



E. F. KNIGHT

A black and white photograph of a ship's deck. A Union Jack flag is flying from a mast in the center-left. The background shows the ship's superstructure, including railings and various pieces of equipment. The sky is a uniform light grey.

***THE HARWICH
NAVAL FORCES:
THEIR PART
IN THE GREAT
WAR***

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The Harwich Naval Forces: Their Part in the Great War

EAN 8596547126805

DigiCat, 2022

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CHAPTER I

THE OPENING OF THE WAR

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The light cruisers and destroyers—Harwich in war time—
The Harwich Force goes out—The first shots of the naval
war—Sinking of the *Königin Luise*—Loss of the *Amphion*.

He who undertakes to write the history of the Naval Forces which had Harwich as their base during the Great War will have a wonderful story indeed to tell—from the sinking, within a few days of the declaration of war, of the German mine-layer *Königin Luise* by a section of the force, down to the day when there steamed into Harwich harbour, under the escort of the Harwich Force, the surrendered

submarines of the beaten enemy. To those who manned our ships during those four terrible years it must all seem now like some strange dream—the weary, watchful patrolling through storm or fog, with no lights showing on sea or shore; the feeling of the way by dead reckoning and lead in dark wintry weather along the enemy's coasts, with an ever-vigilant foe above, below, and on the surface of the sea; the amazing adventures; the risks boldly taken; and ever and anon an action fought with a fierce determination on both sides.

For the Germans fought bravely and skilfully on occasion during the first years of the war. One gathers that it was not until the end that their *moral* began to weaken. They thought that they could shake the *moral* of the British Navy by methods of frightfulness, by the cold-blooded murder of the survivors of sinking ships, and so forth. But it was their own *moral* that failed at last. For this parvenu German Navy, good though its ships and good its personnel, was lacking in one essential—the tradition that inspires our own Navy, the significance of which tradition the German, who knows not chivalry, is incapable of understanding. A Navy with an old and glorious tradition could not have surrendered itself, as did the German Navy, without having come out and made a fight—if hopeless fight—of it, as did the Spanish ships off Cuba and the Russians at Chemulpo, so saving the honour of their flag.

It is part of the tradition, too, of the British Navy at all cost to stand by a friend in distress. It will be remembered that at the beginning of the war two important ships were torpedoed while rescuing the crews of sinking consorts, and

that this led to the issue of an Admiralty order to the effect that no heavy ships must risk valuable material by undertaking this dangerous work, which should be left to the light craft. The zeal that comes of an old tradition may need checking at times, but it leads to victory in the end. Had the *Blücher* belonged to a Navy with a tradition, it is improbable that she would have been deserted, as she was, by the Germans after her disablement.

To any Englishman who, in these days of the armistice, looks across Harwich harbour and the broad estuary of the Stour, that scene, composed of grey wintry sky, grey sea, and grey warships at anchor, will remain to him as a stirring memory. For those are the light cruisers and destroyers of the Harwich Force, and there, too, is the Submarine Flotilla—all these have fought in the Great War; some throughout the war; while others have joined the force later to replace ships that have been lost in action. On board these ships are still the crews that fought them. No doubt shortly ships and men will be dispersed. But at present they remain here in readiness, for it is not Peace yet. Higher up the Stour, a token of victory, lie the surrendered German submarines, on account of their dirty condition more plainly visible through the haze than are our own ships; for the Huns, naturally, before giving them up, wasted no paint on the outside of these craft, and certainly no soap within.

What is known as the Harwich Force, towards the end of 1914, was composed of the light cruisers *Arethusa*, *Fearless*, *Undaunted*, and *Aurora*, and forty destroyers forming two flotillas. The force gradually increased its strength of light cruisers, being joined at various times by the *Penelope*,

Conquest, Cleopatra, Canterbury, Carysfoot, and others. Commodore Tyrwhitt—now Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt—commanded the force from the beginning, his first flagship being the *Arethusa*. He is still in command of the force, with the *Curaçoa* as his flagship.

Various were the duties performed by this light force—the patrolling of the enemy's coasts, keeping the Grand Fleet informed of the enemy's movements, the perpetual harassing of the enemy, the hunting down of his submarines and mine-layers, the enticing out of his heavy ships to fall into our traps, the convoying of merchantmen, and so forth. The work was extremely important and highly dangerous. Throughout the war there was always some portion of the Harwich Force upon the seas, and always a portion of it in harbour under steam, ready to rush out at a moment's notice should the wireless waves give notice of something doing on the North Sea. On one occasion practically the entire Harwich Force got out of harbour within twenty minutes of a call for its assistance. Even when there was no urgency, no longer than three hours' notice was ever given.

A force so actively engaged as was this one could not fail to suffer many casualties—in all probability heavier casualties in proportion to its numbers than any other naval force. Admiral Lord Jellicoe, on one occasion, in a message of greeting to the force, said: "Your casualties alone in this war show what your work has been," or words to that effect. What the total casualties of the force were I do not know; but the narratives that have been communicated to me account for the total loss of over twelve of the destroyers,