

ANNIVERSARY OF THE SEA FIGHT AT ZEEBRUGGE

The British Attack on German
Submarine Base

THE GALLANT VINDICTIVE

Story of Glorious Achievement
Recalled—Eve of St. George's
Day Ever Memorable in History
of British Navy

Tonight is the anniversary of the great sea fight at Zeebrugge, one of the most historic incidents in the history of the British navy. H. M. S. Vindictive and the two Liverpool ferry-boats Iris and Daffodil, shared especially in the glory of that night. The objectives were the canal of Zeebrugge and the entrance to the harbor of Ostend, and the three vessels named had with them five veteran and obsolete cruisers, and a mosquito fleet of destroyers, motor launches and coastal motor boats. Three of the cruisers, the Intrepid, Iphigenia and Thetis, packed with concrete and with mines attached to the bottom to sink them in the neck of the canal, were aligned at Zeebrugge; two others similarly prepared were directed at Ostend. The Vindictive with her ferry boats was to attack the great mole which guards Zeebrugge canal, land bluejackets and machines, destroy guns and stores and create a diversion while the block ships ran in and sank themselves. Admiral Keyes in the destroyer Warwick commanded the operation.

The night of April 22 proved favorable for the exploit and the ships formed up fifteen miles off Zeebrugge. The Vindictive, which had been towing the Iris and Daffodil, cast them off to follow her under their own steam. The Intrepid, Iphigenia and Thetis slowed down to give the first three time to get alongside the Mole, and the Sirius and Brilliant shifted their course for Ostend; while all the other craft scattered themselves for their appointed duties. The night was dark and hazy, with a small wind and a short sea. The small craft sent an effective smoke screen ahead of the Vindictive, and it was not until she was close to the Mole, with her men standing ready for the landing that the wind lulled and veered and revealed her and her two attendant ferry-boats to the Germans on the Mole and the shore. Then Bedlam broke loose. The official narrative says: "A star shell soared aloft; then a score of star shells; the wavering beams of the searchlight swung round and settled to a glare; the wildfire of gun flashes leaped against the sky; strings of luminous green beads shot aloft, hung and sank; and the darkness of the night was supplanted by the nightmare day-light of battle fires. Guns and machine-guns along the Mole and batteries ashore woke to life, and it was in a pile of shelling that the Vindictive laid her nose against the thirty-foot high concrete side of the Mole, let go an anchor, and signed to Daffodil to shove her

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tern in. Iris went ahead and endeavored to get alongside. The fire was intense. Vindictive was swept diagonally by machine-gun fire from both ends of the Mole and by heavy batteries ashore.

"Vindictive was fitted along the port side with a high false deck, whence ran the eighteen bows, or gang-ways by which the storming and demolition parties were to land. The men were gathered in readiness on the main and lower decks, while Colonel Elliot, who was to lead the Marines, waited on the false deck just abaft the bridge, and Captain H. C. Halahan, who commanded the bluejackets, was amidships. The gangways were lowered, and scraped and rebounded upon the high parapet of the Mole as Vindictive rolled; and the word for the assault had not yet been given when both leaders were killed, Colonel Elliot by a shell and Captain Halahan by the machine-gun fire which swept the decks. The same shell that killed Colonel Elliot also did fearful execution in the forward Stokes Mortar Battery.

"The men were magnificent." Every officer bears the same testimony. The mere landing on the Mole was a perilous business; it involved a passage across the crashing, splintering gangways, a drop over the parapet into the field of fire of the German machine-guns which swept its length and a further drop of some sixteen feet to the surface of the Mole itself. Many were killed and more were wounded as they crowded up to the gangways; but nothing hindered the orderly and speedy landing by every gangway.

"Lieutenant H. T. C. Walker had his arm carried away by a shell on the upper deck and lay in the darkness while the storming parties trod him under. He was recognized and dragged aside by the Commander. He raised his remaining arm in greeting. "Good luck to you," he called, as the rest of the stormers hastened by; "good luck."

The lower deck was a shambles as the commander made the rounds of his ship; yet those wounded and dying raised themselves to cheer as he made his tour. The crew of the howitzer which was mounted forward had all been killed; a second crew was destroyed likewise; and even then a third crew was taking over the gun. In the stern cabin a firework expert, who had never been to sea before—one of Captain Brock's employees—was steadily firing great illuminating rockets out of a scuttle to show up the lighthouse on the end of the Mole to the block ships and their escort.

The Daffodil, after aiding to berth Vindictive, should have proceeded to land her own men, but now Commander Carpenter ordered her to remain as she was, with her bows against Vindictive's quarter, pressing the latter ship into the

Mole. Normally, Daffodil's boilers developed eighty pounds' pressure of steam per inch; but now, for this particular task, Artificer Engineer Sutton, in charge of them, maintained a hundred and sixty pounds for the whole period that she was holding Vindictive to the Mole. Her casualties, owing to her position during the fight, were small—one man killed and eight wounded, among them her commander, Lieutenant H.

Campbell, who was struck in the right eye by a shell splinter.

Iris had troubles of her own. Her first attempt to make fast to the Mole ahead of Vindictive failed, as her grapples were not large enough to span the parapet. Two officers, Lieut.-Commander Bagnall and Lieutenant Hawkins, climbed ashore and sat astride the parapet trying to make the grapples fast till each was killed and fell down between the ship and the wall. Commander Valentine Gibbs had both legs shot away and died next morning. Lieutenant Spencer, R. N. R., though wounded, took command and refused to be relieved.

