

# **WILLIAM LE QUEUX**

THE INVASION  
OF 1910

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# William le Queux

## The Invasion of 1910 / with a full account of the siege of London

### PREFACE

*“I sometimes despair of the country ever becoming alive to the danger of the unpreparedness of our present position until too late to prevent some fatal catastrophe.”*

This was the keynote of a solemn warning made in the House of Lords on July 10th of the present year by Earl Roberts. His lordship, while drawing attention to our present inadequate forces, strongly urged that action should be taken in accordance with the recommendations of the Elgin Commission that “no military system could be considered satisfactory which did not contain powers of expansion outside the limit of the regular forces of the Crown.”

*“The lessons of the late war appear to have been completely forgotten.* The one prevailing idea seems to be,” said Earl Roberts, “to cut down our military expenditure without reference to our increased responsibilities and our largely augmented revenue. History tells us in the plainest terms that an Empire which cannot defend its own possessions must inevitably perish.” And with this view both Lord Milner and the Marquis of Lansdowne concurred. But surely this is not enough. If we are to retain our position as the first nation in the world we must be prepared to defend any raid made upon our shores.

The object of this book is to illustrate our utter unpreparedness for war, to show how, under certain conditions which may easily occur, England can be successfully invaded by Germany, and to present a picture of the ruin which must inevitably fall upon us on the evening of that not far-distant day.

Ever since Lord Roberts formulated his plans for the establishment of rifle-clubs I have been deeply interested in the movement; and after a conversation with that distinguished soldier the idea occurred to me to write a forecast, based upon all the available military and naval knowledge – which would bring home to the British public vividly and forcibly what really would occur were an enemy suddenly to appear in our midst. At the outset it was declared by the strategists I consulted to be impossible. No such book could ever be written, for, according to them, the mass of technical detail was far too great to digest and present in an intelligible manner to the public.

Lord Roberts, however, gave me encouragement. The skeleton scheme of the manner in which England could be invaded by Germany was submitted to a number of the highest authorities on strategy, whose names, however, I am not permitted to divulge, and after many consultations, much criticism, and considerable difference of opinion, the “general idea,” with amendment after amendment, was finally adopted.

That, however, was only a mere preliminary. Upon questions of tactics each tactician consulted held a different view, and each criticised adversely the other’s suggestions. With the invaluable assistance of my friend Mr. H. W. Wilson, we had decided upon the naval portion of the campaign; but when it came to the operations on land, I found a wide divergence of opinion everywhere.

One way alone remained open – namely, to take the facts exactly as they stood, add the additional strength of the opposing nations as they will be in 1910, and then draw logical conclusions. This, aided by experts, was done; and after many days of argument with the various authorities, we succeeded at last in getting them in accord as to the general practicability of an invasion.

Before putting pen to paper it was necessary to reconnoitre carefully the whole of England from the Thames to the Tyne. This I did by means of a motor-car, travelling 10,000 miles of all kinds of

roads, and making a tour extending over four months. Each town, all the points of vantage, military positions, all the available landing-places on the coast, all railway connections, and telephone and telegraph communications, were carefully noted for future reference. With the assistance of certain well-known military experts, the battlefields were carefully gone over and the positions marked upon the Ordnance map. Thus, through four months we pushed on day by day collecting information and material, sometimes in the big cities, sometimes in the quietest and remotest hamlets, all of which was carefully tabulated for use.

Whatever critics may say, and however their opinions may differ, it can only be pointed out, first, that the “general idea” of the scheme is in accordance with the expressed and published opinions of the first strategists of to-day, and that, as far as the forecast of events is concerned, it has been written from a first-hand knowledge of the local colour of each of the scenes described. The enemy’s Proclamations reproduced are practically copies of those issued by the Germans during the war of 1870.

That the experts and myself will probably be condemned as alarmists and denounced for revealing information likely to be of assistance to an enemy goes without saying. Indeed, on March 15th last, an attempt was made in the House of Commons to suppress its publication altogether. Mr. R. C. Lehmann, who asked a question of the Prime Minister, declared that it was “calculated to prejudice our relations with the other Powers,” while Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, in a subsequent letter apologising to me for condemning in the House a work he had not read, repeated that it was likely to “produce irritation abroad and might conceivably alarm the more ignorant public at home.”

Such a reflection, cast by the Prime Minister upon the British nation, is, to say the least, curious, yet it only confirms the truth that the Government are strenuously seeking to conceal from our people the appalling military weakness and the consequent danger to which the country is constantly open.

Mr. Haldane’s new scheme has a number of points about it which, at first sight, will perhaps commend themselves to the general public, and in some cases to a proportion of military men. Foremost among these are the provision made for training the Militia Artillery in the use of comparatively modern field-guns, and the institution of the County Associations for the administration of the Volunteers and the encouragement of the local military spirit. Could an ideal Association of this kind be evolved there is little doubt that it would be capable of doing an immense amount of good, since administration by a central staff, ignorant of the widely differing local conditions which affect the several Volunteer corps, has already militated against getting the best work possible out of their members. But under our twentieth-century social system, which has unfortunately displaced so many influential and respected county families – every one of which had military or naval members, relations or ancestors – by wealthy tradesmen, speculators, and the like, any efficient County Association will be very hard to create. Mr. Haldane’s scheme is a bold and masterly sketch, but he will find it very hard to fill in the details satisfactorily. Unfortunately, the losses the Army must sustain by the reduction of so many fine battalions are very real and tangible, while the promised gains in efficiency would appear to be somewhat shadowy and uncertain.

To be weak is to invite war; to be strong is to prevent it.

To arouse our country to a sense of its own lamentable insecurity is the object of this volume, and that other nations besides ourselves are interested in England’s grave peril is proved by the fact that it has already been published in the German, French, Spanish, Danish, Russian, Italian, and even Japanese languages.

*William Le Queux.*

*London, July 26, 1906.*

# BOOK I

## THE ATTACK

### CHAPTER I

#### THE SURPRISE

Two of the myriad of London's night-workers were walking down Fleet Street together soon after dawn on Sunday morning, 2nd September.

The sun had not yet risen. That main artery of London traffic, with its irregular rows of closed shops and newspaper offices, was quiet and pleasant in the calm, mystic light before the falling of the smoke-pall.

Only at early morning does the dear old City look its best; in that one quiet, sweet hour when the night's toil has ended and the day's has not yet begun. Only in that brief interval at the birth of day, when the rose tints of the sky glow slowly into gold, does the giant metropolis repose – at least, as far as its business streets are concerned – for at five o'clock the toiling millions begin to again pour in from all points of the compass, and the stress and storm of London life at once recommences.

And in that hour of silent charm the two grey-bearded sub-editors, though engaged in offices of rival newspapers, were making their way homeward to Dulwich to spend Sunday in a well-earned rest, and were chatting "shop" as Press men do.

"I suppose you had the same trouble to get that Yarmouth story through?" asked Fergusson, the news-editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*, as they crossed Whitefriars Street. "We got about half a column, and then the wire shut down."

"Telegraph or telephone?" inquired Baines, who was four or five years younger than his friend.

"We were using both – to make sure."

"So were we. It was a rattling good story – the robbery was mysterious, to say the least – but we didn't get more than half of it. Something's wrong with the line, evidently," Baines said. "If it were not such a perfect autumn morning, I should be inclined to think there'd been a storm somewhere."

"Yes – funny, wasn't it?" remarked the other. "A shame we haven't the whole story, for it was a first-class one, and we wanted something. Did you put it on the contents-bill?"

"No, because we couldn't get the finish. I tried in every way – rang up the Central News, P.A., Exchange Telegraph Company, tried to get through to Yarmouth on the trunk, and spent half an hour or so pottering about, but the reply from all the agencies, from everywhere in fact, was the same – the line was interrupted."

"Just our case. I telephoned to the Post Office, but the reply came back that the lines were evidently down."

"Well, it certainly looks as though there'd been a storm, but –" and Baines glanced at the bright, clear sky overhead, just flushed by the bursting sun – "there are certainly no traces of it."

"There's often a storm on the coast when it's quite still in London, my dear fellow," remarked his friend wisely.

"That's all very well. But when all communication with a big place like Yarmouth is suddenly cut off, as it has been, I can't help suspecting that something has happened which we ought to know."

"You're perhaps right after all," Fergusson said. "I wonder if anything *has* happened. We don't want to be called back to the office, either of us. My assistant, Henderson, whom I've left in charge, rings me up over any mare's nest. The trunk telephones all come into the Post Office exchange up in Carter Lane. Why not look in there before we go home? It won't take us a quarter of an hour, and we have several trains home from Ludgate Hill."

Baines looked at his watch. Like his companion, he had no desire to be called back to his office after getting out to Dulwich, and yet he was in no mood to go making reporter's inquiries.

"I don't think I'll go. It's sure to be nothing, my dear fellow," he said. "Besides, I have a beastly headache. I had a heavy night's work. One of my men is away ill."

"Well, at any rate, I think I'll go," Fergusson said. "Don't blame me if you get called back for a special edition with a terrible storm, great loss of life, and all that sort of thing. So long." And, smiling, he waved his hand and parted from his friend in the booking-office of Ludgate Hill Station.

Quickening his pace, he hurried through the office and, passing out by the back, ascended the steep, narrow street until he reached the Post Office telephone exchange in Carter Lane, where, presenting his card, he asked to see the superintendent-in-charge.

Without much delay he was shown upstairs into a small private office, into which came a short, dapper, fair-moustached man with the bustle of a person in a great hurry.

"I've called," the sub-editor explained, "to know whether you can tell me anything regarding the cause of the interruption of the line to Yarmouth a short time ago. We had some important news coming through, but were cut off just in the midst of it, and then we received information that all the telephone and telegraph lines to Yarmouth were interrupted."

"Well, that's just the very point which is puzzling us at this moment," was the night-superintendent's reply. "It is quite unaccountable. Our trunk going to Yarmouth seems to be down, as well as the telegraphs. Yarmouth, Lowestoft, and beyond Beccles seem all to have been suddenly cut off. About eighteen minutes to four the operators noticed something wrong, switched the trunks through to the testers, and the latter reported to me in due course."

"That's strange! Did they all break down together?"

"No. The first that failed was the one that runs through Chelmsford, Colchester, and Ipswich up to Lowestoft and Yarmouth. The operator found that he could get through to Ipswich and Beccles. Ipswich knew nothing, except that something was wrong. They could still ring up Beccles, but not beyond."

As they were speaking, there was a tap at the door, and the assistant night-superintendent entered, saying —

"The Norwich line through Scole and Long Stratton has now failed, sir. About half-past four Norwich reported a fault somewhere north, between there and Cromer. But the operator now says that the line is apparently broken, and so are all the telegraphs from there to Cromer, Sheringham, and Holt."

"Another line has gone, then!" exclaimed the superintendent-in-charge, utterly astounded. "Have you tried to get on to Cromer by the other routes — through Nottingham and King's Lynn, or through Cambridge?"

"The testers have tried every route, but there's no response."

"You could get through to some of the places — Yarmouth, for instance — by telegraphing to the Continent, I suppose?" asked Fergusson.

"We are already trying," responded the assistant superintendent.

"What cables run out from the east coast in that neighbourhood?" inquired the sub-editor quickly.

"There are five between Southwold and Cromer — three run to Germany, and two to Holland," replied the assistant. "There's the cable from Yarmouth to Barkum, in the Frisian Islands; from Happisburg, near Mundesley, to Barkum; from Yarmouth to Emden; from Lowestoft to Haarlem, and from Kessingland, near Southwold, to Zandypport."

"And you are trying all the routes?" asked his superior.

"I spoke to Paris myself an hour ago and asked them to cable by all five routes to Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Kessingland, and Happisburg," was the assistant's reply. "I also asked Liverpool Street Station and King's Cross to wire down to some of their stations on the coast, but the reply was that they



were in the same predicament as ourselves – their lines were down north of Beccles, Wymondham, East Dereham, and also south of Lynn. I'll just run along and see if there's any reply from Paris. They ought to be through by this time, as it's Sunday morning, and no traffic." And he went out hurriedly.

"There's certainly something very peculiar," remarked the superintendent-in-charge to the sub-editor. "If there's been an earthquake or an electrical disturbance, then it is a most extraordinary one. Every single line reaching to the coast seems interrupted."

"Yes. It's uncommonly funny," Fergusson remarked. "I wonder what could have happened. You've never had a complete breakdown like this before?"

"Never. But I think –"

The sentence remained unfinished, for his assistant returned with a slip of paper in his hand, saying —

"This message has just come in from Paris. I'll read it. 'Superintendent Telephones, Paris, to Superintendent Telephones, London. – Have obtained direct telegraphic communication with operators of all five cables to England. Haarlem, Zandypot, Barkum, and Emden all report that cables are interrupted. They can get no reply from England, and tests show that cables are damaged somewhere near English shore.'"

"Is that all?" asked Fergusson.

"That's all. Paris knows no more than we do," was the assistant's response.

"Then the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts are completely isolated – cut off from post office, railways, telephones, and cables!" exclaimed the superintendent. "It's mysterious – most mysterious!" And, taking up the instrument upon his table, he placed a plug in one of the holes down the front of the table itself, and a moment later was in conversation with the official in charge of the traffic at Liverpool Street, repeating the report from Paris, and urging him to send light engines north from Wymondham or Beccles into the zone of mystery.

The reply came back that he had already done so, but a telegram had reached him from Wymondham to the effect that the road-bridges between Kimberley and Hardingham had apparently fallen in, and the line was blocked by débris. Interruption was also reported beyond Swaffham, at a place called Little Dunham.

"Then even the railways themselves are broken!" cried Fergusson. "Is it possible that there's been a great earthquake?"

"An earthquake couldn't very well destroy all five cables from the Continent," remarked the superintendent gravely.

The latter had scarcely placed the receiver upon the hook when a third man entered – an operator who, addressing him, said —

"Will you please come to the switchboard, sir? There's a man in the Ipswich call office who has just told me a most extraordinary story. He says that he started in his motor-car alone from Lowestoft to London at half-past three this morning, and just as it was getting light he was passing along the edge of Henham Park, between Wangford village and Blythburgh, when he saw three men apparently repairing the telegraph wires. One was up the pole, and the other two were standing below. As he passed he saw a flash, for, to his surprise, one of the men fired point-blank at him with a revolver. Fortunately, the shot went wide, and he at once put on a move and got down into Blythburgh village, even though one of his tyres went down. It had probably been pierced by the bullet fired at him, as the puncture was unlike any he had ever had before. At Blythburgh he informed the police of the outrage, and the constable, in turn, woke up the postmaster, who tried to telegraph back to the police at Wrentham, but found that the line was interrupted. Was it possible that the men were cutting the wires, instead of repairing them? He says that after repairing the puncture he took the village constable and three other men on his car and went back to the spot, where, although the trio had escaped, they saw that wholesale havoc had been wrought with the telegraphs. The lines had been severed in four or five places, and whole lengths tangled up into great masses. A number of poles had

been sawn down, and were lying about the roadside. Seeing that nothing could be done, the gentleman remounted his car, came on to Ipswich, and reported the damage at our call office.”

“And is he still there?” exclaimed the superintendent quickly, amazed at the motorist’s statement.

“Yes. I asked him to wait for a few moments in order to speak to you, sir.”

“Good. I’ll go at once. Perhaps you’d like to come also, Mr. Fergusson?”

And all four ran up to the gallery, where the huge switchboards were ranged around, and where the night operators, with the receivers attached to one ear, were still at work.

In a moment the superintendent had taken the operator’s seat, adjusted the ear-piece, and was in conversation with Ipswich. A second later he was speaking with the man who had actually witnessed the cutting of the trunk line.

While he was thus engaged an operator at the farther end of the switchboard suddenly gave vent to a cry of surprise and disbelief.

“What do you say, Beccles? Repeat it,” he asked excitedly.

Then a moment later he shouted aloud —

“Beccles says that German soldiers – hundreds of them – are pouring into the place! The Germans have landed at Lowestoft, they think.”

All who heard those ominous words sprang up dumbfounded, staring at each other.

The assistant-superintendent dashed to the operator’s side and seized his apparatus.

“Halloa – halloa, Beccles! Halloa – halloa – halloa!”

The response was some gruff words in German, and the sound of scuffling could distinctly be heard. Then all was silent.

Time after time he rang up the small Suffolk town, but in vain. Then he switched through to the testers, and quickly the truth was plain.

The second trunk line to Norwich, running from Ipswich by Harleston and Beccles, had been cut farther towards London.

