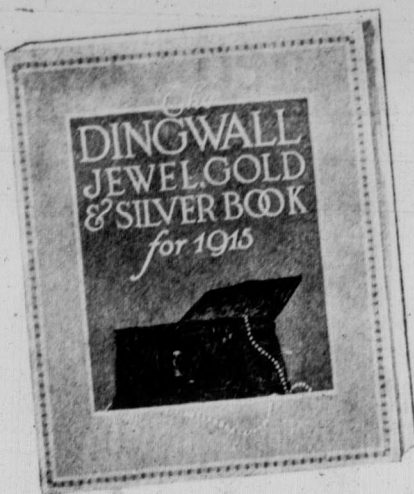
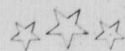




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A Torpedo Attack

The "Apex" of the Triangle and what She Did

The nature of a torpedo attack will always depend entirely on the circumstances of the particular case. In the British navy the torpedo, that is when used in conjunction with the destroyer, has always been looked on as the weapon of the night and only likely to be successful when a surprise attack could be brought off. In the German navy the very reverse has been the idea, the particular forte of the destroyer being the reckless offensive. At manoeuvres the German destroyers were kept with the fleet, sheltering under the lee of the big ships, ready to dash out and drive home their torpedoes whenever the enemy's fire slackened or the line began to waver.

In British manoeuvres it has always been the practice to deliver night attacks, both when the battle fleet was at sea and when snugly anchored in harbor. The particular formation adopted by a flotilla commander when delivering an attack will depend entirely on the commander himself and the circumstances of the case, so that what is written here need not be taken as a recognized method of attack, or even one that has been practised.

The Night Attack

Out in the blue blackness of the night they went, ten throbbing, panting devils whose long, sinuous bodies and squat funnels merged with the sea and the smother they themselves created. Their films of smoke went scurrying away over their wake as their sharp bows ripped thru the water, now turning it back in inky folds, even plowing clean thru a wave that it had no time to ride to.

On deck a few silent figures clad in oilies cower away to leeward of cowls and funnels, or move noiselessly to execute an order given in a hoarse whisper by the officer on the bridge. Ten of them, and for days they have been hiding, biding their time. Now somewhere in the distance, lying in the supposed security given by the guns of a fortification, is a battle fleet, the prey, these "assassins of the sea" are seeking. They are speeding ahead in triangular formation, the four leaders forming the base of the triangle.

Their tubes are loaded with that 17 feet of shining death men call a torpedo, and everything is in readiness for the mission on hand. Onward and ever onward they speed, now poised on the crest of a wave, now buried in a huge smother as they cut right thru a sea that threatens to engulf them, till in the distance ahead lights can be discerned, the anchor lights that clearly mark the leviathans they are seeking. Truly are they unexpected! Torpedo tubes are "cast loose" and everything is got in readiness for launching the shining weapon of destruction.

Discovered

The rhythmic throb of the engines is drowned in the splash of waters and the shrieking of the gale. All is blackness, save only for the twinkling lights in the distance. Down below, in one of the leading boats, a furnace door is opened to feed the greedy fires within, when suddenly a tongue of flame licks the top of the foremost funnel and a smothered imprecation is hurled down the voice tube to the stokehold below. It was only momentary that tongue of flame, but keen eyes were sweeping the horizon, and hardly had he on the bridge let loose his imprecation before a brilliant shaft of light stabbed thru the night and rested on the boat which so carelessly had betrayed her presence.

Then hell was let loose! The blare of bugles and the blast of guns ring out almost simultaneously, and now the roar of death commences in grim earnest. On rush the four leading boats. The water around them is brilliant with the rays of a dozen searchlights and churned into a cauldron by the projectiles from a hundred quickfiring. But there is no retreat—to retreat is destruction, for the shot is tearing up the water astern; to advance is equally risky, but not, perhaps, before they have been able to get within striking distance. The blinding brilliance of the searchlights disconcerts the helmsmen and the boats yaw first to port, now to starboard. A 6-in. lyddite shell strikes one of the leading boats fair and square at the foot of the bridge amidships and she crashes into eternity with the fright-

ful detonation that follows. One of the second line fills her place as tho nothing had happened. Two of the other boats are wallowing in the sea with clouds of steam issuing from their torn sides, the imprecations of their crews telling the plight they are in.

The leviathans have now concentrated their fire on the water some 5,000 yards from themselves, and thru the jaws of death the boats must pass if they would get within effective range of their prey. There is no hesitation, and as they stake it two others crumple up and disappear in clouds of steam; a third staggers and reels and passes thru, torn, ripped and wounded to death. Before she plunges bottomward her two torpedoes are sent from their tubes only to run their course and sink, for they were fired at random.

The Apex Dodges

Not for a moment did the shrieking of bullets cease, and destroyer after destroyer entered that deadly zone only to be torn, riven and sunk. But what of the Apex? As the first rays of the searchlights stabbed thru the darkness she had turned at right angles from her course and plunged away into the night. In flight? No! for as her companions went forward to a frontal attack and extinction, she sped away out of the zone of fire, out of the sweeping arc of the searchlights. As she turned broadside on to the gale a huge sea washed her fore and aft, nearly engulfing her, but she shook herself clear, the water running in cascades from bridge, tubes and deck generally. She saw her late companions silhouetted against the sky-line by the powerful rays cast on them; she saw them enter that deadly zone and crumple up. She saw two double and turn away in opposite direction, thus drawing the fire of the others from herself, and she preferred to avenge those who had gone even at the risk of sharing their fate. And as she drew away in a wide circle she saw the searchlights lighting up the tumbling waters and the pieces of wreckage that were being tossed about. Then the crescendo of guns died down, for only two of the enemy remained afloat and they were wounded to death.

Three thousand yards, and still the presence of that rushing form was undiscovered, unsuspected. Two thousand yards, and the engines were eased down so that their throbbing should not discover the presence of the assassin. Fifteen hundred yards, and beads of clammy sweat stood out on the foreheads of those waiting to launch destruction at two thousand men, for two of the enemy's ships had been selected for targets.

Torpedoes Launched

Eight hundred yards, and the engines were stopped, but she still forged ahead. What did it matter now even if they were discovered? Before destruction could reach them four times seventeen feet of shod death would be racing to their work, and the distance was too small to miss now. Six hundred, five hundred yards, and four shining monsters struck the water almost simultaneously, and are away at 40 knots speed. Onward and downward they plunge until the delicate mechanism of the balance chambers adjusts the horizontal rudders and they turn upwards towards the surface. And so with a series of undulations they shoot ahead.

Three thousand yards away to seaward two destroyers twisted and turned in a vain endeavor to escape the searchlights turned upon them and the iron hail that was decimating them. And every gun and every searchlight and every gun was turned in that direction, bent on the total annihilation of those who had dared to attack them.

Turning casually, a signalman cast his eyes into the darkness, and caught a flash of phosphorescent fire away on the quarter as one of the torpedoes rose on a crest in its undulations. For a moment his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and then with a cry of fear and rage he pointed to the track of the destroyer rushing towards them. Its sharp snout plunged into the steel nets spread out to hold it at bay. For a moment the nets succeeded, and the swiftly revolving propellers of the torpedo lashed the water into a mass of liquid phosphorescent fire.