Iris was obliged at last to change her position and fall in astern of Vindictive, and suffered very heavily from the fire. A single big shell plunged through the upper deck and burst below at a point where fifty-six marines were waiting the order to go to the gangways. Forty-nine were killed and the remaining seven wounded. Another shell in the wardroom, which was serving as sick bay, killed four officers and twenty-six men. Her total casualties were eight officers and sixty-nine men killed and three officers and a hundred and two men wounded.

Meanwhile the storming parties from the Vindictive landed and swept the Mole, working and destroying with systematic precision in face of a terrible fire. Then up came the Thetis, Intrepid and Iphigenia, found their places and were sunk in the channel. The Thetis lost five killed and five wounded. The rest were taken off by a motor launch before she sank. The Intrepid and Iphigenia suffered no loss, their crews being taken off safely before they were sunk in the canal.

When her work had been done the Vindictive was towed away from the Mole by the Daffodil. She was almost a wreck, but she sailed triumphantly away to strike again with equal success at Ostend. And so the eve of St. George's Day, 1918, will be forever memorable in British naval history.

Among the returned soldiers to arrive in Halifax yesterday was Jack Allen, son of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Allen, 36 St. Andrews street. Private Allen went overseas with the 115th Battalion and was transferred to the 2nd Howitzer Battery, and it was while he was in that unit he won the M. M. in a spectacular raid on the Hun lines. He was a despatch carrier. His brother Ray is now a member of the 28th, being an original member of that unit. He was wounded once. He crossed as a private and was promoted to sergeant.



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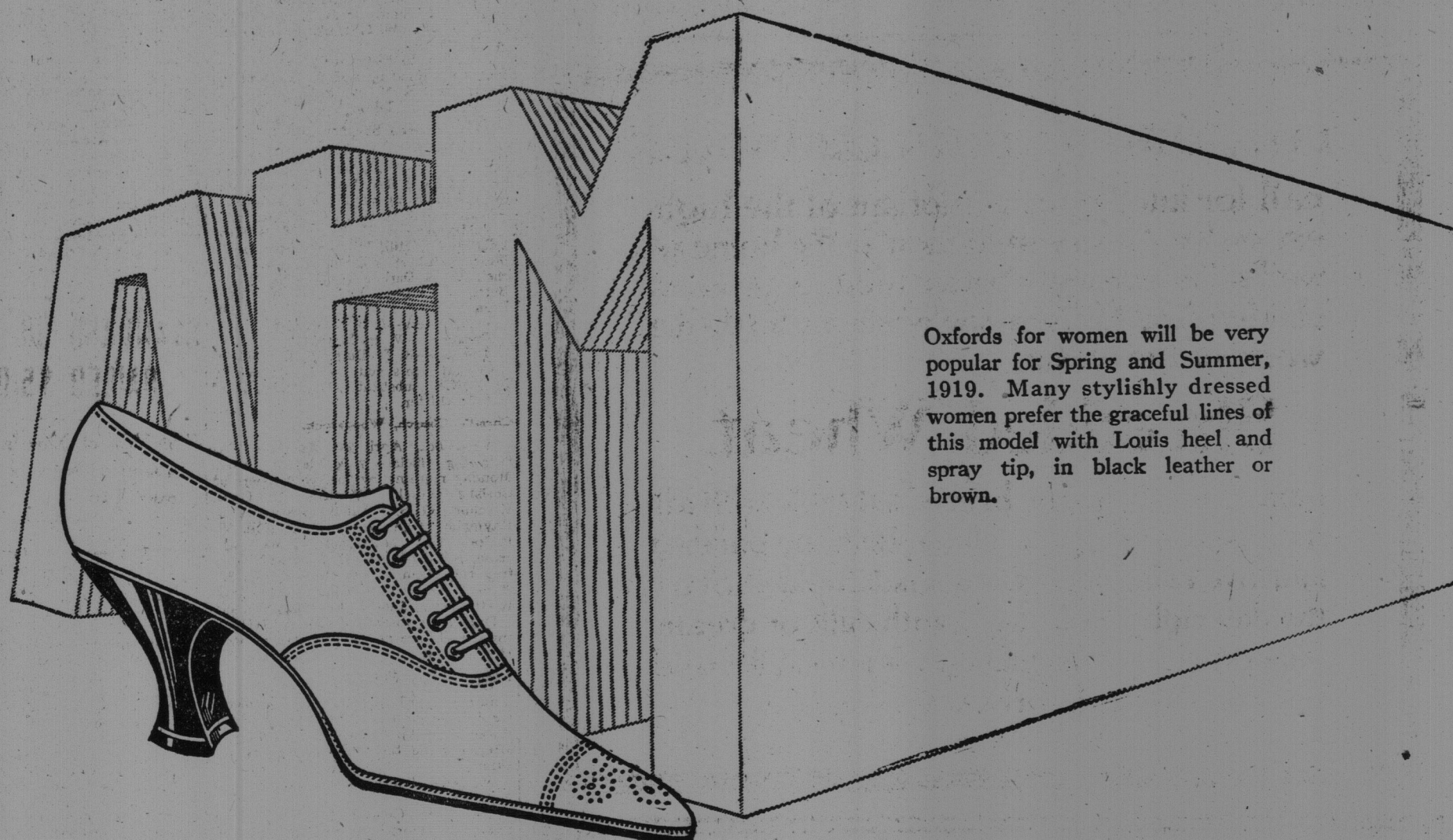
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