But what held everyone breathless in the trunk telephone headquarters was that the Germans had actually effected the surprise landing that had so often in recent years been predicted by military critics; that England on that quiet September Sunday morning had been attacked. England was actually invaded. It was incredible!

Yet London’s millions in their Sunday morning lethargy were in utter ignorance of the grim disaster that had suddenly fallen upon the land.

Fergusson was for rushing at once back to the *Weekly Dispatch* office to get out an extraordinary edition, but the superintendent, who was still in conversation with the motorist, urged judicious forethought.

“For the present, let us wait. Don’t let us alarm the public unnecessarily. We want corroboration. Let us have the motorist up here,” he suggested.

“Yes,” cried the sub-editor. “Let me speak to him.”

Over the wire Fergusson begged the stranger to come at once to London and give his story, declaring that the military authorities would require it. Then, just as the man who had been shot at by German advance spies – for such they had undoubtedly been – in order to prevent the truth leaking out, gave his promise to come to town at once, there came over the line from the coastguard at Southwold a vague, incoherent telephone message regarding strange ships having been seen to the northward, and asking for connection with Harwich; while King’s Cross and Liverpool Street Stations both rang up almost simultaneously, reporting the receipt of extraordinary messages from King’s Lynn, Diss, Harleston, Halesworth, and other places. All declared that German soldiers were swarming over the north, that Lowestoft and Beccles had been seized, and that Yarmouth and Cromer were isolated.

Various stationmasters reported that the enemy had blown up bridges, taken up rails, and effectually blocked all communication with the coast. Certain important junctions were already held by the enemy's outposts.

Such was the amazing news received in that high-up room in Carter Lane, City, on that sweet, sunny morning when all the great world of London was at peace, either still slumbering or week-ending.

Fergusson remained for a full hour and a half at the Telephone Exchange, anxiously awaiting any further corroboration. Many wild stories came over the wires telling how panic-stricken people were fleeing inland away from the enemy's outposts. Then he took a hansom to the *Weekly Dispatch* office, and proceeded to prepare a special edition of his paper – an edition containing surely the most amazing news that had ever startled London.

Fearing to create undue panic, he decided not to go to press until the arrival of the motorist from Ipswich. He wanted the story of the man who had actually seen the cutting of the wires. He paced his room excitedly, wondering what effect the news would have upon the world. In the rival newspaper offices the report was, as yet, unknown. With journalistic forethought he had arranged that at present the bewildering truth should not leak out to his rivals, either from the railway termini or from the telephone exchange. His only fear was that some local correspondent might telegraph from some village or town nearer the metropolis which was still in communication with the central office.

Time passed very slowly. Each moment increased his anxiety. He had sent out the one reporter who remained on duty to the house of Colonel Sir James Taylor, the Permanent Under-Secretary for War. Halting before the open window, he looked up and down the street for the arriving motor-car. But all was quiet.

Eight o'clock had just boomed from Big Ben, and London still remained in her Sunday morning peace. The street, bright in the warm sunshine, was quite empty, save for a couple of motor-omnibuses and a sprinkling of gaily dressed holiday-makers on their way to the day excursion trains.

In that centre of London – the hub of the world – all was comparatively silent, the welcome rest after the busy turmoil that through six days in the week is unceasing, that fevered throbbing of the heart of the world's great capital.

Of a sudden, however, came the whirr-r of an approaching car, as a thin-faced, travel-stained man tore along from the direction of the Strand and pulled up before the office. The fine car, a six-cylinder "Napier," was grey with the mud of country roads, while the motorist himself was smothered until his goggles had been almost entirely covered.

Fergusson rushed out to him, and a few moments later the pair were in the upstairs room, the sub-editor swiftly taking down the motorist's story, which differed very little from what he had already spoken over the telephone.

Then, just as Big Ben chimed the half-hour, the echoes of the half-deserted Strand were suddenly awakened by the loud, strident voices of the newsboys shouting —

"*Weekly Dispatch*, spe-shall! Invasion of England this morning! Germans in Suffolk! Terrible panic! Spe-shall! *Weekly Dispatch*, Spe-shall!"

As soon as the paper had gone to press Fergusson urged the motorist – whose name was Horton, and who lived at Richmond – to go with him to the War Office and report. Therefore, both men entered the car, and in a few moments drew up before the new War Office in Whitehall.

"I want to see somebody in authority at once!" cried Fergusson excitedly to the sentry as he sprang out.

"You'll find the caretaker, if you ring at the side entrance – on the right, there," responded the man, who then marched on.

"The caretaker!" echoed the excited sub-editor bitterly. "And England invaded by the Germans!"

He, however, dashed towards the door indicated and rang the bell. At first there was no response. But presently there were sounds of a slow unbolting of the door, which opened at last, revealing a tall, elderly man in slippers, a retired soldier.

"I must see somebody at once!" exclaimed the journalist. "Not a moment must be lost. What permanent officials are here?"

"There's nobody 'ere, sir," responded the man in some surprise at the request. "It's Sunday morning, you know."

"Sunday! I know that, but I must see someone. Whom can I see?"

"Nobody, until to-morrow morning. Come then." And the old soldier was about to close the door when the journalist prevented him, asking —

"Where's the clerk-in-residence?"

"How should I know? Gone up the river, perhaps. It's a nice mornin'."

"Well, where does he live?"

"Sometimes 'ere – sometimes in 'is chambers in Ebury Street," and the man mentioned the number.

"Better come to-morrow, sir, about eleven. Somebody'll be sure to see you then."

"To-morrow!" cried the other. "To-morrow! You don't know what you're saying, man! To-morrow will be too late. Perhaps it's too late now. The Germans have landed in England!"

"Oh, 'ave they?" exclaimed the caretaker, regarding both men with considerable suspicion. "Our people will be glad to know that, I'm sure – to-morrow."

"But haven't you got telephones, private telegraphs, or something here, so that I can communicate with the authorities? Can't you ring up the Secretary of State, the Permanent Secretary, or somebody?"

The caretaker hesitated a moment, his incredulous gaze fixed upon the pale, agitated faces of the two men.

"Well, just wait a minute, and I'll see," he said, disappearing into a long cavernous passage.

In a few moments he reappeared with a constable whose duty it was to patrol the building.

The officer looked the strangers up and down, and then asked —

"What's this extraordinary story? Germans landed in England – eh? That's fresh, certainly!"

"Yes. Can't you hear what the newsboys are crying? Listen!" exclaimed the motorist.

"H'm. Well, you're not the first gentleman who's been here with a scare, you know. If I were you I'd wait till to-morrow," and he glanced significantly at the caretaker.

"I won't wait till to-morrow!" cried Fergusson. "The country is in peril, and you refuse to assist me on your own responsibility – you understand?"

"All right, my dear sir," replied the officer, leisurely hooking his thumbs in his belt. "You'd better drive home, and call again in the morning."

"So this is the way the safety of the country is neglected!" cried the motorist bitterly, turning away. "Everyone away, and this great place, built merely to gull the public, I suppose, empty and its machinery useless. What will England say when she learns the truth?"

As they were walking in disgust out from the portico towards the car, a man jumped from a hansom in breathless haste. He was the reporter whom Fergusson had sent out to Sir James Taylor's house in Cleveland Square, Hyde Park.

"They thought Sir James spent the night with his brother up at Hampstead," he exclaimed. "I've been there, but find that he's away for the week-end at Chilham Hall, near Buckden."

"Buckden! That's on the Great North Road!" cried Horton. "We'll go at once and find him. Sixty miles from London. We can be there under two hours!"

And a few minutes later the pair were tearing due north in the direction of Finchley, disregarding the signs from police constables to stop, Horton wiping the dried mud from his goggles and pulling them over his half-closed eyes.

They had given the alarm in London, and the *Weekly Dispatch* was spreading the amazing news everywhere. People read it eagerly, gasped for a moment, and then smiled in utter disbelief. But the two men were on their way to reveal the appalling truth to the man who was one of the heads of that complicated machinery of inefficient defence which we so proudly term our Army.

Bursting with the astounding information, they bent their heads to the wind as the car shot onward through Barnet and Hatfield, then, entering Hitchin, they were compelled to slow down in the narrow street as they passed the old Sun Inn, and afterwards out again upon the broad highway with its many telegraph lines, through Biggleswade, Tempsford, and Eaton Socon, until, in Buckden, Horton pulled up to inquire of a farm labourer for Chilham Hall.

“Oop yon road to the left, sir. 'Bout a mile Huntingdon way,” was the man’s reply.

Then away they sped, turning a few minutes later into the handsome lodge-gates of Chilham Park, and running up the great elm avenue, drew up before the main door of the ancient hall, a quaint many-gabled old place of grey stone.

“Is Sir James Taylor in?” Fergusson shouted to the liveried man who opened the door.

“He’s gone across the home farm with his lordship and the keepers,” was the reply.

“Then take me to him at once. I haven’t a second to lose. I must see him this instant.”

Thus urged, the servant conducted the pair across the park and through several fields to the edge of a small wood, where two elderly men were walking with a couple of keepers and several dogs about them.

“The tall gentleman is Sir James. The other is his lordship,” the servant explained to Fergusson; and a few moments later the breathless journalist, hurrying up, faced the Permanent Under-Secretary with the news that England was invaded – that the Germans had actually effected a surprise landing on the east coast.

Sir James and his host stood speechless. Like others, they at first believed the pale-faced, bearded sub-editor to be a lunatic, but a few moments later, when Horton briefly repeated the story, they saw that whatever might have occurred, the two men were at least in deadly earnest.

“Impossible!” cried Sir James. “We should surely have heard something of it if such were actually the case! The coastguard would have telephoned the news instantly. Besides, where is our fleet?”

“The Germans evidently laid their plans with great cleverness. Their spies, already in England, cut the wires at a pre-arranged hour last night,” declared Fergusson. “They sought to prevent this gentleman from giving the alarm by shooting him. All the railways to London are already either cut, or held by the enemy. One thing, however, is clear – fleet or no fleet, the east coast is entirely at their mercy.”

Host and guest exchanged dark glances.

“Well, if what you say is the actual truth,” exclaimed Sir James, “to-day is surely the blackest day that England has ever known.”

“Yes, thanks to the pro-German policy of the Government and the false assurances of the Blue Water School. They should have listened to Lord Roberts,” snapped his lordship. “I suppose you’ll go at once, Taylor, and make inquiries?”

“Of course,” responded the Permanent Secretary. And a quarter of an hour later, accepting Horton’s offer, he was sitting in the car as it headed back towards London.

Could the journalist’s story be true? As he sat there, with his head bent against the wind and the mud splashing into his face, Sir James recollected too well the repeated warnings of the past five years, serious warnings by men who knew our shortcomings, but to which no attention had been paid. Both the Government and the public had remained apathetic, the idea of peril had been laughed to scorn, and the country had, ostrich-like, buried its head in the sand, and allowed Continental nations to supersede us in business, in armaments, in everything.

The danger of invasion had always been ridiculed as a mere alarmist's fiction; those responsible for the defence of the country had smiled, the Navy had been reduced, and the Army had remained in contented inefficiency.

If the blow had really been struck by Germany? If she had risked three or four, out of her twenty-three, army corps, and had aimed at the heart of the British Empire? What then? Ay! what then?

As the car swept down Regent Street into Pall Mall and towards Whitehall, Sir James saw on every side crowds discussing the vague but astounding reports now published in special editions of all the Sunday papers, and shouted wildly everywhere.

Boys bearing sheets fresh from the Fleet Street presses were seized, and bundles torn from them by excited Londoners eager to learn the latest intelligence.

Around both War Office and Admiralty great surging crowds were clamouring loudly for the truth. Was it the truth, or was it only a hoax? Half London disbelieved it. Yet from every quarter, from the north and from across the bridges, thousands were pouring in to ascertain what had really occurred, and the police had the greatest difficulty in keeping order.

In Trafalgar Square, where the fountains were plashing so calmly in the autumn sunlight, a shock-headed man mounted the back of one of the lions and harangued the crowd with much gesticulation, denouncing the Government in the most violent terms; but the orator was ruthlessly pulled down by the police in the midst of his fierce attack.

It was half-past two o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans had already been on English soil ten hours, yet London was in ignorance of where they had actually landed, and utterly helpless.

All sorts of wild rumours were afloat, rumours that spread everywhere throughout the metropolis, from Hampstead to Tooting, from Barking to Hounslow, from Willesden to Woolwich. The Germans were in England!

But in those first moments of the astounding revelation the excitement centred in Trafalgar Square and its vicinity. Men shouted and threatened, women shrieked and wrung their hands, while wild-haired orators addressed groups at the street corners.

Where was our Navy? they asked. Where was our "command of the sea" of which the papers had always talked so much? If we possessed that, then surely no invader could ever have landed? Where was our Army – that brave British Army that had fought triumphantly a hundred campaigns, and which we had been assured by the Government was always ready for any emergency? When would it face the invader and drive him back into the sea?

When?

And the wild, shouting crowds looked up at the many windows of the Admiralty and the War Office, ignorant that both those huge buildings only held terrified caretakers and a double watch of police constables.

Was England invaded? Were foreign legions actually overrunning Norfolk and Suffolk, and were we really helpless beneath the iron heel of the enemy?

It was impossible – incredible! England was on the most friendly terms with Germany. Yet the blow had fallen, and London – or that portion of her that was not enjoying its Sunday afternoon nap in the smug respectability of the suburbs – stood amazed and breathless, in incredulous wonder.

## CHAPTER II

### EFFECT IN THE CITY

Monday, 3rd September 1910, was indeed Black Monday for London.

By midnight on Sunday the appalling news had spread everywhere. Though the full details of the terrible naval disasters were not yet to hand, yet it was vaguely known that our ships had been defeated in the North Sea, and many of them sunk.

Before 7 a.m. on Monday, however, telegrams reaching London by the subterranean lines from the north gave thrilling stories of frightful disasters we had, while all unconscious, suffered at the hands of the German fleet.

With London, the great cities of the north, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, and Birmingham, awoke utterly dazed. It seemed incredible. And yet the enemy had, by his sudden and stealthy blow, secured command of the sea and actually landed.

The public wondered why a formal declaration of war had not previously been made, ignorant of the fact that the declaration preceding the Franco-German War was the first made by any civilised nation prior to the commencement of hostilities for one hundred and seventy years. The peril of the nation was now recognised on every hand.

Eager millions poured into the City by every train from the suburbs and towns in the vicinity of the metropolis, anxious to ascertain the truth for themselves, pale with terror, wild with excitement, indignant that our land forces were not already mobilised and ready to move eastward to meet the invader.

As soon as the banks were opened there was a run on them, but by noon the Bank of England had suspended all specie payments. The other banks, being thus unable to meet their engagements, simply closed the doors, bringing business to an abrupt standstill. Consols stood at 90 on Saturday, but by noon on Monday were down to 42 – lower even than they were in 1798, when they stood at 47¼. Numbers of foreigners tried to speculate heavily, but were unable to do so, for banking being suspended they could not obtain transfers.

On the Stock Exchange the panic in the afternoon was indescribable. Securities of every sort went entirely to pieces, and there were no buyers. Financiers were surprised that no warning in London had betrayed the position of affairs, London being the money centre of the world. Prior to 1870 Paris shared with London the honour of being the pivot of the money market, but on the suspension of cash payments by the Bank of France during the Franco-German War, Paris lost that position. Had it not been that the milliards comprising the French War indemnity were intact in golden louis in the fortress of Spandau, Germany could never have hoped to wage sudden war with Great Britain before she had made Berlin independent of London in a money sense, or, at any rate, to accumulate sufficient gold to carry on the war for at least twelve months. The only way in which she could have done this was to raise her rate so as to offer better terms than London. Yet directly the Bank of England discovered the rate of exchange going against her, and her stock of gold diminishing, she would have responded by raising the English bank-rate in order to check the flow. Thus competition would have gone on until the rates became so high that all business would be checked, and people would have realised their securities to obtain the necessary money to carry on their affairs. Thus, no doubt, the coming war would have been forecasted had it not been for Germany's already prepared war-chest, which the majority of persons have nowadays overlooked. Its possession had enabled Germany to strike her sudden blow, and now the Bank of England, which is the final reserve of gold in the United Kingdom, found that as notes were cashed so the stock of gold diminished until it was in a few hours compelled to obtain from the Government suspension of the Bank Charter. This enabled the Bank to suspend cash payment, and issue notes without a corresponding deposit of the equivalent in gold.

The suspension, contrary to increasing the panic, had, curiously enough, the immediate effect of somewhat allaying it. Plenty of people in the City were confident that the blow aimed could not prove an effective one, and that the Germans, however many might have landed, would quickly be sent back again. Thus many level-headed business men regarded the position calmly, believing that when our command of the sea was again re-established, as it must be in a day or two, the enemy would soon be non-existent.

