with European opponents of equal standing, apart from individual affairs which justified the brightest hopes. Our ships had shown what they could do mainly in cooperating in the acquisition of our colonial possessions or maintaining respect for and upholding the prestige of the German flag against the encroachments of half-civilised or savage races. We had no personal experience of commanding and handling in battle the big ships which had recently come into existence. Nor, for the matter of that, had our most important opponent at sea, England.

The English Fleet had the advantage of looking back on a hundred years of proud tradition which must have given every man a sense of superiority based on the great deeds of the past. This could only be strengthened by the sight of their huge fleet, each unit of which in every class was supposed to represent the last word in the art of marine construction. The feeling was also supported by the British sailor's perfect familiarity with the sea and with conditions of life on board ship, a familiarity which took for granted all the hardships inseparable from his rough calling.

In our Fleet reigned a passionate determination not to fall behind our comrades of the Army, and a burning desire to lay the foundation-stone of a glorious tradition. Our advantage was that we had to establish our reputation with the nation, while the enemy had to defend his. We were urged on by the impulse to dare all, while he had to be careful that he did not prejudice his ancient fame.

There was only one opinion among us, from the Commander-in-Chief down to the latest recruit, about the attitude of the English Fleet. We were convinced that it would seek out and attack our Fleet the minute it showed itself and wherever it was. This could be accepted as certain

from all the lessons of English naval history, and the view was reinforced by the statement, so often made on the English side, that the boundaries of the operations of their fleet lay on the enemy's coasts. It was also confirmed by an earlier remark of the Civil Lord, Lee: "If it ever comes to war with Germany the nation will wake up one morning and find that it has possessed a fleet." All this pointed to the intention of making a quick and thorough job of it.

Right up to the last moment in which there was the remotest possibility of keeping England out of the war everything was avoided which could have provided a superficial excuse for the existence of a crisis. The Heligoland Bight was left open to traffic so far as it was not commanded by the guns on the Island; elsewhere there were none which had a sufficient range to stop traffic. We had never regarded it as possible that the English Fleet would be held back from battle and, as a "fleet in being," be restricted solely to blockading us from a distance, thereby itself running no risks.

The test mobilisation to which I have already referred and the advanced stage of preparation thus involved also seemed to indicate that offensive operations were to be expected immediately. This mobilisation at the same time afforded a proof of the resolve of the English Government not to be afraid of increasing the existing tension, and to add the weight of their Fleet, fully prepared for war, to the concentration of the Russian armies.

Chapter 2

Relative Strengths and the Strategic Situation

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OUR High Sea Fleet was concentrated in the North Sea. Since February, 1913, it had been under the command of Admiral von Ingenohl, who was flying his flag in the battleship Friedrich der Grosse. The High Sea Fleet was composed of three squadrons, cruisers and destroyers :

SQUADRON I

Vice-Admiral von Lans (In Command).
Rear-Admiral Gaedecke (Second in Command).

Battleships

Ostfriesland. Thuringen. Helgoland. Oldenburg.
Posen. Rheinland. Nassau. Westfalen.

SQUADRON II

Vice-Admiral Scheer (In Command).
Commodore Mauve (Second in Command).

Battleships

Preussen. Schlesien. Hessen. Lothringen. Hannover.
Schleswig-Holstein. Pommern. Deutschland.

SQUADRON III

Rear-Admiral Funke (In Command).

Battleships

Kaiser. Kaiserin. König Albert. Prinz Regent Luitpold.

Cruisers

Rear-Admiral Hipper (In Command).
Rear-Admiral Maass (Second in Command).
Rear-Admiral Tapken.

Battle-Cruisers

Seydlitz. Moltke. Von der Tann.

Light Cruisers.

Koln. Mainz. Stralsund. Kolberg. Rostock. Strassburg.

Seven Destroyer Flotillas

(In peace these were only occasionally under the
orders of the High Sea Fleet.)

Tenders

Hela (small cruiser of no fighting value). Pfeil. Blitz.

At this point I must say something about the organisation of the Fleet in order to present a picture of its fighting value. As is well known, our Navy Bills had provided for a total of 41 battleships, 20 battle-cruisers, 40 light cruisers, 12 destroyer flotillas and 4 submarine flotillas. This fleet was divided into the Home Fleet and the Foreign Fleet. The nucleus of the Home Fleet was the High Sea Fleet which was principally concerned with preparing itself for battle in case of war. In order to devote ourselves wholly to that purpose and be in a condition to be sent wherever required - that is,