

The Sea Fight

UP to the present there has been no description worth printing of any naval engagement such as can be found in all good histories of the doings of Nelson and Drake in the days of old. The two reasons are that there has so far been but one naval engagement, and that even there no scribe was present to record what happened. A wounded seaman of the Laertes, one of the cruisers engaged in the flotilla of Sir David Beatty, that sunk five German ships in Heligoland Bight, thus describes what happened that night in so far as he could remember it:

"It was after midnight when a despatch-boat arrived with orders, and though we all suspected that some move was on we heard nothing. In ten minutes we were steaming away as fast as we could, and in about three hours we tumbled to the fact that we were going after the enemy. Not a light was visible on any ship, as we were now off Heligoland, and all eyes were straining in the fog for a sight of the enemy. 'Here they come,' was whispered along the decks, and we were sorely tempted to break into cheers in spite of the orders for silence.

"The enemy's ships, about fifteen, we thought, crept out without the least suspicion of the little surprise in store for them. Just when they were near enough to be likely to see us the order was given, and a brilliant flash of light, followed by a deafening roar, lit up the misty sea.

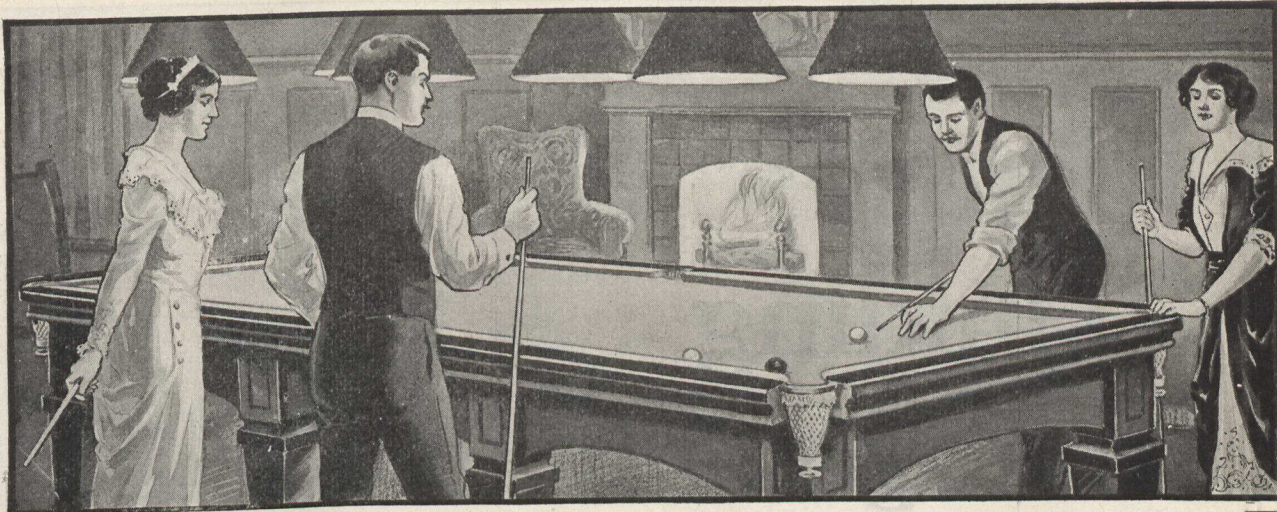
"In the meantime our fast cruisers and destroyers had dashed ahead and got between five of the enemy's ships and the forts. So far as we could see the rest of the German vessels turned tail, but not before they were riddled by a heavy fire from our lads. All the Germans concentrated their fire on two of the vessels that were wedged in between the leading German ships and the landward forts, and the forts opened brisk fire also, but their range was at fault.

"The German fire was brisk while it lasted, but they have a lot to learn about naval marksmanship, and we were all astonished at the muddle they made of their chance. Our ships closed in, the men cheering like mad as they stood at their places, and in less time than it takes to tell the last German gun was silenced."

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