Business outside the money market was, of course, utterly demoralised. The buying of necessities was now uppermost in everyone's mind. Excited crowds in the streets caused most of the shops in the City and West End to close, while around the Admiralty were great crowds of eager men and women of all classes, tearful wives of bluejackets jostling with officers' ladies from Mayfair and Belgravia, demanding news of their loved ones – inquiries which, alas! the casualty office were unable to satisfy. The scene of grief, terror, and suspense was heartrending. Certain ships were known to have been sunk with all on board after making a gallant fight, and those who had husbands, brothers, lovers, or fathers on board wept loudly, calling upon the Government to avenge the ruthless murder of their loved ones.

In Manchester, in Liverpool, indeed all through the great manufacturing centres of the north, the excitement of London was reflected.

In Manchester there was a panic "on 'Change," and the crowd in Deansgate coming into collision with a force of mounted police, some rioting occurred, and a number of shop windows broken, while several agitators who attempted to speak in front of the Infirmary were at once arrested.

Liverpool was the scene of intense anxiety and excitement, when a report was spread that German cruisers were about the estuary of the Mersey. It was known that the coal staithes, cranes, and petroleum tanks at Penarth, Cardiff, Barry, and Llanelly had been destroyed; that Aberdeen had been bombarded; and there were rumours that notwithstanding the mines and defences of the Mersey, the city of Liverpool, with all its crowd of valuable shipping, was to share the same fate.

The whole place was in a ferment. By eleven o'clock the stations were crowded by women and children sent by the men away into the country – anywhere from the doomed and defenceless city. The Lord Mayor vainly endeavoured to inspire confidence, but telegrams from London announcing the complete financial collapse, only increased the panic. In the Old Hay Market and up Dale Street to the landing-stages, around the Exchange, the Town Hall, and the Custom House, the excited throng surged, talking eagerly, terrified at the awful blow that was prophesied. At any moment the grey hulls of those death-dealing cruisers might appear in the river; at any moment the first shell might fall and burst in their midst.

Some – the wiseacres – declared that the Germans would never shell a city without first demanding an indemnity, but the majority argued that as they had already disregarded the law of nations in attacking our fleet without provocation, they would bombard Liverpool, destroy the shipping, and show no quarter.

Thus during the whole of the day Liverpool existed in hourly terror of destruction.

London remained breathless, wondering what was about to happen. Every hour the morning newspapers continued to issue special editions, containing all the latest facts procurable regarding the great naval disaster. The telegraphs and telephones to the north were constantly at work, and survivors of a destroyer who had landed at St. Abb's, north of Berwick, gave thrilling and terrible narratives.

A shilling a copy was no unusual price to be paid in Cornhill, Moorgate Street, Lombard Street, or Ludgate Hill for a halfpenny paper, and the newsboys reaped rich harvests, except when, as so often happened, they were set upon by the excited crowd, and their papers torn from them.

Fleet Street was entirely blocked, and the traffic stopped by crowds standing before the newspaper offices waiting for the summary of each telegram to be posted up upon the windows. And as each despatch was read, sighs, groans, and curses were heard on every hand.



The Government – the sleek-mannered, soft-spoken, self-confident Blue Water School – were responsible for it all, was declared on every hand. They should have placed the Army upon a firm and proper footing; they should have encouraged the establishment of rifle clubs to teach every young man how to defend his home; they should have pondered over the thousand and one warnings uttered during the past ten years by eminent men, statesmen, soldiers, and writers: they should have listened to those forcible and eloquent appeals of Earl Roberts, England's military hero, who, having left the service, had no axe to grind. He spoke the truth in the House of Lords in 1906 fearlessly, from patriotic motives, because he loved his country and foresaw its doom. And yet the Government and the public had disregarded his ominous words.

And now the blow he prophesied had fallen. It was too late – too late! The Germans were upon English soil.

What would the Government now do? What, indeed, could it do?

There were some who shouted in bravado that when mobilised the British troops would drive the invader into the sea; but such men were unaware of the length of time necessary to mobilise our Army for home defence – or of the many ridiculous regulations which appear to be laid down for the purpose of hindering rather than accelerating the concentration of forces.

All through the morning, amid the chaos of business in the City, the excitement had been steadily growing, until shortly after three o'clock the *Daily Mail* issued a special edition containing a copy of a German proclamation which, it was said, was now posted everywhere in East Norfolk, East Suffolk, and in Maldon in Essex, already occupied by the enemy.

The original proclamation had been found pasted by some unknown hand upon a barn door near the town of Billericay, and had been detached and brought to London in a motor-car by the *Mail's* correspondent.

It showed plainly the German intention was to deal a hard and crushing blow, and it struck terror into the heart of London, for it read as will be seen on next page.

Upon the walls of the Mansion House, the Guildhall, outside the Bank of England, the Royal Exchange, and upon the various public buildings within the City wards a proclamation by the Lord Mayor quickly appeared. Even upon the smoke-blackened walls of St. Paul's Cathedral, where, at that moment, a special service was being held, big posters were being posted and read by the assembled thousands.

There was a sullen gloom everywhere as the hours went slowly by, and the sun sank into the smoke haze, shedding over the giant city a blood-red afterglow – a light that was ominous in those breathless moments of suspense and terror.

Westward beyond Temple Bar proclamations were being posted. Indeed, upon all the hoardings in Greater London appeared various broadsheets side by side. One by the Chief Commissioner of Police, regulating the traffic in the streets, and appealing to the public to assist in the preservation of order; another by the Mayor

## **PROCLAMATION**

### **WE, GENERAL COMMANDING THE 3rd GERMAN ARMY,**

HAVING SEEN the proclamation of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor William, King of Prussia, Chief of the Army, which authorises the generals commanding the different German Army Corps to establish special measures against all municipalities and persons acting in contradiction to the usages of war, and to take what steps they consider necessary for the well-being of the troops,

## HEREBY GIVE PUBLIC NOTICE:

(1) THE MILITARY JURISDICTION is hereby established. It applies to all territory of Great Britain occupied by the German Army, and to every action endangering the security of the troops by rendering assistance to the enemy. The Military Jurisdiction will be announced and placed vigorously in force in every parish by the issue of this present proclamation.

(2) ANY PERSON OR PERSONS NOT BEING BRITISH SOLDIERS, or not showing by their dress that they are soldiers:

(a) SERVING THE ENEMY as spies;

(b) MISLEADING THE GERMAN TROOPS when charged to serve as guides;

(c) SHOOTING, INJURING, OR ROBBING any person belonging to the German Army, or forming part of its personnel;

(d) DESTROYING BRIDGES OR CANALS, damaging telegraphs, telephones, electric light wires, gasometers, or railways, interfering with roads, setting fire to munitions of war, provisions, or quarters established by German troops;

(e) TAKING ARMS against the German troops,

## WILL BE PUNISHED BY DEATH

IN EACH CASE the officer presiding at the Council of War will be charged with the trial, and pronounce judgment. Councils of War may not pronounce ANY OTHER CONDEMNATION SAVE THAT OF DEATH.

THE JUDGMENT WILL BE IMMEDIATELY EXECUTED.

(3) TOWNS OR VILLAGES in the territory in which the contravention takes place will be compelled to pay indemnity equal to one year's revenue.

(4) THE INHABITANTS MUST FURNISH necessaries for the German troops daily as follows: —

1 lb. 10 oz. bread.	1 oz. tea.	1½ pints beer, or 1
13 oz. meat.	1½ oz. tobacco or 5 cigars.	wine-glassful of brandy or whisky.
3 lb. potatoes.	½ pint wine.	

The ration for each horse: —

13 lb. oats.	3 lb. 6 oz. hay.	3 lb. 6 oz. straw.
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(ALL PERSONS WHO PREFER to pay an indemnity in money may do so at the rate of 2s. per day per man.)

(5) COMMANDERS OF DETACHED corps have the right to requisition all that they consider necessary for the well-being of their men, and will deliver to the inhabitants official receipts for goods so supplied.

WE HOPE IN CONSEQUENCE that the inhabitants of Great Britain will make no difficulty in furnishing all that may be considered necessary.

(6) AS REGARDS the individual transactions between the troops and the inhabitants, we give notice that one German mark shall be considered the equivalent to one English shilling.

*The General Commanding the Ninth German Army Corps, VON KRONHELM.*

*Beccles, September the Third, 1910.*

of Westminster, couched in similar terms to that of the Lord Mayor; and a Royal Proclamation, brief but noble, urging every Briton to do his duty, to take his part in the defence of King and country, and to unfurl the banner of the British Empire that had hitherto carried peace and civilisation in every quarter of the world. Germany, whose independence had been respected, had attacked us without provocation; therefore hostilities were, alas, inevitable.

When the great poster printed in big capitals and headed by the Royal Arms made its appearance it was greeted with wild cheering.

It was a message of love from King to people – a message to the highest and to the lowest. Posted in Whitechapel at the same hour as in Whitehall, the throngs crowded eagerly about it and sang “God Save our Gracious King,” for if they had but little confidence in the War Office and Admiralty, they placed their trust in their Sovereign, the first diplomat in Europe. Therefore the loyalty was spontaneous, as it always is. They read the royal message, and cheered and cheered again.

As evening closed in yet another poster made its appearance in every city, town, and village in the country, a poster issued by military and police officers and naval officers in charge of dockyards – the order for mobilisation.

The public, however, little dreamed of the hopeless confusion in the War Office, in the various regimental dépôts throughout the country, at headquarters everywhere, and in every barracks in the kingdom. The armed forces of England were passing from a peace to a war footing; but the mobilisation of the various units – namely, its completion in men, horses, and material – was utterly impossible in the face of the extraordinary regulations which, kept a strict secret by the Council of Defence until this moment, revealed a hopeless state of things.

The disorder was frightful. Not a regiment was found fully equipped and ready to march. There was a dearth of officers, equipment, horses, provisions, of, indeed, everything. Some regiments simply existed in the pages of the Army List, but when they came to appear on parade they were mere paper phantoms. Since the Boer War the Government had, with culpable negligence, disregarded the needs of the Army, even though they had the object-lesson of the struggle between Russia and Japan before their eyes.

In many cases the well-meaning efforts on the part of volunteers proved merely a ludicrous farce. Volunteers from Glasgow found themselves due to proceed to Dorking, in Surrey; those from Aberdeen were expected at Caterham, while those from Carlisle made a start for Reading, and found themselves in the quiet old city of Durham. And in a hundred cases it was the same. Muddle, confusion, and a chain of useless regulations at Aldershot, Colchester, and York all tended to hinder the movement of troops to their points of concentration, bringing home to the authorities at last the ominous warnings of the unheeded critics of the past.

In that hour of England’s deadly peril, when not a moment should have been lost in facing the invader, nothing was ready. Men had guns without ammunition; cavalry and artillery were without horses; engineers only half-equipped; volunteers with no transport whatever; balloon sections without balloons, and searchlight units vainly trying to obtain the necessary instruments.

Horses were being requisitioned everywhere. The few horses that, in the age of motor-cars, now remained on the roads in London were quickly taken for draught, and all horses fit to ride were commandeered for the cavalry.

During the turmoil daring German spies were actively at work south of London. The Southampton line of the London and South-Western Railway was destroyed – with explosives placed

by unknown hands – by the bridge over the Wey, near Weybridge, being blown up, and again that over the Mole, between Walton and Esher, while the Reading line was cut by the great bridge over the Thames at Staines being destroyed. The line, too, between Guildford and Waterloo was also rendered impassable by the wreck of the midnight train, which was blown up half-way between Wansborough and Guildford, while in several other places nearer London bridges were rendered unstable by dynamite, the favourite method apparently being to blow the crown out of an arch.

The well-laid plans of the enemy were thus quickly revealed. Among the thousands of Germans working in London, the hundred or so spies, all trusted soldiers, had passed unnoticed, but, working in unison, each little group of two or three had been allotted its task, and had previously thoroughly reconnoitred the position and studied the most rapid or effective means.

The railways to the east and north-east coasts all reported wholesale damage done on Sunday night by the advance agents of the enemy, and now this was continued on the night of Monday in the south, the objective being to hinder troops from moving north from Aldershot. This was, indeed, effectual, for only by a long *détour* could the troops be moved to the northern defences of London, and while many were on Tuesday entrained, others were conveyed to London by the motor-omnibuses sent down for that purpose.

Everywhere through London and its vicinity, as well as in Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Coventry, Leeds, and Liverpool, motor-cars and motor-omnibuses from dealers and private owners were being requisitioned by the military authorities, for they would, it was believed, replace cavalry to a very large extent.

Wild and extraordinary reports were circulated regarding the disasters in the north. Hull, Newcastle, Gateshead, and Tynemouth had, it was believed, been bombarded and sacked. The shipping in the Tyne was burning, and the Elswick works were held by the enemy. Details were, however, very vague, as the Germans were taking every precaution to prevent information reaching London.

## CHAPTER III

### NEWS OF THE ENEMY

Terror and excitement reigned everywhere. The wildest rumours were hourly afloat. London was a seething stream of breathless multitudes of every class.

On Monday morning the newspapers throughout the kingdom had devoted greater part of their space to the extraordinary intelligence from Norfolk and Suffolk and Essex and other places.

That we were actually invaded was plain, but most of the newspapers happily preserved a calm, dignified tone, and made no attempt at sensationalism. The situation was far too serious.

Like the public, however, the Press had been taken entirely by surprise. The blow had been so sudden and so staggering that half the alarming reports were discredited.

In addition to the details of the enemy's operations, as far as could as yet be ascertained, the *Morning Post* on Monday contained an account of a mysterious occurrence at Chatham, which read as follows: —

*“Chatham, Sept. 1 (11.30 p.m.).*

“An extraordinary accident took place on the Medway about eight o'clock this evening. The steamer *Pole Star*, 1200 tons register, with a cargo of cement from Frindsbury, was leaving for Hamburg and came into collision with the *Frauenlob*, of Bremen, a somewhat larger boat, which was inward bound, in a narrow part of the channel about half-way between Chatham and Sheerness. Various accounts of the mishap are current, but whichever of the vessels was responsible for the bad steering or neglect of the ordinary rules of the road, it is certain that the *Frauenlob* was cut into by the stem of the *Pole Star* on her port bow, and sank almost across the channel. The *Pole Star* swung alongside her after the collision, and very soon afterwards sank in an almost parallel position. Tugs and steamboats carrying a number of naval officers and the port authorities are about to proceed to the scene of the accident, and if, as seems probable, there is no chance of raising the vessels, steps will be at once taken to blow them up. In the present state of our foreign relations such an obstruction directly across the entrance to one of our principal warports is a national danger, and will not be allowed to remain a moment longer than can be helped.”

*“Sept. 2.*

“An extraordinary *dénoûement* has followed the collision in the Medway reported in my telegram of last night, which renders it impossible to draw any other conclusion than that the affair is anything but an accident. Everything now goes to prove that the whole business was premeditated and was the result of an organised plot with the object of ‘bottling up’ the numerous men-of-war that are now being hurriedly equipped for service in Chatham Dockyard. In the words of Scripture, ‘An enemy hath done this,’ and there can be very little doubt as to the quarter from which the outrage was engineered. It is nothing less than an outrage to perpetrate what is in reality an overt act of hostility in a time of profound peace, however much the political horizon may be darkened by lowering warclouds. We are living under a Government whose leader lost no time in announcing that no fear of being sneered at as a ‘Little Englander’ would deter him from seeking peace and ensuring it by a reduction of our naval and military armaments, even at that time known to be inadequate to the demands likely to be made upon them if our Empire is to be maintained. We trust, however, that even this parochially minded statesman will lose no time in probing the conspiracy to its depths, and in seeking instant satisfaction from those personages, however highly placed and powerful, who have committed this outrage on the laws of civilisation.

“As soon as the news of the collision reached the dockyard the senior officer at Kethole Reach was ordered by wire to take steps to prevent any vessel from going up the river, and he at once

despatched several picket-boats to the entrance to warn in-coming ships of the blocking of the channel, while a couple of other boats were sent up to within a short distance of the obstruction to make assurance doubly sure. The harbour signals ordering 'suspension of all movings,' were also hoisted at Garrison Point.

