

How Sturdee Tricked the Crafty Von Spee and Drove Germans From the Pacific

(By George Hughes)

"Had the British Navy been less prepared to contest German maritime aspirations on the sea during the first six months of the war, Germany to-day would have been the master of Europe."

Such was the remark of an American high official some months ago. Four years of war has vindicated this observation and justified the immense expenditure of the British people upon the Royal Navy.

But during the six months of hostilities, from that fateful August when Germany refused to accept arbitration and issued her ultimatum to the Entente nations, to well into the New Year of 1915, the British Navy had an agitated existence. While the bottling up process was singularly complete in the Kiel Canal and the waters adjacent thereto, in the more remote seas German maritime marauders roamed in search of prey.

In November, 1914, the world heard of the defeat of the gallant Sir Christopher Cradock. It was dire news for the Entente, and a dark day for the British nation.

Defeat of Enemy Planned. Lord Fisher had scarcely succeeded in Prince Henry of Battenberg as First Sea Lord, ere he took the first steps in the naval campaign which brought about the downfall of von Spee and his South Sea squadron at the Battle of Falkland Islands. Rear-Admiral Sir Frederick Doveton Sturdee headed the squadron to avenge Admiral Cradock, and the 1,650 officers and men who had gone to their last sleep in the blue waters of the Pacific. How he accomplished his object had been told in a vivid manner by the greatest historians of the war.

Surprise was to be the principal element utilized by the Admiralty

for the defeat of von Spee. Consequently the expedition was kept a profound secret, a wonderful achievement when the insidious and effective espionage system of the enemy is taken into consideration. Our naval ports were filled with German spies, and important news had an uncanny way of percolating through to the Hun.

The plan conceived by the British Admiralty to rid the Southern Seas of the German raiders was simple yet audacious, and evoked the admiration of Naval Strategists.

Baiting the Ocean Trap. Rear Admiral Sturdee was given the liberty of action which would allow him to apply the plan in keeping with existing conditions. His was a game of "bluff," an allurements in the shape of a wireless message to the "Canopus" instructing her to proceed to Port Stanley in the Falklands, where she was told there would be safe concealment and security from the German Squadron, since guns for the new forts had arrived.

Von Spee intercepted the message, as it was intended that he should. He rightly believed that the talk of new guns was all nonsense. Flushed with his success over the British Squadron at Coronel, his cunning for the moment forsook him. How easy it would be to steam for the Falklands, seize the disabled "Canopus" and, at the same time, the wireless across the station at Port Stanley. This done, he could sail across the Atlantic to the South African coast and there intercept the Union force at Luderitz Bay, with disastrous results to the Allies. His plan was masterly and ambitious, but he overlooked the chief factor of sea warfare in his eagerness to strike a vital blow at the Allied nations in the Southern

Seas, he failed to appreciate the spirit of true British seamanship; and to him this failure meant defeat and death.

Von Spee Makes Fatal Mistake. Admiral Sturdee's initial squadron was the "Invincible" and the "Inflexible," two battle cruisers, displacing 17,250 tons, and having a speed of 27.5 knots; the "Carnarvon," 10,850 tons, and 22.3 knots; the "Kent" and the "Cornwall," each 9,000 tons.

At sea this force was joined by light cruiser "Bristol," which belonged to the West Atlantic Station; and the armored liners "Macedonia," and the "Glasgow."

On the morning of December 7th, the British squadron arrived at Port Stanley, which lies at the eastern corner of the East Island. The Falklands, with their lands, with their brown moors, shining with quartz, their innumerable lochs, and their Scotch shepherds, a striking simile to the Outer Hebrides of the Orkneys, transplanted to the Southern Seas. Port Stanley is a deeply indented gulf, leading into an inner harbor. The low shores on the south side allow vessels encoined therein an excellent view of the outer sea.

December 8th, before von Spee arrived from the direction of Cape Horn. Every day, he sent one of the light cruisers ahead to reconnoitre, and this vessel reported the presence of two British ships, probably the "Kent" and the "Macedonia," the first ships visible on rounding the islands.

