

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

it. She's not, he says, so very vile—things considered, barring her five-ton torpedo-derricks, the abominations of her wireless, and the tropical temperature of her beer-lockers. All of which signifies that the new boat has found her soul, and her commander would not change her for battle-cruisers. Therefore, that he may remember he is the Service and not a branch of it, he is after certain seasons shifted to a battle-cruiser, where he lives in a blaze of admirals and aiguillettes, responsible for vast decks and crypt-like flats, a student of extended above-water tactics, thinking in tens of thousands of yards instead of his modest but deadly three to twelve hundred.

And the man who takes his place straightway forgets that he ever looked down on great rollers from a sixty-foot bridge under the whole breadth of heaven, but crawls and climbs and dives through conning-towers with those same waves wet in his neck, and when the cruisers pass him, tearing the deep open in half a gale, thanks God he is not as they are, and goes to bed beneath their distracted keels.

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EXPERT OPINIONS

'But submarine work is cold-blooded business.'

(This was at a little session in a green-curtained 'wardroom' cum owner's cabin.)