"Among other ships which were stopped in consequence of these measures was the *Van Gysen*, a big steamer hailing from Rotterdam, laden, it was stated, with steel rails for the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway, which were to be landed at Port Victoria. She was accordingly allowed to proceed, and anchored, or appeared to anchor, just off the railway pier at that place. Ten minutes later the officer of the watch on board H.M.S. *Medici* reported that he thought she was getting under way again. It was then pretty dark. An electric searchlight being switched on, the *Van Gysen* was discovered steaming up the river at a considerable speed. The *Medici* flashed the news to the flagship, which at once fired a gun, hoisted the recall, and the *Van Gysen's* number in the international code, and despatched her steam pinnace, with orders to overhaul the Dutchman and stop him at whatever cost. A number of the marines on guard were sent in her with their rifles.

"The *Van Gysen* seemed well acquainted with the channel, and continually increased her speed as she went up the river, so that she was within half a mile of the scene of the accident before the steamboat came up with her. The officer in charge called to the skipper through his megaphone to stop his engines and to throw him a rope, as he wanted to come on board. After pretending for some time not to understand him, the skipper slowed his engines and said, 'Ver vel, come 'longside gangway.' As the pinnace hooked on at the gangway, a heavy iron cylinder cover was dropped into her from the height of the *Van Gysen's* deck. It knocked the bowman overboard and crashed into the fore part of the boat, knocking a big hole in the port side forward. She swung off at an angle and stopped to pick up the man overboard. Her crew succeeded in rescuing him, but she was making water fast, and there was nothing for it but to run her into the bank. The lieutenant in charge ordered a rifle to be fired at the *Van Gysen* to bring her to, but she paid not the smallest attention, as might have been expected, and went on her way with gathering speed.

"The report, however, served to attract the attention of the two picket-boats which were patrolling up the river. As she turned a bend in the stream they both shot up alongside out of the darkness, and ordered her peremptorily to stop. But the only answer they received was the sudden extinction of all lights in the steamer. They kept alongside, or rather one of them did, but they were quite helpless to stay the progress of the big wall-sided steamer. The faster of the picket-boats shot ahead with the object of warning those who were busy examining the wrecks. But the *Van Gysen*, going all she knew, was close behind, an indistinguishable black blur in the darkness, and hardly had the officer in the picket-boat delivered his warning before she was heard close at hand. Within a couple of hundred yards of the two wrecks she slowed down, for fear of running right over them. On she came, inevitable as Fate. There was a crash as she came into collision with the central deck-houses of the *Frauenlob* and as her bows scraped past the funnel of the *Pole Star*. Then followed no fewer than half a dozen muffled reports. Her engines went astern for a moment, and down she settled athwart the other two steamers, heeling over to port as she did so. All was turmoil and confusion. None of the dockyard and naval craft present were equipped with searchlights. The harbourmaster, the captain of the yard, even the admiral superintendent, who had just come down in his steam launch, all bawled out orders.

"Lights were flashed and lanterns swung up and down in the vain endeavour to see more of what had happened. Two simultaneous shouts of 'Man overboard!' came from tugs and boats at opposite sides of the river. When a certain amount of order was restored it was discovered that a big dockyard tug was settling down by the head. It seems she had been grazed by the *Van Gysen* as she came over the obstruction, and forced against some portion of one of the foundered vessels, which had pierced a hole in her below the water-line.

“In the general excitement the damage had not been discovered, and now she was sinking fast. Hawsers were made fast to her with the utmost expedition possible in order to tow her clear of the piled-up wreckage, but it was too late. There was only just time to rescue her crew before she, too, added herself to the under-water barricade. As for the crew of the *Van Gysen*, it is thought that all must have gone down in her, as no trace of them has as yet been discovered, despite a most diligent search, for it was considered that, in an affair which had been so carefully planned as this certainly must have been, some provision must surely have been made for the escape of the crew. Those who have been down at the scene of the disaster report that it will be impossible to clear the channel in less than a week or ten days, using every resource of the dockyard.

“A little later I thought I would go down to the dockyard on the off-chance of picking up any further information. The Metropolitan policemen at the gate would on no account allow me to pass at that hour, and I was just turning away when by a great piece of good fortune I ran up against Commander Shelley.

“I was on board his ship as correspondent during the manœuvres of the year before last. ‘And what are you doing down here?’ was his very natural inquiry after we had shaken hands. I told him that I had been down in Chatham for a week past as special correspondent, reporting on the half-hearted preparations being made for the possible mobilisation, and took the opportunity of asking him if he could give me any further information about the collision between the three steamers in the Medway. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘the best thing you can do is to come right along with me. I have just been hawked out of bed to superintend the diving operations which will begin the moment there is a gleam of daylight.’ Needless to say, this just suited me, and I hastened to thank him and to accept his kind offer. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘but I shall have to make one small condition.’

“ ‘And that is?’ I queried.

“ ‘Merely to let me “censor” your telegrams before you send them,’ he returned. ‘You see, the Admiralty might not like to have too much said about this business, and I don’t want to find myself in the dirt-tub.’

“The stipulation was a most reasonable one, and however I disliked the notion of having probably my best paragraphs eliminated, I could not but assent to my friend’s proposition. So away we marched down the echoing spaces of the almost deserted dockyard till we arrived at the *Thunderbolt* pontoon. Here lay a pinnacle with steam up, and, lighted down the sloping side of the old ironclad by the lantern of the policeman on duty, we stepped on board and shot out into the centre of the stream. We blew our whistles and the coxswain waved a lantern, whereupon a small tug that had a couple of dockyard lighters attached gave a hoarse ‘toot’ in response, and followed us down the river. We sped along in the darkness against a strong tide that was making up-stream, past Upnor Castle, that quaint old Tudor fortress with its long line of modern powder magazines, and along under the deeper shadows beneath Hoo Woods till we came abreast of the medley of mud flats and grass-grown islets just beyond them. Here, above the thud of the engines and the splash of the water, a thin, long-drawn-out cry wavered through the night. ‘Someone hailing the boat, sir,’ reported the lookout forward. We had all heard it. ‘Ease down,’ ordered Shelley, and hardly moving against the rushing tideway we listened for its repetition. Again the voice was raised in quavering supplication. ‘What the dickens does he say?’ queried the commander. ‘It’s German,’ I answered. ‘I know that language well. I think he’s asking for help. May I answer him?’

“ ‘By all means. Perhaps he belongs to one of those steamers.’ The same thought was in my own mind. I hailed in return, asking where he was and what he wanted. The answer came back that he was a shipwrecked seaman, who was cold, wet, and miserable, and implored to be taken off from the islet where he found himself, cut off from everywhere by water and darkness. We ran the boat’s nose into the bank, and presently succeeded in hauling on board a miserable object, wet through, and plastered from head to foot with black Medway mud. The broken remains of a cork life-belt hung from his shoulders. A dram of whisky somewhat revived him. ‘And now,’ said Shelley, ‘you’d

better cross-examine him. We may get something out of the fellow.’ The foreigner, crouched down shivering in the stern-sheets half covered with a yellow oilskin that some charitable bluejacket had thrown over him, appeared to me in the light of the lantern that stood on the deck before him to be not only suffering from cold, but from terror. A few moments’ conversation with him confirmed my suspicions. I turned to Shelley and exclaimed, ‘He says he’ll tell us everything if we spare his life,’ I explained. ‘I’m sure I don’t want to shoot the chap,’ replied the commander. ‘I suppose he’s implicated in this “bottling up” affair. If he is, he jolly well deserves it, but I don’t suppose anything will be done to him. Anyway, his information may be valuable, and so you may tell him that he is all right as far as I’m concerned, and I will do my best for him with the Admiral. I daresay that will satisfy him. If not, you might threaten him a bit. Tell him anything you like if you think it will make him speak.’ To cut a long story short, I found the damp Dutchman amenable to reason, and the following is the substance of what I elicited from him.

“He had been a deck hand on board the *Van Gysen*. When she left Rotterdam he did not know that the trip was anything out of the way. There was a new skipper whom he had not seen before, and there were also two new mates with a new chief engineer. Another steamer followed them all the way till they arrived at the Nore. On the way over he and several other seamen were sent for by the captain and asked if they would volunteer for a dangerous job, promising them £50 a-piece if it came off all right. He and five others agreed, as did two or three stokers, and were then ordered to remain aft and not communicate with any others of the crew. Off the Nore all the remainder were transferred to the following steamer, which steamed off to the eastward. After they were gone the selected men were told that the officers all belonged to the Imperial German Navy, and by orders of the Kaiser were about to attempt to block up the Medway.

“A collision between two other ships had been arranged for, one of which was loaded with a mass of old steel rails into which liquid cement had been run, so that her hold contained a solid impenetrable block. The *Van Gysen* carried a similar cargo, and was provided with an arrangement for blowing holes in her bottom. The crew were provided with life-belts and the half of the money promised, and all except the captain, the engineer, and the two mates dropped overboard just before arriving at the sunken vessels. They were advised to make their way to Gravesend, and then to shift for themselves as best they could. He had found himself on a small island, and could not muster up courage to plunge into the cold water again in the darkness.

“‘By Jove! This means war with Germany, man! – War!’ was Shelley’s comment. At two o’clock this afternoon we knew that it did, for the news of the enemy’s landing in Norfolk was signalled down from the dockyard. We also knew from the divers that the cargo of the sunken steamers was what the rescued seaman had stated it to be. Our bottle has been fairly well corked.”

This amazing revelation showed how cleverly contrived was the German plan of hostilities. All our splendid ships at Chatham had, in that brief half-hour, been bottled up and rendered utterly useless. Yet the authorities were not blameless in the matter, for in November 1905 a foreign warship actually came up the Medway in broad daylight, and was not noticed until she began to bang away her salutes, much to the utter consternation of everyone!

This incident, however, was but one of the many illustrations of Germany’s craft and cunning. The whole scheme had been years in careful preparation.

She intended to invade us, and regarded every stratagem as allowable in her sudden dash upon England, an expedition which promised to result in the most desperate war of modern times.

At that moment the *Globe* reproduced those plain, prophetic words of Lord Overstone, written some years before to the Royal Defence Commission: “Negligence alone can bring about the calamity under discussion. Unless we suffer ourselves to be surprised we cannot be invaded with success. It is useless to discuss what will occur or what can be done after London has fallen into the hands of an invading foe. The apathy which may render the occurrence of such a catastrophe possible will



not afterwards enable the country, enfeebled, dispirited, and disorganised by the loss of its capital, to redeem the fatal error.”

Was that prophecy to be fulfilled?

Some highly interesting information was given by Lieutenant Charles Hammerton, 1st Volunteer Battalion Suffolk Regiment, of Ipswich, who with his company of Volunteer cyclists reconnoitred the enemy’s position in East Suffolk during Monday night. Interviewed by the Ipswich correspondent of the Central News, he said:

“We left Ipswich at eight o’clock in order to reconnoitre all the roads and by-roads in the direction of Lowestoft. For the first twelve miles, as far as Wickham Market, we knew that the country was clear of the enemy, but on cautiously entering Saxmundham – it now being quite dark – we pulled up before Gobbett’s shop in the High Street, and there learnt from a group of terrified men and women that a German reconnoitring patrol consisting of a group of about ten Uhlans under a sergeant, and supported by other groups all across the country to Framlingham and Tannington, had been in the town all day, holding the main road to Lowestoft, and watching in the direction of Ipswich. For hours they had patrolled the south end opposite Waller’s, upon whose wall they posted a copy of Von Kronhelm’s proclamation.

“They threatened to shoot any person attempting to move southward out of the town. Three other Germans were on the old church tower all day making signals northward at intervals. Then, as night closed in, the Uhlans refreshed themselves at the Bell, and with their black and white pennants fluttering

## **PROCLAMATION**

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## **CITIZENS OF LONDON**

—

THE NEWS OF THE BOMBARDMENT of the City of Newcastle and the landing of the German Army at Hull, Weybourne, Yarmouth, and other places along the East Coast is unfortunately confirmed.

THE ENEMY’S INTENTION is to march upon the City of London, which must be resolutely defended.

THE BRITISH NATION and the Citizens of London, in face of these great events, must be energetic in order to vanquish the invader.

The ADVANCE must be CHALLENGED FOOT BY FOOT. The people must fight for King and Country.

Great Britain is not yet dead, for indeed, the more serious her danger, the stronger will be her unanimous patriotism.

## **GOD SAVE THE KING**

*HARRISON, Lord Mayor.*

Mansion House,  
London, *September 3rd, 1910.*

### **THE LORD MAYOR'S APPEAL TO LONDON**

from their lances, clattered backward in the direction of Yoxford.

"I had sent scouts off the main road from Woodbridge, through Framlingham, Tannington, and Wilby, with orders to push on if possible to Hoxne, to join the main road to Harleston, which I judged must be on the enemy's flank. Each man knew those difficult crossroads well, which was necessary, we having to travel noiselessly without lights.

"In the bar-parlour of the Bell at Saxmundham we held consultation with a sergeant of police and a couple of constables, from whom we gathered some further information, and then decided to push cautiously north and ascertain into what positions the Uhlans had retired for the night, and, if possible, the whereabouts of the enemy's march outposts. I had with me twelve men. Nine of us were in uniform, including myself, but the other four preferred to go in mufti, though warned of the risk that they might be treated as spies.

"Carefully, and in silence, we got past the crossroad, to Kelsale, on past the Red House, and down into Yoxford village, without meeting a soul. We were told in Yoxford by the excited villagers that there were foreign soldiers and motor-cyclists constantly passing and repassing all day, but that soon after seven o'clock they had all suddenly retired by the road leading back to Haw Wood. Whether they had gone to the right to Blythburgh, or to the left to Halesworth, was, however, unknown. Our expedition was a most risky one. We knew that we carried our lives in our hands, and yet the War Office and the whole country were anxiously waiting for the information which we hoped to gain. Should we push on? I put it to my companions – brave fellows every one of them, even though the Volunteers have so often been sneered at – and the decision was unanimous that we should reconnoitre at all costs.

"Therefore, again in silence, we went forward, determining to take the Lowestoft high road. Where the enemy's outposts were, we had no idea. Quietly we skirted Thorington Park, and were just ascending the bridge over the Blyth, before entering Blythburgh, when of a sudden we saw silhouetted on the slope against the star-lit sky a small group of heavily-accoutred German infantry, who had their arms piled beside the road, while two were acting as sentries close at hand.

"At once we were challenged in German. In an instant we flung ourselves from our machines, and took shelter in a hedge opposite. Several times was the gruff challenge repeated, and as I saw no possibility of crossing the bridge, we stealthily turned our cycles round and prepared to mount. Of a sudden we were evidently perceived, and next second shots whistled about us, and poor Maitland, a private, fell forward upon his face in the road – dead. We heard loud shouting in German, which we could not understand, and in a moment the place seemed alive with the foreigners, while we only just had time to mount and tear away in the direction we had come. At Haw Wood I decided to pass the river by a by-road I knew at Wissett, avoiding Halesworth on the right. As far as Chediston Green all was quiet, but on turning northward to Wissett at the cross-roads outside the inn we perceived three men lurking in the shadow beneath the wall.

"With one of my men I abandoned my machine, and crept softly in their direction, not knowing whether they were farm labourers or the enemy's outposts. Slowly, and with great caution, we moved

forward until, on listening intently, I heard them in conversation. They were speaking in German! On my return to my section, Plunkett, one of the privates in mufti, volunteered to creep past without his machine, get to Aldous Corner, and so reconnoitre the country towards the enemy's headquarters, which, from Von Kronhelm's proclamation, we knew to be at Beccles.

"Under our breath we wished him God-speed, and a moment later he disappeared in the darkness. What afterwards happened we can only surmise. All we know is that he probably stumbled over a length of barbed wire stretched across the road, for of a sudden the three lurking Germans ran across in his direction. There was a sound of muffled oaths and curses, a quick shuffling of struggling feet, and the triumphant shout in German as a prisoner was secured.

"The truth held us breathless. Poor Plunkett was captured as a spy!

"We could do nothing to save him, for to reveal ourselves meant capture or death. Therefore we were compelled to again retire. We then slipped along the by-roads until we reached Rumburgh, narrowly avoiding detection by sentries stationed at the fork leading to Redisham. Rumburgh was the native place of one of my men named Wheeler, and fortunately he knew every hedge, wall, ditch, and field in the vicinity. Acting as our guide, he left the main road, and by a series of footpaths took us to the main Bungay Road at St. Lawrence. Continuing again by circuitous footpaths, he took us to the edge of Redisham Park, where we discovered a considerable number of German infantry encamped, evidently forming supports to the advance line of outposts. It then became difficult how to act, but this dilemma was quickly solved by Wheeler suggesting that he being in mufti should take the other two plain-clothes men and push on to Beccles, we having now safely passed the outposts and being actually within the enemy's lines. No doubt we had penetrated the advance line of outposts when we struck off from Rumburgh, therefore there only remained for us to turn back and make good our escape, which we did by crossroads in the direction of Bungay. Wheeler and his two brave companions had hidden their cycles and rifles in the ditch outside the park, and had gone forward with whispered good-byes.

