

## What Really Did Happen at Scapa Flow.

HERE IS REVEALED FOR THE FIRST TIME HOW THE MOST SENSATIONAL GERMAN COUP OF THE WAR WAS WORKED.

(By ADMIRAL VON REUTER, Chief of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow.—In Cassell's Magazine.)

### PREPARATIONS FOR SINKING VESSELS.

This obstacle could only be removed by reducing the crews. Such a course was impracticable at the moment; we had hitherto retained enough men to enable us to put to sea, a further reduction would make this impossible, and the British would realize that we had given up all idea of taking the fleet home. I thought it wiser to wait and not take undue risks by acting prematurely.

(2) What consequences for the intended fleet might result from negotiations on the peace conditions? It was possible that the German Government might barter the ships in exchange for some benefit, such as a free hand in the Baltic or some similar concession. We officers should not have liked such a solution, but we would have to make this sacrifice for the welfare of the State. Did the German Government intend to make use of the fleet in some such way? That was the one important question which let me no peace. But all my messages begging for enlightenment remained unanswered. It never entered our heads that the fleet might be sold; we did not think that the government would descend to that.

Further, it was possible that the German Government might attach no importance to the question of the fleet. Both the army and the foreign office intrigued against the navy, and the government was not likely to defend it.

In this case, too, the only course was to wait.

(3) Immediate acceptance of the conditions of peace could be ruled out, for the news from home that reached us through the British Press, led us to expect anything but that.

At the end of May I sent a wireless message to the Admiralty in Berlin asking them to send ships to fetch away 2,700 of the crews early in June. This wireless was submitted to the British Admiralty and sent with his consent. These men were fetched home on June 15 and 17, and the reduction of the fleet was left to us with crews of twenty-five on the large cruisers, fifty on the battleships, twenty on the small cruisers; the numbers left on the torpedo boats were determined by the other commanding them.

Early in June I learn that the crews of the torpedo boats were making preparations to sink them. Had these preparations become known to the fleet, the plan to sink them might have been frustrated. I sent for the leader of the torpedo boats and explained to him my doubts and designs. He acquiesced in these and actually succeeded in keeping his preparations secret not only from the British, but also from the rest of the interned fleet. On June 17, when the last of the torpedo boats were being shipped home on German transports, the orders for sinking were sent to the ships. As I feared to attract attention if I sent them by my own hand, most of them were dispatched by the British packets. The order ran as follows:

Command of the Interned Fleet  
June 17, 1919.  
OFFICERS ONLY!  
PERSONAL.  
To all captains and officers commanding torpedo boats.  
All necessary preparations for sinking of the ships are to be made at once, so as to make sure that receipt of an order the ship may sink as quickly as possible.

2. Final preparations are to be made after the crews have disembarked. Individual captains must decide on their own responsibility to what extent individual members of the crews can help in these preparations and be informed of our intentions without endangering the success of the scheme in any way; such as, for instance, by betrayal to the English.

3. The following preparatory measures are to be taken: All inner doors and hatches, such as passage doors, bunker doors, the doors of longitudinal and transverse bulkheads, ventilators, side windows, etc., are to be kept permanently open. It is left to the discretion of the captain to take the following further steps: necessary measures to ensure that torpedo tubes, condensers, valves and cocks (except floating cocks) may be opened quickly.

4. Boats. If possible, only one boat—to accommodate the crew—to be cleared for lowering. A white flag is to be held in readiness to take in the boat. The boats with the crews are to make straight for the nearest land; they are to keep close order under the command of their officers.

5. The ships are to be sunk:

(a) In the event of forcible seizure by the British.

(b) On receipt of a special order from me.

6. Additional to 5 (a) The commanding officers must carefully think out what steps to take to ensure the sinking of the ships if the British should attempt to take us by surprise and seize the ships. A demand made by the British without my express consent that the ships should be handed over to them, is to be regarded as a forcible seizure, and the ships are to be sunk in reply.

7. Additional to 5 (b) Orders may be issued (a) to sink the ship at once, or (b) to sink the ship at a certain hour.

8. Signals. In pursuance of 7 (a), if the ship is to be sunk at once, the following signal will be given:

"To all captains and officers commanding torpedo boats. Paragraph Confirm.—Officer in command of interned fleet."

This signal is to be passed on in every possible way. The sinking of the ships is to begin at once.

In pursuance of 7 (b), if the ship is to be sunk at a certain hour, the following signal will be given:

"To all captains and officers commanding torpedo boats. Paragraph Confirm.—Officer in command of interned fleet."

In this signal the first two numbers denote the date, i.e., the 9th, and the last two numbers the hour at which sinking is to begin. Time is to be reckoned from noon to noon (astronomical).

9. Confirmation. The receipt of the signal is to be confirmed as follows: "To the officer in command of interned fleet. Paragraph—Is confirmed.—Captain, Emden."

10. Since the decision as to whether the conditions of peace shall be accepted or rejected, and whether hostilities shall be renewed, lies in the balance, the next few days will be very critical. From Wednesday, June 18, onward, more careful watch must be kept by day and night, not only so as to observe any unusual behaviour on the part of the British, but also so as to take note of signals from the

Emden. As the crews cannot be considered trustworthy, the officers must keep a look out themselves.

11. It is my intention to sink the ships only if the enemy should attempt, without the consent of our government, to take possession of the fleet. If our government consents to deliver up our ships, they will be handed over to the eternal shame of those who have brought us to this pass.

12. Captains are to keep this communication under lock and key; it must not fall into enemy hands.

(Signed) VON REUTER.

Excepting on two ships of the fleet, we succeeded in keeping our intention to sink the fleet a secret.

On the morning of June 20, the captain of a large cruiser sent word that the crew were watching his preparations for sinking the vessel with great mistrust, and that they dogged his steps wherever he went on the ship. He therefore asked to be allowed to inform the crew of the order to sink the ships, so that he might complete his preparations. My chief of staff urged me to comply, but I decided that I would rather leave this big cruiser out, if the ships were to be sunk, than disclose the secret. Immediately afterwards the captain of a battleship informed me that four petty officers, owing to the preparations he had made, had guessed that I intended to sink the ships; as they did not want to have anything to do with it, they had asked to be sent home at once; if their request were granted they would not disclose the preparations for sinking. If the crews were to learn unofficially of our intentions, i.e., through these petty officers, by the back door so to speak, they would become suspicious and resist, and would prevent our carrying out our plans. The crews, therefore, had now to be informed of our scheme to sink the fleet, even at the risk of treachery.

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