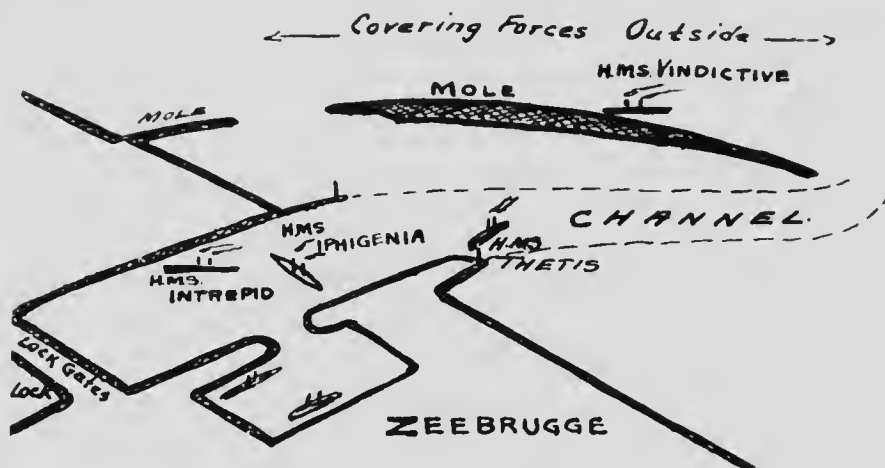




THE ZEEBRUGGE RAID

ST. GEORGE'S DAY, April 23, 1918, will long be remembered. On that day men of the Royal Navy successfully carried out one of the most daring ventures of the war, the plugging up of the German submarine base at Zeebrugge Harbor.

The Germans had few good ports on the North Sea, but when they overran Belgium they gained possession of two good harbors, Zeebrugge and Ostend. From these sheltered havens they sent forth their submarines to prey on the ships approaching or leaving the shores of Britain. The first warning that many a brave ship had of her approaching doom was the crash of a torpedo against her side. Then as she lurched over and sank to a watery grave, the crew and passengers were left to the mercy of the waves.

The destruction of so many freighters made the shortage of food a very serious problem in England, while the cruelty of the enemy in sinking passenger ships called for some method of ending the submarine frightfulness.

It was decided to close up the harbor at Zeebrugge by sinking ships in the only channel where submarines could enter or leave. The coast ports of Belgium lie exposed to the sweep of the North Sea, so at Zeebrugge a mole or breakwater sheltered the exit of the Bruges canal. If two ships were sunk in this narrow channel the passage of submarines would be impossible.

Even the most daring could scarcely hope for success as the enemy had planted batteries around the harbor of Zeebrugge and were prepared to stoutly defend the Mole from attack. Six old cruisers, five of them filled with cement, were to be sacrificed. One of these cruisers, the *Vindictive*, was to convey men to the Mole where a desperate attack was to be made in order to draw off the enemy's attention while the other ships tried to sink themselves in the narrow channel.