"Presently we found ourselves at Methingham Castle, where we again saw groups of Germans waiting for the dawn, while squadrons of cavalry and motor-cyclists were apparently preparing to move out along Stone Street to scour all the country to the south-west. These we at once gave a wide berth, and succeeded at last in getting down to the Waveney and crossing it, little the worse, save for a wetting. Near Harleston, four miles to the south-west, we came across two of our men whom we had left at Woodbridge, and from them learnt that we were at last free of the enemy. Therefore, by three o'clock we were back again in Ipswich, and immediately made report to the adjutant of our regiment, who was anxiously awaiting our return to headquarters. The scene during the night in Ipswich was one of terror and disorder, the worst fears being increased by our report.

"Would Wheeler return? That was the crucial question. If he got to Beccles he might learn the German movements and the disposition of their troops. Yet it was a terribly risky proceeding, death being the only penalty for spies.

"Hour after hour we remained in eager suspense for news of the three gallant fellows who had risked their lives for their country, until shortly after eight I heard shouts outside in the street, and, covered with mud and perspiration, and bleeding from a nasty cut on his forehead, the result of a spill, Wheeler burst triumphantly in.

"Of the others he had seen nothing since leaving them in the market-place at Beccles, but when afterwards he secured his own cycle, the two other cycles were still hidden in the ditch. Travelling by paths across the fields, however, he joined the road south of Wissett, and there in the grey morning was horrified to see the body of poor Plunkett suspended from a telegraph pole. The unfortunate fellow had, no doubt, been tried at a drum-head court-martial and sentenced to be hanged as a warning to others!

“During the two and a half hours Wheeler was in Beccles, he made good use of eyes and ears, and his report – based upon information given him by a carter whom the enemy had compelled to haul supplies from Lowestoft – was full of deepest interest and most valuable.

“From my own observations, combined with Wheeler’s information, I was enabled to draw up a pretty comprehensive report, and point out on the map the exact position of the German Army Corps which had landed at Lowestoft.

“Repeated briefly, it is as follows: —

“Shortly before three o’clock on Sunday morning the coastguard at Lowestoft, Corton, and Beach End discovered that their telephonic communication was interrupted, and half an hour later, to the surprise of everyone, a miscellaneous collection of mysterious craft were seen approaching the harbour; and within an hour many of them were high and dry on the beach, while others were lashed alongside the old dock, the new fish-docks of the Great Eastern Railway, and the wharves, disembarking a huge force of German infantry, cavalry, motor-infantry, and artillery. The town, awakened from its slumbers, was utterly paralysed, the more so when it was discovered that the railway to London was already interrupted, and the telegraph lines all cut. On landing, the enemy commandeered all provisions, including the stock at Kent’s, Sennett’s, and Lipton’s, in the London Road, all motor-cars they could discover, horses and forage, while the banks were seized, and the infantry falling in, marched up Old Nelson Street into High Street and out upon the Beccles Road. The first care of the invaders was to prevent the people of Lowestoft damaging the Swing Bridge, a strong guard being instantly mounted upon it, and so quietly and orderly was the landing effected that it was plain the German plans of invasion were absolutely perfect in every detail.

“Few hitches seemed to occur. The mayor was summoned at six o’clock by General von Kronhelm, the generalissimo of the German Army, and briefly informed that the town of Lowestoft was occupied, and that all armed resistance would be punished by death. Then, ten minutes later, when the German war-flag was flying from several flagstaffs in various parts of the town, the people realised their utter helplessness.

“The Germans, of course, knew that irrespective of the weather, a landing could be effected at Lowestoft, where the fish docks and wharves, with their many cranes, were capable of dealing with a large amount of stores. The Denes, that flat, sandy plain between the upper town and the sea, they turned into a camping-ground, and large numbers were billeted in various quarters of the town itself, in the better-class houses along Marine Parade, in the Royal, the Empire, and Harbour hotels, and especially in those long rows of private houses in London Road South.

“The people were terror-stricken. To appeal to London for help was impossible, as the place had been cut entirely off, and around it a strong chain of outposts had already been thrown, preventing anyone from escaping. The town had, in a moment, as it seemed, fallen at the mercy of the foreigners. Even the important-looking police constables of Lowestoft, with their little canes, were crestfallen, sullen, and inactive.

“While the landing was continuing during all Sunday the advance guard moved rapidly over Mutford Bridge, along the Beccles Road, occupying a strong position on the west side of the high ground east of Lowestoft. Beccles, where Von Kronhelm established his headquarters, resting as it does on the River Waveney, is strongly held. The enemy’s main position appears to run from Windle Hill, one mile north-east of Gillingham, thence north-west through Bull’s Green, Herringfleet Hill, over to Grove Farm and Hill House to Ravingham, whence it turns easterly to Haddiscoe, which is at present its northern limit. The total front from Beccles Bridge north is about five miles, and commands the whole of the flat plain west towards Norwich. It has its south flank resting on the River Waveney, and to the north on Thorpe Marshes. The chief artillery position is at Toft Monks – the highest point. Upon the high tower of Beccles Church is established a signal station, communication being made constantly with Lowestoft by helio by day, and acetylene lamps by night.

“The enemy’s position has been most carefully chosen, for it is naturally strong, and, being well held to protect Lowestoft from any attack from the west, the landing can continue uninterrupted, for Lowestoft beach and docks are now entirely out of the line of any British fire.

“March outposts are at Blythburgh, Wenhaston, Holton, Halesworth, Wissett, Rumburgh, Homersfield, and Bungay, and then north to Haddiscoe, while cavalry patrols watch by day, the line roughly being from Leiston through Saxmundham, Framlingham, and Tannington, to Hoxne.

“The estimate, gleaned from various sources in Lowestoft and Beccles, is that up to Monday at midday nearly a whole Army Corps, with stores, guns, ammunition, etc., had already landed, while there are also reports of a further landing at Yarmouth, and at a spot still farther north, but at present there are no details.

“The enemy,” he concluded, “are at present in a position of absolute security.”

## CHAPTER IV

### A PROPHECY FULFILLED

This authentic news of the position of the enemy, combined with the vague rumours of other landings at Yarmouth, along the coast at some unknown point north of Cromer, at King's Lynn, and other places, produced an enormous sensation in London, while the Central News interview, circulated to all the papers in the Midlands and Lancashire, increased the panic in the manufacturing districts.

The special edition of the *Evening News*, issued about six o'clock on Tuesday evening, contained another remarkable story which threw some further light upon the German movements. It was, of course, known that practically the whole of the Norfolk and Suffolk coast was already held by the enemy, but with the exception of the fact that the enemy's cavalry vedettes and reconnoitring patrols were out everywhere at a distance about twenty miles from the shore, England was entirely in the dark as to what had occurred anywhere else but at Lowestoft. Attempts similar to that of the Ipswich cyclist volunteers had been made to penetrate the cavalry screen at various points, but in vain. What was in progress was carefully kept a secret by the enemy. The veil was, however, now lifted. The story which the *Evening News* had obtained exclusively, and which was eagerly read everywhere, had been related by a man named Scotney, a lobster-fisherman, of Sheringham, in Norfolk, who had made the following statement to the chief officer of coastguard at Wainfleet, in Lincolnshire: —

"Just before dawn on Sunday morning I was in the boat with my son Ted off the Robin Friend taking up the lobster pots, when we suddenly saw about three miles offshore a mixed lot of curious-looking craft strung out right across the horizon, and heading apparently for Cromer. There were steamers big and little, many of them towing queer flat-bottomed kind of boats, lighters, and barges, which, on approaching nearer, we could distinctly see were filled to their utmost capacity with men and horses.

"Both Ted and I stood staring at the unusual sight, wondering whatever it meant. They came on very quickly, however – so quickly, indeed, that we thought it best to move on. The biggest ships went along to Weybourne Gap, where they moored in the twenty-five feet of water that runs in close to the shore, while some smaller steamers and the flats were run up high and dry on the hard shingle. Before this I noticed that there were quite a number of foreign warships in the offing, with several destroyers far away in the distance, both to east and west.

"From the larger steamships all sorts of boats were lowered, including apparently many collapsible whale-boats, and into these in a most orderly manner, from every gangway and accommodation-ladder, troops – Germans we afterwards discovered them to be to our utter astonishment – began to descend.

"These boats were at once taken charge of by steam pinnaces and cutters and towed to the beach. When we saw this we were utterly dumbfounded. Indeed, at first I believed it to be a dream, for ever since I was a lad I had heard the ancient rhyme my old father was so fond of repeating:

" 'He who would old England win,  
Must at Weybourne Hoop begin.'

"As everybody knows, nature has provided at that lonely spot every advantage for the landing of hostile forces, and when the Spanish Armada was expected, and again when Napoleon threatened an invasion, the place was constantly watched. Yet nowadays, except for the coastguard, it has been utterly unprotected and neglected.

"The very first soldiers who landed formed up quickly, and under the charge of an officer ran up the low hill to the coastguard station, I suppose in order to prevent them signalling a warning. The

funny thing was, however, that the coastguards had already been held up by several well-dressed men – spies of the Germans, I suppose. I could distinctly see one man holding one of the guards with his back to the wall, and threatening him with a revolver.

“Ted and I had somehow been surrounded by the crowd of odd craft which dodged about everywhere, and the foreigners now and then shouted to me words that unfortunately I could not understand.

“Meanwhile, from all the boats strung out along the beach, from Sheringham right across to the Rocket House at Salthouse, swarms of drab-coated soldiers were disembarking, the boats immediately returning to the steamers for more. They must have been packed as tightly as herrings in a barrel; but they all seemed to know where to go to, because all along at various places little flags were held by men, and each regiment appeared to march across and assemble at its own flag.

“Ted and I sat there as if we were watching a play. Suddenly we saw from some of the ships and bigger barges, horses being lowered into the water and allowed to swim ashore. Hundreds seemed to gain the beach even as we were looking at them. Then, after the first lot of horses had gone, boats full of saddles followed them. It seemed as though the foreigners were too busy to notice us, and we – not wanting to share the fate of Mr. Gunter, the coastguard, and his mates – just sat tight and watched.

“From the steamers there continued to pour hundreds upon hundreds of soldiers who were towed to land, and then formed up in solid squares, which got bigger and bigger. Horses innumerable – quite a thousand I should reckon – were slung overboard from some of the smaller steamers which had been run high and dry on the beach, and as the tide had now begun to run down they landed only knee-deep in water. Those steamers, it seemed to me, had big bilge keels, for as the tide ebbed they did not heel over. They had, no doubt, been specially fitted for the purpose. Out of some they began to hoist all sorts of things, wagons, guns, motor-cars, large bales of fodder, clothing, ambulances with big red crosses on them, flat-looking boats – pontoons I think they call them – and great piles of cooking pots and pans, square boxes of stores, or perhaps ammunition, and as soon as anything was landed it was hauled up above high-water mark.

“In the meantime lots of men had mounted on horseback and ridden off up the lane which leads into Weybourne village. At first half a dozen started at a time; then, as far as I could judge, about fifty more started. Then larger bodies went forward, but more and more horses kept going ashore, as though their number was never-ending. They must have been stowed mighty close, and many of the ships must have been specially fitted up for them.

“Very soon I saw cavalry swarming up over Muckleburgh, Warborough, and Telegraph Hills, while a good many trotted away in the direction of Runton and Sheringham. Then, soon after they had gone – that is, in about an hour and a half from their first arrival – the infantry began to move off, and as far as I could see, they marched inland by every road, some in the direction of Kelling Street and Holt, others over Weybourne Heath towards Bodham, and still others skirting the woods over to Upper Sheringham. Large masses of infantry marched along the Sheringham Road, and seemed to have a lot of officers on horseback with them, while up on Muckleburgh Hill I saw frantic signalling in progress.

“By this time they had a quantity of carts and wagons landed, and a large number of motor-cars. The latter were soon started, and, manned by infantry, moved swiftly in procession after the troops. The great idea of the Germans was apparently to get the beach clear of everything as soon as landed, for all stores, equipment, and other tackle were pushed inland as soon as disembarked.

“The enemy kept on landing. Thousands of soldiers got ashore without any check, and all proceeding orderly and without the slightest confusion, as though the plans were absolutely perfect. Everybody seemed to know exactly what to do. From where we were we could see the coastguards held prisoners in their station, with German sentries mounted around; and as the tide was now setting strong to the westward, Ted and I first let our anchor off the ground and allowed ourselves to drift.

It occurred to me that perhaps I might be able to give the alarm at some other coastguard station if I could only drift away unnoticed in the busy scene now in progress.

“That the Germans had actually landed in England was now apparent; yet we wondered what our own fleet could be doing, and pictured to ourselves the jolly good drubbing that our cruisers would give the audacious foreigner when they did haul in sight. It was for us, at all costs, to give the alarm, so gradually we drifted off to the nor'-westward, in fear every moment lest we should be noticed and fired at. At last we got around Blakeney Point successfully, and breathed more freely; then hoisting our sail, we headed for Hunstanton, but seeing numbers of ships entering the Wash, and believing them to be also Germans, we put our helm down and ran across into Wainfleet Swatchway to Gibraltar Point, where I saw the chief officer of coastguard, and told him all the extraordinary events of that memorable morning.”

The report added that the officer of coastguard in question had, three hours before, noticed strange vessels coming up the Wash, and had already tried to report by telegraph to his divisional inspecting officer at Harwich, but could obtain no communication. An hour later, however, it had become apparent that a still further landing was being effected on the south side of the Wash, in all probability at King's Lynn.

The fisherman Scotney's statement had been sent by special messenger from Wainfleet on Sunday evening, but owing to the dislocation of the railway traffic north of London, the messenger was unable to reach the offices of the coastguard in Victoria Street, Westminster, until Monday. The report received by the Admiralty had been treated as confidential until corroborated, lest undue public alarm should be caused.

It had then been given to the Press as revealing the truth of what had actually happened.

The enemy had entered by the back door of England, and the sensation it caused everywhere was little short of panic.

Some further very valuable information was also received by the Intelligence Department of the War Office, revealing the military position of the invaders who had landed at Weybourne Hoop.

It appears that Colonel Charles Macdonald, a retired officer of the Black Watch, who lived in the “Boulevard” at Sheringham, making up his mind to take the risk, had carefully noted all that was in progress during the landing, had drawn up a clear description of it, and had, after some narrow escapes, succeeded in getting through the German lines to Melton Constable, and thence to London. He had, before his retirement, served as military attaché at Berlin, and, being thoroughly acquainted with the appearance of German uniforms, was able to include in his report even the names of the regiments, and in some cases their commanders.

From his observations it was plain that the whole of the IVth German Army Corps, about 38,000 men, had been landed at Weybourne, Sheringham, and Cromer. It consisted of the 7th and 8th Divisions complete, commanded respectively by Major-General Dickmann and Lieutenant-General von Mirbach. The 7th Division comprised the 13th and 14th Infantry Brigades, consisting of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau's 1st Magdeburg Regiment, the 3rd Magdeburg Infantry Regiment, Prince Louis Ferdinand von Preussen's 2nd Magdeburg Regiment, and the 5th Hanover Infantry Regiment. Attached to this division were the Magdeburg Hussars No. 10, and the Uhlan Regiment of Altmärk No. 16.

In the 8th Division were the 15th and 16th Brigades, comprising a Magdeburg Fusilier Regiment, an Anhalt Infantry Regiment, the 4th and 8th Thuringen Infantry, with the Magdeburg Cuirassiers, and a regiment of Thuringen Hussars. The cavalry were commanded by Colonel Frölich, while General von Kleppen was in supreme command of the whole corps.

Careful reconnaissance of the occupied area showed that immediately on landing, the German position extended from the little town of Holt, on the west, eastward, along the main Cromer Road, as far as Gibbet Lane, slightly south of Cromer, a distance of about five miles. This constituted a naturally strong position; indeed, nature seemed to have provided it specially to suit the necessities of a



foreign invader. The ground for miles to the south sloped gently away down to the plain, while the rear was completely protected, so that the landing could proceed until every detail had been completed.

