

THE MARCH OF EVENTS

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SEPTEMBER 22.—"The sure shield of Britain in her hour of trial," was King George's characterization of the Navy at the outbreak of war—and, as one man, the public applauded the sentiment, and went unthinkingly on its way, forgetful largely of the real meaning of the phrase, little recking of the long weary vigils, the constant alertness, the ever present dangers essential to the performance of the Navy's duty on the North Sea. By day, while England, undisturbed went about the commonplace tasks of life; by night, while England slept in peace; out on the tossing waters, week in week out, in times of storm when the sea raged and waves ran mountains high, and it seemed as though the destroyers and smaller vessels of the fleet could not withstand its fury; or in the calm, when the bosom of the ocean rose and fell in gentle undulations—in all weathers, and at all times, the grey ships of His Majesty's navy stood on guard or ceaselessly patrolled the waters.

But the disaster of Tuesday, September 22nd brought home to the British people, as perhaps nothing else could have done, a realization of the hazards to which the sailors of the Home Fleet were constantly exposed. For the price of admiralty is ever a high one, demanding in times of peace a heavy sacrifice of money, and in times of war the added sacrifice of lives.

In the canal at Kiel the great ships of the Kaiser's navy still skulked in idle uselessness, but, in pursuance of her admitted policy of gradually depleting the opposing fleets, Germany now struck a sudden and a startling blow.

The disaster occurred not long after dawn, and the quick action of this naval drama is strikingly portrayed in the narrative of Captain Berkhout of the Dutch steamer "Titon," who chanced to be in the vicinity at the time.

"Far away on the horizon," he said, "I saw three cruisers, the Aboukir, Cressy and Hogue, and after a while I noticed that one of them had gone. I did not pay particular attention at the time, but when I next turned to look for them I noticed another had disappeared. There was some smoke and I heard a slight explosion.

"At once I dashed in their direction, and on arriving in the vicinity I lowered away two boats to rescue a large number of men whom I saw swimming about in the water."

The whole story is simply told. At about 6.25 a.m., the British Light Cruiser "Aboukir," while on patrol duty in the North Sea, in consort with her sister ships the "Cressy" and "Hogue" was torpedoed on the starboard beam. Within 35 minutes she disappeared beneath the waves.

Assuming that the "Aboukir" had struck a mine, the "Cressy" and "Hogue" rushed to the rescue, the former taking up a position ahead of the stricken ship, the latter standing by about 400 yards on her port beam. Perceiving the serious nature of the "Aboukir's" injury, the "Cressy" at once launched her boats; but before the "Hogue" could complete a similar operation,

she herself was twice torpedoed, not more than 20 seconds elapsing between the blows. A heavy explosion immediately took place, and five minutes later, she sank.

In the meantime the "Cressy," while attempting rescue work, sighted the periscope of a submarine on her port bow, and immediately opened fire, at the same time proceeding full speed ahead with the object of running this assailant down. Whether the fire was effective or not is open to question, Captain Nicholson in his report stating:

"Our gunner, Mr. Dougherty, positively asserts that he hit the periscope and that the submarine sank. An officer, who was standing alongside the gunner, thinks that the shell struck only floating timber, of which there was much about, but it was evidently the impression of the men on deck, who cheered and clapped heartily, that the submarine had been hit."

The daring submarine or submarines—there being some doubt as to the number engaged—were not yet content with this really remarkable achievement. Soon a periscope again became visible, and another torpedo was launched. "The track of the torpedo which she fired at a range of 500 to 600 yards" said Captain Nicholson of the "Cressy," was plainly visible, and it struck us on the starboard side, just before the after bridge."

"The ship listed about 10 degrees to the starboard, and remained steady. The time was 7.15 a.m. All the water-tight doors, deadlights and scuttles had been securely closed before the torpedo struck the ship. All the mess stools and table shores, and all available timber below and on deck, had been previously got up and thrown overside for the saving of life."

A second torpedo missed its object, but, some fifteen minutes after the first hit was scored, another struck the "Cressy" under her number five boiler room. The Captain's report stated:

"The time was 7.30 a.m. The ship then began to heel rapidly and finally turned keel up, remaining so for about 20 minutes before she finally sank at 7.55 a.m."

Thus in a little over an hour the three cruisers, built at a cost of \$11,250,000 had gone to the bottom, carrying to their death nearly 60 officers and 1,400 men. The Commanders of the "Cressy" and "Hogue" were among the saved. The effective rescue work accomplished under the circumstances was due largely to the brave efforts of the crew of the "Titon" and other small vessels who were nearby at the time, and rushed to the assistance of the men struggling in the water; and due also to the plucky fight for life on the part of the sailors themselves. Many kept afloat for a long time before aid reached them, and were hauled into the rescue boats in a terribly exhausted condition.

The loss of the ships, all of obsolete types of 12,000 tons, was declared by the Admiralty to be of no naval significance, but the loss of so many lives—without a real chance of "fighting back"—for the time being stunned the British public by its tragic nature, and entirely diverted attention from events on the continent. Many of the survivors were conveyed to Holland, where they

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THE "EMDEN" operating in the Bay of Bengal and other southern waters, was a menace to British merchant shipping for some time, until "put out of business" by the "Sydney". (Photo, Central News.)

DESTROYED BY THE AUSTRIANS. This magnificent bridge was destroyed by the Austrians in order to impede the progress of the Russian Army, during the recent heavy fighting which has taken place in Poland. (Copyright, Underwood & Underwood.)