But here von Spee blundered. He misjudged the two ships as the remnants of Cradock's ill-fated squadron, fled for concealment and recuperation after the Coronel defeat. Intent on making a speedy annihilation of the presumed refugees, the Germans advanced in line.

At 9.30 von Spee arrived abreast of the harbor mouth, and was for the first time able to note the strength of the British squadron. It was then that he realized how he had been deceived. He saw that flight was his only hope of escape. He turned, and made off, with the British ships close behind.

At 11 o'clock, seven miles separated the combatants and at 12.55 the British opened fire on the "Leipzig," which was at the rear of the German line. The German commander had long recognized the hopelessness of his position. He prepared to give battle. The "Invincible," the "Inflexible," and the "Carnarvon" engaged the "Scharnhorst" and the "Gneisenau." But the dense smoke from the funnels of the enemy ships obscured the view, and the British were forced to use superior speed to get to the other side of their antagonists. A terrific battle ensued, in which the "Gneisenau" and the "Scharnhorst" were crippled and sunk.

The Last of the Huns. Meanwhile the "Kent," the "Glasgow" and the "Cornwall" hotly pursued the "Nurnberg" and the "Leipzig." The weather had turned thick and rainy, and poor visibility badly handicapped the British gunners. Of slightly superior speed were the ships of the enemy, but the magnificent work of the British engineers and stokers neutralized this advantage; and that night the "Nurnberg" and the "Leipzig" fell prey to British prowess. Only the "Dresden," limping away into the wastes of the South Atlantic, remained of that proud fleet which had tasted the delights of victory at Coronel.

The Battle of the Falkland Islands was a brilliant piece of strategy and a credit to the skill of its creators. It was a manoeuvre necessitating a trip across the world; a stratagem at once audacious in its conception, subtle in detail, and almost perfect in attainment. The sole blemish was the escape of the "Dresden."

Thus disappeared the German menace to Allied shipping. Von Spee and his men fought courageously, and due credit is given them by the victors. They went down with their colors flying to rest in the profundity of the ocean, with brave Cradock and his men, for all time.

UNDER ALLIED PROTECTION. By Courier Leased Wire. London, Dec. 19.—The Estonian provisional government, controlling the territory covered by the former Russian Baltic province of Estonia, has replaced the public "under the common protection of the Entente powers, pending the decision of the peace conference."

The Estonian premier announces this action in a telegram which reached London to-night.

WILSON'S TRIP TO ENGLAND

By Courier Leased Wire. London, Wednesday, Dec. 18.—(By the Associated Press.)—If President Wilson arrives in England by Thursday of next week, as it is intimated he will, he will find England making, as the day after Christmas is "boxing day." Through-out the United Kingdom, business will be at a standstill on Dec. 26. The President will also find that many people are away from London because this year many business houses are giving their employees a week's vacation to enable them to spend the holidays in the country. King George and the members of the Royal family plan to spend the Christmas holidays at Sandringham, but they may change their plans if the President comes to England next Thursday.

NEW RULES SUCCESSFUL. By Courier Leased Wire. Ottawa, Dec. 19.—The hockey match last night between the Canadiens and the Ottawa was interesting as a test of the new rules recently adopted. The fans here seemed to be pleased with the new regulations. The Citizen says:

"Special interest centred around the new playing rules, which were introduced for the purpose of trial. The revised penalty system worked to perfection, and on two occasions Canadiens had to play one man short. The checking was hard, but there were no glaring violations."

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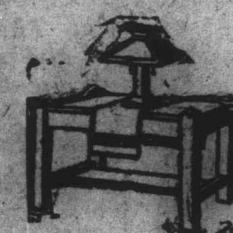


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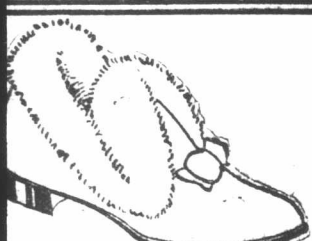
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