Artillery were massed on both flanks, namely, at Holt and on the high ground near Felbrigg, immediately south of Cromer. This last-named artillery was adequately supported by the detached infantry close at hand. The whole force was covered by a strong line of outposts. Their advanced sentries were to be found along a line starting from Thornage village, through Hunworth, Edgefield, Barningham Green, Squallham, Aldborough, Hanworth, to Roughton. In rear of them lay their picquets, which were disposed in advantageous situations. The general line of these latter were at North Street, Pondhills to Plumstead, thence over to Matlash Hall, Aldborough Hall, and the rising ground north of Hanworth. These, in their turn, were adequately supplemented by the supports, which were near Hempstead Green, Baconsthorpe, North Narningham, Bessingham, Sustead, and Melton.

In case of sudden attack, reserves were at Bodham, West Beckham, East Beckham, and Aylmerton, but orders had been issued by Von Kleppen, who had established his headquarters at Upper Sheringham, that the line of resistance was to be as already indicated – namely, that having the Holt-Cromer Road for its crest. Cuirassiers, hussars, and some motorists – commanded by Colonel von Dorndorf – were acting independently some fifteen miles to the south, scouring the whole country, terrifying the villagers, commandeering all supplies, and posting Von Kronhelm's proclamation, which has already been reproduced.

From Colonel Macdonald's inquiries it was shown that on the night of the invasion six men, now known to have been advance agents of the enemy, arrived at the Ship Inn, at Weybourne. Three of them took accommodation for the night, while their companions slept elsewhere. At two o'clock the trio let themselves out quietly, were joined by six other men, and just as the enemy's ships hove in sight nine of them seized the coastguards and cut the wires, while the other three broke into the Weybourne Stores, and, drawing revolvers, obtained possession of the telegraph instrument to Sheringham and Cromer until they could hand it over to the Germans.

The panic in both Sheringham and Cromer when the astounded populace found the enemy billeted on them was intense. There were still many holiday-makers in the Grand and Burlington Hotels in Sheringham, as also in the Metropole, Grand, and Paris at Cromer, and these, on that memorable Sunday morning, experienced a rude awakening from their slumbers.

At Cromer the enemy, as soon as they landed, took possession of the post office, commandeered all the stores at shops, including the West-End Supply Stores and Rust's; occupied the railway station on the hill, with all its coal and rolling stock, and made prisoners of the coastguards, the four wires, as at Weybourne, having already been cut by advance agents, who had likewise seized the post office wires. A German naval party occupied the coastguard station, and hoisting the German flag at the peak of the staff in place of the white ensign, began to make rapid signals with the semaphore and their own coloured bunting instead of our coastguard flags.

In the clean, red-brick little town of Sheringham all the grocers and provision-dealers were given notice not to sell food to anyone, as it was now in possession of the invaders, while a number of motor-cars belonging to private persons were seized. Every lodging-house, every hotel, and every boarding-house was quickly crowded by the German officers, who remained to superintend the landing. Many machine guns were landed on the pier at Cromer, while the heavier ordnance were brought ashore at the gap and hauled up the fishermen's slope.

Colonel Macdonald, who had carefully marked a cycling road-map of the district with his observations driving in his own dog-cart from one point to the other, met with a number of exciting adventures.

While in Holt on Monday evening – after a long day of constant observation – he suddenly came face to face with Colonel Frölich, commanding the enemy's cavalry brigade, and was recognised. Frölich had been aide-de-camp to the Emperor at the time when Macdonald was attaché at the British Embassy, and both men were intimate friends.

They stopped and spoke, Frölich expressing surprise and also regret that they should meet as enemies after their long friendship. Macdonald, annoyed at being thus recognised, took the matter philosophically as the fortunes of war, and learnt from his whilom friend a number of valuable details regarding the German position.

The retired attaché, however, pushed his inquiries rather too far, and unfortunately aroused the suspicions of the German cavalry commander, with the result that the Englishman's movements were afterwards very closely watched. He then found himself unable to make any further reconnaissance, and was compelled to hide his map under a heap of stones near the Thornage Road, and there leave it for some hours, fearing lest he should be searched and the incriminating plan found upon him.

At night, however, he returned cautiously to the spot, regained possession of his treasure, and abandoning his dog-cart and horse in a by-road near North Barningham, succeeded in getting over to Edgefield. Here, however, he was discovered and challenged by the sentries. He succeeded, nevertheless, in convincing them that he was not endeavouring to escape; otherwise he would undoubtedly have been shot there and then, as quite a dozen unfortunate persons had been at various points along the German line.

To obtain information of the enemy's position this brave old officer had risked his life, yet concealed in his golf-cap was the map which would condemn him as a spy. He knew the peril, but faced it boldly, as an English soldier should face it.

His meeting with Frölich had been most unfortunate, for he knew that he was now a marked man.

At first the sentries disbelieved him, but, speaking German fluently, he argued with them, and was at last allowed to go free. His one object was to get the map into the hands of the Intelligence Department, but the difficulties were, he soon saw, almost insurmountable. Picquets and sentries held every road and every bridge, while the railway line between Fakenham and Aylsham had been destroyed in several places, as well as that between Melton Constable and Norwich.

Through the whole night he wandered on, hoping to find some weak point in the cordon about Weybourne, but in vain. The Germans were everywhere keeping a sharp vigil to prevent anyone getting out with information, and taking prisoners all upon whom rested the slightest suspicion.

Near dawn, however, he found his opportunity, for at the junction of the three roads near the little hamlet of Stody, a mile south of Hunworth, he came upon a sleeping Uhlan, whose companions had evidently gone forward into Briningham village. The horse was grazing quietly at the roadside, and the man, tired out, lay stretched upon the bank, his helmet by his side, his sabre still at his belt.

Macdonald crept up slowly. If the man woke and discovered him he would be again challenged. Should he take the man's big revolver and shoot him as he lay?

No. That was a coward's action, an unjustifiable murder, he decided.

He would take the horse, and risk it by making a dash for life.

Therefore, on tiptoe he crept up, passing the prostrate man, till he approached the horse, and in a second, old though he was, he was nevertheless in the saddle. But none too soon. The jingle of the bit awakened the Uhlan suddenly, and he sprang up in time to see the stranger mount.

In an instant he took in the situation, and before the colonel could settle himself in the saddle he raised his revolver and fired.

The ball struck the colonel in the left shoulder, shattering it, but the gallant man who was risking his life for his country only winced, cursed his luck beneath his breath, set his teeth, and with the blood pouring from the wound, made a dash for life, and succeeded in getting clean away ere the alarm could be raised.

Twelve hours later the valuable information the colonel had so valiantly gained at such risk was in the hands of the Intelligence Department at Whitehall, and had been transmitted back to Norwich and Colchester.

That the Fourth German Army Corps were in a position as strong as those who had landed at Lowestoft could not be denied, and the military authorities could not disguise from themselves the extreme gravity of the situation.

## CHAPTER V

### OUR FLEET TAKEN UNAWARES

The first news of the great naval battle, as generally happens in war, was confused and distorted. It did not clearly show how the victory had been gained by the one side, or what had brought defeat upon the other. Only gradually did the true facts appear. The following account, however, of the sudden attack made by the Germans upon the British Fleet represents as near an approach as can ever be made, writing after events, to the real truth:

On the fateful evening of September 1, it appears that the North Sea Fleet lay peacefully at anchor off Rosyth, in the Firth of Forth. It mustered sixteen battleships, four of them of the famous Dreadnought class, and all powerful vessels. With it, and attached to it, was a squadron of armoured cruisers eight ships strong, but no destroyers, as its torpedo flotilla was taking part in the torpedo manœuvres in the Irish Sea. Some excitement had been caused in the fleet by orders received on the previous day, directing it to remain under steam ready to put to sea at an hour's notice. Officers and men had read the reports in the papers announcing some friction with Germany, and had recalled with ironical amusement certain speeches of the Premier, in which he had declared that since his advent to power war was impossible between civilised nations. On the morning of the First, however, the orders to hold the fleet in readiness were cancelled, and Admiral Lord Ebbfleet was instructed to wait at his anchorage the arrival of reinforcements from the reserve divisions at the great naval ports. The Admiral had reported some shortage of coal and ammunition, and had asked for further supplies of both. A promise was made him that more coal should be sent to Rosyth, but ammunition, he was told, it would be inconvenient and unnecessary to forward at this juncture. There was no reason for precipitation or alarm, a cipher telegram from Whitehall ran: Any sign of either would irritate Germany and endanger the situation. He was peremptorily enjoined to refrain from any act of preparation for war. The estimates could not be exceeded without good reason, and the necessary economies of the Admiralty had left no margin for unexpected expenses. Even the commissioning of the reserve ships, he was told, was not to be considered in any sense as pointing to the imminence of war; it was merely a test of the readiness of the fleet.

This remarkable despatch and the series of telegrams which accompanied it were produced at the Parliamentary investigation after the war, and caused simple stupefaction. There was not a hint in them of the peril which menaced the North Sea Fleet. Not the safety of England, but the feelings of the enemy, were considered. And yet the same utter absence of precautions had characterised the policy of the Government during the Fashoda crisis, when Mr. Goschen indignantly denied to an approving House of Commons the suggestion that the dockyards had been busy or that special efforts to prepare for war had been needed. In the North Sea crisis again, the safety of England had been left to chance, and the British fleets carefully withdrawn from the waters of the North Sea, or placed in a position of such weakness that their defeat was a probability.

Lord Ebbfleet, the Admiral, however, was wiser than the Admiralty. There were too many busybodies about, and the ships were too plainly under observation, to make the full battle toilet. But all that afternoon his crews were active in removing the woodwork, which could not, unfortunately, be sent ashore or thrown into the water – that would have caused excessive suspicion. He would personally have preferred to weigh anchor and proceed to sea, but his instructions forbade this. A great admiral at such a juncture might have disobeyed, and acted on his own responsibility; but Lord Ebbfleet, though brave and capable, was not a Nelson. Still, as well as he could, he made ready for war, and far into the night the crews worked with a will.

Torpedo-nets were got out in all the large ships; the guns were loaded; the watch manned and armed ship; the ships' torpedo boats were hoisted out and patrolled the neighbouring waters; all ships had steam up ready to proceed to sea, though the Admiralty had repeatedly censured Lord Ebbfleet

for the heinous offence of wasting coal. Unhappily, the fortifications on the Firth of Forth were practically unmanned and dismantled. Many of the guns had been sold in 1906 to effect economies. In accordance with the policy of trusting to luck and the kindness of the Germans, in fear, also, of provoking Germany, no steps had been taken to mobilise their garrisons. Under the latest scheme of defence which the experts in London had produced, it had been settled that fortifications were not needed to protect the bases used by the fleet. The garrison artillery had gone – sacrificed to the demand for economy. It was considered amply sufficient to man the works with mobilised Volunteers when the need arose. That the enemy might come like a thief in the night had seemingly not occurred to the Government, the House of Commons, or the Army reformers.

Thus the Admiral had to trust entirely to his own ships and guns. The very searchlights on the coast defences were not manned; everything after the usual English fashion was left to luck and the last minute. And, truth to tell, the pacific assurances of the Ministerial Press had lulled anxiety to rest everywhere, save, perhaps, in the endangered fleet. The nation wished to slumber, and it welcomed the leading articles which told it that all disquietude was ridiculous.

It was equally disastrous that no destroyers accompanied the fleet. The three North Sea flotillas of twenty-four boats were conducting exercises in the Irish Sea, whither they had been despatched after the grand naval manoeuvres were over. No flotilla of destroyers, and not even a single one of those worn-out, broken-down torpedo boats which the Admiralty had persisted in maintaining as a sham defence for the British coast, was stationed in the Forth. For patrol work the Admiral had nothing but his armoured cruisers and the little launches carried in his warships, which were practically useless for the work of meeting destroyers. The mine defences on the coast had been abolished in 1905, with the promise that torpedo boats and submarines should take their place. Unluckily, the Admiralty had sold off the stock of mines for what it would fetch, before it had provided either the torpedo boats or the submarines, and now five years after this act of supreme wisdom and economy there was still no mobile defence permanently stationed north of Harwich.

At nightfall six of the battleships' steam torpedo boats were stationed outside the Forth Bridge, east of the anchorage, to keep a vigilant watch, while farther out to sea was the fast cruiser *Leicestershire* with all lights out, in mid-channel, just under the island of Inchkeith. Abreast of her and close inshore, where the approach of hostile torpedo craft was most to be feared, were three small ships' torpedo boats to the north and another three to the south, so that, in all, twelve torpedo boats and one cruiser were in the outpost line, to prevent any such surprise as that of the Russian fleet at Port Arthur on the night of February 8, 1904. Thus began this most eventful night in the annals of the British Navy.

Hour after hour passed, while the lieutenants in charge of the torpedo boats incessantly swept the horizon with night glasses; and on the bridge of the *Leicestershire* a small group of officers and signalmen directed their telescopes and glasses out to sea. The great cruiser in the darkness showed not a glimmer of light; gently her engines moved her to and fro upon her beat; she looked through the blackness like a monstrous destroyer herself; and as she went to and fro her guns were always kept trained out seawards, with the watch ready. Towards 2 a.m. the tide began to set strongly into the Forth, and at the same time the weather became misty. Captain Cornwall, noting with uneasiness that the horizon was becoming obscured, and that the field of vision was narrowing, exclaimed to his fellow-watchers on the bridge that it was an ideal night for destroyers – if they should come.

Barely had he spoken thus when he was called aft to the wireless telegraphy instruments. Out of the night Hertzian waves were coming in. The mysterious message was not in the British code; it was not in the international code; and it bore no intelligible meaning. It was in no language that could be recognised – was evidently a cipher. For two or three minutes the recorder rattled off dots and dashes, and then the aerial impulse ceased. Immediately, with a noise like the rattle of pistol shots, the *Leicestershire's* transmitters began to send the news of this strange signal back to the flagship

at the anchorage. The special tuning of the British instruments kept for fleet work would prevent a stranger taking in her news.

While the *Leicestershire*'s wireless instruments were signalling, a steamer was made out approaching Inchkeith. From her build she was a tramp; she carried the usual lights, and seemed to be heading for Queensferry. A flashlight signal was made to her to ask her name and nationality, and to direct her not to approach, as manœuvres were in progress. She made not the faintest response to these signals – a by no means unusual case with British and foreign merchant steamers. In the dim light she looked to be of about 2500 tons displacement as she steered straight for the *Leicestershire*. Captain Cornwall ordered one of the inshore torpedo boats to proceed to her, and examine her, and direct her, if she was not British, to go into Leith, thus taking upon his shoulders the considerable responsibility of interfering with a foreign ship in time of peace. But she paid no attention to the torpedo boat. She was about 3000 yards off the *Leicestershire* when the order to the boat was given, and she had now approached within 1500 yards. Disquieted by her proceedings, Captain Cornwall ordered one of the 3-pounders to fire a shot across her bow, and then, as this did not stop her, followed it up with two shots from a 3-pounder directed against her hull.

At the first shot across her bows she swung round, now little more than a thousand yards away from the British cruiser, bringing her broadside to bear. There was the noise of a dull report like the discharge of torpedo tubes, as an instant later the 3-pounder shells struck her hull. Immediately, at Captain Cornwall's order, the *Leicestershire* opened fire with all her guns that would bear. Through the water came two streaks of bubbles and foam, moving with lightning speed. One passed right ahead of the *Leicestershire*; the other swept towards the British cruiser's stern; there was a heavy explosion; the whole hull of the cruiser was violently shaken and lifted perceptibly up in the water; a spout of water and smoke rose up astern, and the engines ceased to work. The *Leicestershire* had been torpedoed by the stranger.

The stranger caught the cruiser's fire and reeled under it. The British gunners took their revenge. The searchlights came on; four 7.5's, in less time than it takes to tell, planted shell after shell upon her waterline, and the steamer began slowly to founder. Clouds of smoke and steam rose from her; her engine was apparently disabled, and the British launches closed about her to seize those of her crew that survived. In ten minutes all was over. The steamer had disappeared, her side torn open by a dozen 7.5-in. shells charged with lyddite. But the *Leicestershire* was in serious plight. The damage done by the German torpedo was of the gravest nature. The British cruiser was heavily down by the stern; her port engine and propeller would no longer revolve; two compartments on the port quarter had filled, and water was leaking into the port engine-room. Very slowly, with the help of the starboard engine, Captain Cornwall took her in towards Leith and beached his ship on the shoals near the new harbour.

The opening act had been cleverly thought out by the German staff. While the torpedo boats were picking up the crew of the steamer, three divisions of German torpedo craft, each six boats strong, had passed into the Forth under the shadow of the northern coast. They glided like shadows through the darkness, and they do not seem to have been seen by the British vessels off Inchkeith, whose crews' attention was riveted upon the *Leicestershire*. A fourth division, moving rapidly in the shadow of the southern coast, was seen by the *Leicestershire* and by the British launches about her and with her, and at once she opened fire upon the dim forms. But, bereft of motive power, she could not use her battery to advantage, and though it was thought that one of the destroyers disappeared in the water, the others sped up the estuary, towards the British fleet.

Warned by wireless telegraphy that destroyers had been sighted, the British crews were on the *qui vive*. There was not time at this eleventh hour to weigh and put out to sea; the only possible course was to meet the attack at anchorage. The fleet was anchored off Rosyth, the battleships in two lines ahead, headed by the flagships *Vanguard* and *Captain*. The *Vanguard* and *Captain*, the leading ships in the starboard and port lines respectively, were just abreast of the Beamer Rock and Port Edgar. The seven armoured cruisers were moored in the St. Margaret's Hope Anchorage. To torpedo craft

coming from the sea and passing under the Forth Bridge, the fleet thus offered a narrow front, and comparatively few of its guns would bear.

About 2.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, the lookout of the *Vanguard* detected white foam, as from the bows of a destroyer, just under Battery Point; a few seconds later, the same sign was seen to the south of Inchgarvie, and as the bugles sounded and the 12-in. guns in the three forward turrets of the British flagship opened, and the searchlights played their steady glare upon the dark waters just under the Forth Bridge, the forms of destroyers or torpedo boats fast approaching were unmistakably seen.

In a moment the air trembled with the concussion of heavy guns; the quick-firers of the fleet opened a terrific fire; and straight at the battleships came eighteen German destroyers and large torpedo boats, keeping perfect station, at impetuous speed. The sea boiled about them; the night seemed ablaze with the flashing of the great guns and the brilliant flame of exploding shells. Now one destroyer careened and disappeared; now another flew into splinters, as the gunners sent home their huge projectiles. Above all the din and tumult could be heard the rapid hammering of the pom-poms, as they beat from the bridges with their steady stream of projectiles upon the approaching craft.

Four destroyers went to the bottom in that furious onrush; ten entered the British lines, and passed down them with the great ships on either side, not more than 200 yards away, and every gun depressed as much as it could be, vomiting flame and steel upon the enemy; the others turned back. The thud of torpedo firing followed; but the boats amid that tempest of projectiles, with the blinding glare of the searchlights in their gunners' eyes, aimed uncertainly. Clear and unforgettable the figures of officers and men stood out of the blackness, as the searchlights caught the boats. Some could be seen heaving heavy weights overboard; others were busy at the torpedo tubes; but in the blaze of light the pom-poms mowed them down, and tore the upper works of the destroyers to flinders. Funnels were cut off and vanished into space; a conning-tower was blown visibly away by a 12-in. shell which caught it fairly, and as the smitten boat sank there was a series of terrific explosions.

Fifth ship in the starboard British line from the *Vanguard* lay the great battleship *Indefatigable*, after the four "Dreadnoughts" one of the four powerful units in the fleet. Four torpedoes were fired at her by the German destroyers; three of the four missed her, two of them only by a hair's breadth, but the fourth cut through the steel net and caught her fairly abreast of the port engine-room, about the level of the platform deck. The Germans were using their very powerful 17.7-in. Schwartzkopf torpedo, fitted with net-cutters, and carrying a charge of 265 lb. of gun-cotton, the heaviest employed in any navy, and nearly a hundred pounds heavier than that of the largest British torpedo.

The effect of the explosion was terrific. Though the *Indefatigable* had been specially constructed to resist torpedo attack, her bulkheads were not designed to withstand so great a mass of explosive, and the torpedo breached the plating of the wing compartments, the wing passage, and the coal-bunker, which lay immediately behind it. The whole structure of the ship was shaken and much injured in the neighbourhood of the explosion, and water began to pour through the shattered bulkheads into the port engine-room.

The pumps got to work, but could not keep the inrush down; the ship rapidly listed to the port side, and though "out collision mat" was ordered at once, and a mat got over the huge, gaping hole in the battleship's side, the water continued to gain. Slipping her anchors, at the order of the Admiral, the *Indefatigable* proceeded a few hundred yards with her starboard screw to the shelving, sandy beach of Society Bank, where she dropped aground. Had the harbour works at Rosyth been complete, the value of them to the nation at this moment would have been inestimable, for there would have been plenty of time to get her into the dock which was under construction there. But in the desire to effect apparent economies the works since 1905 had been languidly pushed.

The calamities of the British fleet did not end with the torpedoing of the *Indefatigable*. A few seconds later some object drifting in the water, probably a mine – though in the confusion it was impossible to say what exactly happened – struck the *Resistance* just forward of the fore barrette. It must have drifted down inside the torpedo nets, between the hull and the network. There was an

explosion of terrific violence, which rent a great breach in the side of the ship near the starboard fore torpedo tube, caused an irresistible inrush of water, and compelled her captain also to slip his anchors and beach his ship.

Two of the British battle squadron were out of action in the space of less than five minutes from the opening of fire.

Already the shattered remnants of the German torpedo flotilla were retiring; a single boat was steaming off as fast as she had come, but astern of her four wrecks lay in the midst of the British fleet devoid of motive power, mere helpless targets for the guns.

As they floated in the glare of the searchlights with the water sputtering about them, in the hail of projectiles, first one and then another, and finally all four, raised the white flag. Four German boats had surrendered; four more had been seen to sink in the midst of the fleet; one was limping slowly off under a rain of shells from the smaller guns of the *Vanguard*.

The British cruiser *Londonderry* was ordered to slip and give chase to her, and steamed off in pursuit down the Forth. A caution to "beware of mines" was flashed by the Admiral, and was needed. The German destroyers must have carried with them, and thrown overboard in their approach, a large number of these deadly agents, which were floating in all directions, greatly hampering the *Londonderry* in her chase.

But with the help of her searchlights she picked her way past some half-dozen mines which were seen on the surface, and she was so fortunate as not to strike any of those which had been anchored in the channel. Gathering speed, she overhauled the damaged destroyer. The crew could offer little resistance to the guns of a powerful cruiser.

A few shots from the three-pounders and a single shell from one of the *Londonderry's* 7.5's did the work. The German torpedo boat began to sink by the stern; her engines stopped; her rudder was driven by the explosion of the big projectile over to starboard, and the impulse of the speed at which she was travelling brought her head round towards the British vessel. The boat was almost flush with the water as one of her crew raised the white flag, and the fifth German boat surrendered.

The prisoners were rescued from the water with shaken nerves and quaking limbs, as men who had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, who had endured the hail of shells and faced the danger of drowning.

So soon as the survivors of that most daring and gallant attack had been recovered from the water, and possession had been taken of the battered hulls in which they had made their onset, the Admiral ordered his torpedo launches to drag the channel for mines.

And while the dragging was proceeding, the prisoners were taken on board the flagship and interrogated. They would disclose little other than the fact that, according to them, war had been already declared. The ship which had attacked the *Leicestershire*, they said, was a tramp fitted for mine-laying and equipped with three torpedo tubes. Half of them were more or less seriously wounded; all admitted that the slaughter on board their boats caused by the British fire had been terrific. One lieutenant stated that all the men at one of his torpedo tubes had been mown down twice by the hail of small shells from the pom-poms, while a 12-in. shell which had hit the stern of his boat had blown it completely away. Yet the remnant of the boat had still floated.

Lord Ebbfleet surveyed the scene with rueful eyes. The *Indefatigable* and *Resistance*, two of his powerful battleships, were out of action, and could take no more part in operations for weeks. The *Leicestershire* was in the same plight. From sixteen battleships his force had fallen to fourteen; his armoured cruiser squadron was reduced from eight ships to seven. To remain in the anchorage without destroyers and torpedo boats to keep a lookout would be to court further torpedo attacks, and perhaps the even more insidious danger from German submarines, and might well imperil the safety of the British reserve ships. Only one course remained – to weigh and proceed to sea, endeavouring to pass south to meet the reserve ships.



Efforts to communicate his intention to the Admiralty failed. The roar of firing had awakened Leith and Edinburgh; people were pouring into the streets to know what this strange and sudden commotion meant, and what was the cause of the storm.

The windows at Queensferry had been shattered; the place was shaken as by a great earthquake. The three heavy bursts of firing, the continuous disquieting flashes of the searchlights, and the great hull of the *Leicestershire* ashore off Leith, indicated that something untoward had befallen the fleet.

For a moment it was thought that the Admiral had fallen to manœuvres at a most unseasonable hour, or that some accident had occurred on board the injured cruiser. Then suddenly the truth dawned upon the people. The crowd ashore, constantly increasing, as it gazed in alarm towards the anchorage, realised that war had begun, and that for the first time since the Dutch sailed up the Medway, more than two hundred years before, the sanctity of a British anchorage had been invaded by an enemy.

The coastguardsmen, who had been placed under the control of the civil authorities as the result of one of the numerous reforms effected in the interests of economy, had for the most part forgotten the art of quick signalling or quick reading of naval signals, else they might have interpreted to the crowd the history of that night, as it was flashed to the wireless station at Rosyth, for transmission to London.

But, as has been said, the attempt to despatch the news to headquarters failed. The private wire from the dockyard to Whitehall would not work, and though the post office wires were tried no answer could be obtained. It appeared that, as on the famous night of the North Sea outrage, there was no one at the Admiralty – not even a clerk. It was, therefore, impossible to obtain definite information.

Lord Ebbfleet had meantime received a report from his torpedo launches that a precarious passage had been cleared through the mines in the channel, and about four o'clock on Sunday morning he ordered the armoured cruiser squadron to put to sea and ascertain whether the coast was clear, preceding the battle squadron, which, minus the two damaged battleships, was to follow at six.

The interval of two hours was required to take on board ammunition from the damaged ships, to land woodwork and all the impedimenta that could possibly be discarded before battle, and also to complete the preparations for action.

It was now almost certain that a German fleet would be encountered, but, as has been said, the risk of remaining in the Forth was even greater than that of proceeding to sea, while the Commander-in-Chief realised the full gravity of the fact that upon his fleet and its activity would depend the safety of England from invasion.

He knew that the other main fleets were far distant; that the reserve ships were much too weak by themselves to meet the force of the German Navy, and that the best chance of averting a fresh disaster to them was to effect as speedily as possible a junction with them. Where exactly they were or whether they had moved from the Nore he was not yet aware; the absence of information from the Admiralty left him in the dark as to these two important points.

The armoured cruisers were ordered, if they encountered the German cruisers in approximately equal or inferior force, to drive them off and push through them, to ascertain the strength and whereabouts of the German battle fleet; if, however, the Germans were in much superior force, the British squadron was to fall back on the battle fleet. One by one the armoured cruisers steamed off, first the *Polyphemus*, with the Rear-Admiral's flag, then the *Olympia*, *Achates*, *Imperieuse*, *Aurora*, and *Londonderry*, and last of all the *Gloucester* bringing up the rear.

Upon these seven ships the duty of breaking through the enemy's screen was to devolve. As they went out they jettisoned their woodwork and formed a line ahead, in which formation they were to fight.

Unfortunately, the shooting of the squadron was very uneven. Three of its ships had done superbly at battle practice and in the gun-layers' test; but two others had performed indifferently, and two could scarcely be trusted to hit the target.

For years the uneven shooting of the fleet had been noted as a source of weakness; but what was needed to bring the bad ships up to the mark was a lavish expenditure of ammunition, and ammunition cost money. Therefore ammunition had to be stinted.

In the German Navy, on the other hand, a contrary course had been followed. For the two months before the war, as was afterwards disclosed by the German Staff History, the German ships had been kept constantly at practice, and if the best ships did not shoot quite so well as the best units in the British fleet, a far higher average level of gunnery had been attained.

Increasing the number of revolutions till the speed reached 18 knots, the cruiser squadron sped seawards. The east was flushed with the glow of dawn as the ships passed Inchcolm, but a grey mist lay upon the surface of the gently heaving sea and veiled the horizon. Leaving Inchkeith and the Kinghorn Battery soon after the Leith clocks had struck the half-hour, and steaming on a generally easterly course, the lookout of the *Polyphemus* saw right ahead and some ten or eleven miles away to the north-east the dark forms of ships upon the horizon. The British line turned slightly and headed towards these ships. All the telescopes on the *Polyphemus*'s fore-bridge were directed upon the strangers, and the fact that they were men-of-war painted a muddy grey was ascertained as they drew nearer, and transmitted by wireless telegraphy to Lord Ebbfleet.

They were coming on at a speed which seemed to be about 17 knots, and were formed in line ahead, in a line perfectly maintained, so that, as they were approaching on almost exactly the opposite course, their number could not be counted. In another minute or two, as the distance between the two squadrons rapidly diminished, it was clear from her curious girdermasts that the ship at the head of the line was either the large German armoured cruiser *Waldersee*, the first of the large type built by Germany, or some other ship of her class. At six miles distance several squadrons of destroyers were made out, also formed in line ahead, and steaming alongside the German line, abaft either beam.

A battle was imminent; there was no time to issue elaborate orders, or make fresh dispositions.

The British Admiral signalled that he would turn to starboard, to reconnoitre the strange fleet, and reserve fire till closer quarters. He turned five points, which altered his course to an east-south-easterly one. For a fractional period of time the Germans maintained their original course, steering for the rear of the British line. Then the German flagship or leader of the line turned to port, steering a course which would bring her directly across the bows of the British line.

Simultaneously the two divisions of torpedo craft on the port beam of the German squadron increased speed, and, cutting across the loop, neared the head of the German line.

The German squadron opened fire as it began to turn, the *Waldersee* beginning the duel with the two 11-in. guns in her fore-turret.

A flash, a haze of smoke instantly dissipated, and a heavy shell passed screeching over the fore-turret of the *Polyphemus*.

Another flash an instant later, and a shell struck the British cruiser's third funnel, tearing a great hole in it, but failing to burst. Then every German gun followed, laid on the *Polyphemus*, which blew her steam siren and fired a 12-pounder, the prearranged signal to the British ships for opening, and an instant later, just after 5 a.m., both squadrons were exchanging the most furious fire at a distance which did not exceed 5000 yards.

As the two lines turned, the British were able at last to make out the strength and numbers of their enemy. There were ten German armoured cruisers in line – at the head of the line the fast and new *Waldersee*, *Caprivi*, and *Moltke*, each of 16,000 tons, and armed with four 11-in. and ten 9.4-in. guns, with astern of them the *Manteuffel*, *York*, *Roon*, *Friedrich Karl*, *Prince Adalbert*, *Prince Heinrich*, and *Bismarck*.

The last four did not follow the first six in the turn, but maintained their original course, and headed direct for the rear of the British line. Thus the position was this: One German squadron was manœuvring to pass across the head of the British line, and the other to cross the rear of that line. Each German squadron was attended by two torpedo divisions.

Retreat for the British Admiral was already out of the question, even if he had wished to retire. But as he stood in the *Polyphemus's* conning-tower and felt his great cruiser reel beneath him under the concussion of her heavy guns – as he saw the rush of splinters over her deck, and heard the officers at his side shouting down the telephones amid the deafening din caused by the crash of steel on steel, the violent explosion of the shells, the heavy roar of the great guns, and the ear-splitting crack and rattle of the 12-pounders and pom-poms – he realised that the German squadrons were manœuvring perfectly, and were trying a most daring move – one which it would need all his nerve and foresight to defeat.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIERCE CRUISER BATTLE

Contrary to anticipation, in the interchange of fire the ships of the two combatants did not suffer any disabling injury. The armour on either side kept out the shells from the vitals, though great smoking gaps began to show where the unarmoured sides had been riven.

The *Waldersee's* turrets flashed and smoked incessantly as she closed; the whole German squadron of six ships, which included her and followed her, turned its concentrated fire upon the *Polyphemus*, and the British cruisers to the rear of the British line were at some disadvantage, since their weapons could only fire at extreme range. The Germans aimed chiefly at the *Polyphemus's* conning-tower, wherein, they knew, dwelt the brain that directed the British force.

Amidst the smoke and fumes of high-explosive shells, with the outlook obscured by the hail of splinters and the nerves shaken by the incessant blast of shells, it was difficult to keep a perfectly cool head.

The next move of the British Admiral has been bitterly criticised by those who forget that the resolutions of naval war may have to be reached in two seconds, under a strain to which no General on land is subjected.

Seeing that the main German squadron was gaining a position to execute the famous manœuvre of "crossing the T," and unable to turn away to starboard for want of sea-room, the British Admiral signalled to his fleet to turn simultaneously to port, reversing the direction of his movement and inverting the order of his fleet. His van became his rear, his rear his van.

Amidst all the uproar, the main German squadron replied with the same manœuvre, while the second German squadron instantly headed straight for the ships which had been to the rear of the British line, and now formed its van.

Simultaneously two of the four divisions of German destroyers attacked, one the rear and the other the head, of the British line, and the German ships let go their long-range torpedoes.

The range had fallen to a distance of not much over 3000 yards between the main German squadron and the *Polyphemus*. At the other extremity of the British line, as the four armoured cruisers forming the second German squadron closed on the British van, it rapidly decreased. The confusion was fearful on either side, and if the British had had destroyers with them the German official narrative acknowledges that it might have gone very hard with the German fleet. But here, as elsewhere, initial errors of disposition, in the famous words of the Archduke Charles, proved fatal beyond belief.

The smaller guns on board all the ships of both sides had been in many cases put out of action; even the heavier weapons had suffered. Several of the turrets no longer flashed and revolved. Funnels and bridges had sunk; wreckage of steel yawned where decks had been; dense clouds of smoke poured from blazing paint or linoleum, and the fires were incessantly renewed by fresh shell explosions. Blood covered the decks, the scuppers ran red; inside the fore barbette of the *Imperieuse*, which had been pierced by an 11-in. shell, was a scene of indescribable horror. The barbette had suddenly ceased firing.

An officer, sent to ascertain the cause, was unable to make his way in before he was swept away by a fresh projectile. Another volunteer climbed up through the top into the steel pent-house, for there was no other means of access – returned alive, and reported that the whole barbette crew were dead and that the place was like a charnel-house. There was no sign of disabling injury to the mechanism, but the problem was how to get a fresh crew of living men through the hail of shells to the guns.

The four German armoured cruisers of the second division turned within 1500 yards of the head of the British line, firing torpedoes and delivering and receiving a terrific shell fire. One torpedo boat followed each German cruiser closely, and as the four cruisers turned, the torpedo craft, instead of following them, charged home.

The manœuvre was so unexpected and so hazardous that it was difficult to meet. At twenty-five knots speed the German boats passed like a flash through the British line. A great hump of water rose under the British cruiser *Londonderry*, second in the inverted order of the line, and she reeled and settled heavily in the water. A torpedo had struck her abaft the fore-turret.

Almost at the same instant another German torpedo division attacked the rear of the British line, and a German torpedo boat made a hit upon the *Olympia*, last but one in the British line. She was struck abaft the starboard engine-room, and she too listed, and settled in the water.

As the German boats attempted to escape to the south they caught the fire of the British squadron's port broadsides, which sent two to the bottom and left two others in a sinking condition. Both the damaged British ships turned out of the British line and headed for the coast to the south. The only chance of saving the ships and crews was to beach the vessels and effect repairs. As they steered out of the battle, the tumult behind them increased, and their crews could see great tongues of flame shooting upwards from the *Bismarck*, which was held unmercifully by the British 9.2-in. shells. She was badly damaged and in sore trouble, but the rest of the German ships still appeared to be going well. The British torpedoes, fired from the cruisers' tubes, seemed to have made no hits.

The Germans offered no hindrance to the withdrawal of the injured ships. They closed on the remnant of the British force, now reduced to five ships, all much damaged. On their side, without the *Bismarck*, which had fallen out of the line, they had nine ships in action and two intact flotillas of torpedo craft to bring to bear.

The second German squadron had wheeled to join the other division, which was now steering a generally parallel course, though well astern of the British ships. The two fleets had drawn apart after the short but fierce torpedo action, and the British were now heading north. A fierce cruiser battle ensued.

In this sharp encounter at close quarters, at a range which did not exceed 2000 yards, a grave catastrophe had befallen the *Polyphemus*. As the Admiral was giving orders for his squadron to turn, two heavy projectiles in quick succession struck the conning-tower, inside which he was standing with the captain, a midshipman, a petty officer, and two boys at his side. The first shell struck the base of the conning-tower, causing a most violent shock, and filling the interior of the tower with smoke and fumes.

The Admiral leant against the side of the tower and strove to ascertain through the narrow opening in the steel wall what had happened, when the second shell hit the armour outside, and exploded against it with terrific violence. Admiral Hardy was instantly killed by the shock or by the bolts and splinters which the explosion or impact of the projectile drove into the conning-tower. The flag-captain was mortally wounded; the petty officer received an insignificant contusion. The midshipman and the two boys escaped without a scratch, though stunned and much shaken by the terrific blow.

For some seconds the ship passed out of control; then, dazed and bewildered, the midshipman took charge, and shouted to the chamber below, where the steering gear was placed with the voice-pipes and all other appliances, – an improvement introduced after the war in the Far East, – orders to communicate the death of the Admiral and disablement of the captain to the commander. For some minutes the British squadron was without a chief, though under the system of “follow my leader,” which had been adopted for the cruiser squadron, the captain of the *Gloucester* which led the line was controlling the battle.

Some confusion resulted, and the opportunity of finishing off the *Bismarck* which undoubtedly offered at this moment was lost. Captain Connor, of the *Gloucester*, increased speed to eighteen knots, heading northward, to draw the German squadron away from the damaged British ships, and attempted to work across the head of the German line. The fleets now fought broadside to broadside, exchanging a steady fire, until Captain Connor, finding himself getting too close to the north coast,

and with insufficient manœuvring room, turned southward, inverting the British line, and bringing the *Polyphemus* once more to its head.

The British squadron, after turning, steamed towards the *Bismarck*, which was crawling off eastwards, with a division of German torpedo boats near at hand to give her succour. The German squadrons had now formed up into one compact line, in which two of the ships appeared to be in serious difficulties. They copied the British manœuvre and steered a parallel course to the British cruisers, holding a position a little ahead of them. Simultaneously, their other intact torpedo division took station to leeward of their line near its rear, and the six remaining boats of the two divisions, which had executed the first attack, took station to leeward near the head of the line. The two fleets steamed 3500 yards apart, gradually closing, and fought an artillery battle, in which the greater gunpower, of the Germans, who had nine ships in action to the British five, speedily began to tell.

The *Gloucester* lost two of her four funnels; one of her masts fell with a resounding crash. The *Olympia* had a slight list; the *Aurora's* forward works were shot away; the *Achates* had lost one of her funnels.

In the German line the *Waldersee's* forward military mast tottered and could be seen swaying at each instant, the network of steel girders had been badly damaged. The *Caprivi* was on fire amidships, and smoke was pouring up from the fire. The *Moltke* was without one of her four funnels. The *Manteuffel's* stern had been wrecked till the structure of the ship above the armour looked like a tangle of battered girders. The *York* and *Roon* were less shattered, but gaping wounds could be seen in their sides. The *Friedrich Karl* had lost the upper portion of her after military mast. The *Prince Heinrich* was slightly down by the bow, and was drooping astern.

Sparks and splinters flew upwards from the steel sides of the great ships as the projectiles went home; the din was indescribable; mingled with the dull note of the heavy guns was the crackling of the smaller guns and the beating of the pom-poms, playing a devil's tattoo in this furious encounter of the mastodons.

The German Admiral saw that the two fleets were steadily nearing the *Bismarck*, and essayed once more the manœuvre which he had already tried, a manœuvre studiously practised in the German Navy, which had for ten years been daily experimenting with battle-evolutions, and testing its captains' nerves till they were of steel. In these difficult and desperate manœuvres, it was remarked then – and it has since been proved by experience – the Germans surpassed their British rivals, not because the German officer was braver or more capable, but because he was younger taught to display initiative to a higher degree than the personnel of the British fleet, and better trained for actual battle.

The four last cruisers in the German line suddenly altered course and steered straight at the British line, while behind them, as before, followed six torpedo boats. Through the intervals at the head of the German line came the other six boats – an evolution which they had constantly rehearsed in peace, and which they carried out with admirable precision and dash in the crisis of battle – and charged the head of the British line. The rest of the German squadron maintained its original course, and covered the attack with a terrific fire, all its guns accelerating the rapidity of their discharge till the air hummed with projectiles.

The attack was suddenly and vigorously delivered. The British ships at the rear of the line met it and countered it with success by turning together south and steaming away, so that the German effort in this quarter ended with a blow to the air.

But the flagship at the head of the line was not so alert; the death of the Admiral was at this critical moment severely felt, and the *Polyphemus*, though she eluded three torpedoes which were fired at her at about 3000 yards by the German battleships, found two torpedo boats closing in upon her from right ahead. She charged one with the ram; there was no time for thinking, and she caught the boat fair under her steel prow, which cut through the thin plating of the boat like a knife through matchwood. Her huge hull passed with a slight shudder over the boat, which instantly foundered with a violent explosion.

The other boat, however, passed her only a hundred yards away in the spray of shells and projectiles which seemed as if by enchantment just to miss it. Her crew had a vision of wild-looking officers and men busy at the boat's torpedo tubes; the flash of two torpedoes glinted in the sun as they leaped from the tubes into the water; then a great shell caught the boat and sent her reeling and sinking, but too late. The mischief had been done. One of the German torpedoes struck the *Polyphemus* full on the starboard engine-room, and, exploding with devastating effect, blew in the side and bulkheads. The engine-room filled at once, and bereft of half her power the great cruiser broke from the British line and headed for the shore with a heavy list. Almost at the same moment the fire on board the *Caprivi* blazed up so fiercely under the impact of the British shells that she, too, had to leave the line of battle.

The British line re-formed, heading east, now only four ships strong, faced by eight German ships. For some minutes both fleets steamed on a parallel course 4500 yards apart, the Germans, who had, on the whole, suffered less damage, since their injuries were distributed over a larger number of ships, steaming a little faster. Once more the German Admiral essayed a surprise. Suddenly the eight German ships made each simultaneously a quarter-turn, which brought them into line abreast. They stood in towards the four British survivors, to deal the culminating blow. End-on they caught the full vehemence of the British fire. But with forces so weakened, the British senior officer could not run the risk of a *mêlée*, and to avoid his antagonists he, too, turned away from the Germans in a line abreast, and at the same moment the *Achates*, *Imperieuse*, and *Aurora* fired their stern torpedo tubes. Realising the danger of pressing too closely in the course of a retiring fleet, the Germans again altered course to line ahead, and steered to cut the British ships off from their line of retreat up the Forth.

The four British cruisers now headed up the Forth, perceiving that victory was impossible and flight the only course. They again received the German fire, steering on a parallel course. At this juncture the *Gloucester*, the last ship in the British line, dropped far astern; she had received in quick succession half a dozen heavy German shells on her 6-in. armour and had sprung a serious leak. The German ships closed on her, coming in to less than 2000 yards, when their guns battered her with ever-increasing effect. She sank deeper in the water, heading for the coast, with the Germans in hot pursuit firing continuously at her. The other three cruisers were preparing to turn and go to her aid – a course which would certainly have involved the annihilation of the First Cruiser Squadron – when welcome help appeared.

To the west a column of great ships was made out coming up at impetuous speed from the Upper Forth. The new-comers were the British battleships steering to the scene of action.

At their approach the German cruisers wheeled and stood seaward, making off at a speed which did not exceed 16 knots, and leaving the *Gloucester* to beach herself. They were now in peril, in imminent danger of destruction – as it seemed to the British officers. Actually, however, the risk for them had not been great. Within touch of them the main German battle-fleet had waited off the Forth, linked to them by a chain of smaller cruisers and torpedo boats. It would have shown itself before, but for its commander's fear that its premature appearance might have broken off the battle and led to the retreat of the British squadron. As the British fleet came up, the German cruiser *Bismarck*, which had been for an hour in the gravest trouble, dropped astern of the other German ships, and it could be seen that one other German ship had been taken in tow and was falling astern.

Thus the preliminary cruiser action between the fleets had ended all to the disadvantage of the British, who had fought for two hours, and in that brief space lost four ships disabled. From seven ships on that disastrous morning, the British strength had been reduced to three. Impartial posterity will not blame the officers and men of the armoured cruiser squadron, who made a most gallant fight under the most unfavourable conditions.

The real criminals were the British Ministers, who neglected precautions, permitted the British fleet to be surprised, and compelled the British Admiral to play the most hazardous of games while

they had left the coast without torpedo stations, and England without any military force capable of resisting an invading army.

Had there been a national army, even a national militia, the Commander-in-Chief could have calmly awaited the concentration of the remaining British fleets, which would have given the British Navy an overwhelming superiority. Had there been a fair number of destroyers always attached to his force, again, it is morally certain that he would have suffered no loss from the German torpedo attacks, while a number of torpedo stations disposed along the North Sea coast would have enabled him to call up torpedo divisions to his assistance, even if he had had none attached to his fleet.

Foresight would have provided for all the perils which menaced the British Navy on this eventful night; foresight had urged the rapid completion of the harbour at Rosyth, without which further strengthening of the North Sea fleet was difficult; foresight had pointed out the danger of neglecting the strengthening of the torpedo flotilla; foresight had called for a strong navy, and a nation trained to defend the fatherland.

It was the cry of the people and the politician for all manner of “reforms” at the expense of national security; the demand for old-age pensions, for feeding of children, for State work at preposterous wages for the work-shy; the general selfishness which asked everything of the State and refused to make the smallest sacrifice for it; the degenerate slackness of the Public and the Press, who refused to concern themselves with these tremendous interests, and riveted all their attention upon the trivialities of the football and cricket field, that worked the doom of England.

The nation was careless and apathetic; it had taken but little interest in its Fleet. Always it had assumed that the navy was perfect, that one British ship was a match for any two enemies. And now in a few hours it had been proved that the German Navy was as efficient; that its younger officers were better trained for war and more enterprising than the older British personnel; that its staff had perfectly thought out and prepared every move; and that much of the old advantage possessed by the British Navy had been lost by the too general introduction of short service.

The shooting of the British ships, it is true, had on the whole been good, and even the cruisers, which in battle practice had done badly, in action had improved their marksmanship to a remarkable degree. But it was in the art of battle manœuvring and in the scientific employment of their weapons that the British had failed.

The three surviving cruisers of the British squadron had all suffered much damage from the German fire, and had exhausted so much of their ammunition in the two hours’ fight that they were practically incapable of taking further part in the operations. They had to proceed to Rosyth to effect hasty repairs and ship any further ammunition that might with luck be found in the insignificant magazines at that place.

The *Olympia* had been struck three times on her fore barbette, but though one of the 9.2-in. guns which it contained had been put out of action by splinters, the barbette still worked well. Twice almost the entire crew of the barbette had been put out of action and had been renewed. The scenes within the barbette were appalling. Two of her 7.5-in. barbettes had been jammed by the fire; her funnels were so much damaged that the draught had fallen and the coal consumption enormously increased. Below the armour deck, however, the vitals of the ship were intact.

The *Impérieuse* and *Aurora* had serious hits on the water-line astern, and each of them was taking on board a good deal of water. They, too, were much mauled about their funnels and upper works. As for the four beached cruisers, they were in a parlous condition, and it would take weeks to effect repairs. The losses in men of the cruisers had not been very heavy; the officers in the conning-towers had suffered most, as upon the conning-towers the Germans had directed their heaviest fire.

Most serious and trying in all the ships had been the outbreaks of fire. Wherever the shells struck they appeared to cause conflagrations, and this, though the hoses were spouting water and the decks drowned before the action began. Once a fire broke out, to get it under was no easy task. Projectiles came thick upon the fire-parties, working in the choking smoke. Shell-splinters cut down



the bluejackets and tore the hoses. The difficulty of maintaining communications within the ships was stupendous; telephones were inaudible in the terrible din; voice-pipes were severed; mechanical indicators worked indifferently.

The battle-fleet had spent its respite at the anchorage in getting on board the intact ships much of the ammunition from the *Indefatigable* and *Triumph*, and stripping away all remaining impedimenta; in rigging mantlets and completing the work of preparation.

While thus engaged at five a.m. the heavy boom of distant firing came in towards it from the sea – the continuous thundering of a hundred large guns, a dull, sinister note, which alternately froze and warmed the blood. Orders were instantly issued to make ready for sea with all possible speed, and hoist in the boats. Meantime the ships' torpedo and picket boats had dragged carefully for mines, as Lord Ebbfleet dared to leave nothing to chance. Numerous mines were found floating on the water or moored in the channel, and it seemed a miracle that so many ships of the cruiser squadron had passed out to sea in safety.

Ten minutes later, at 5.10 a.m., Lord Ebbfleet signalled to weigh anchor, and the battle-fleet got under way and headed out to sea, its ships in a single line ahead, proceeding with the utmost caution. As it cleared the zone of danger, speed was increased to sixteen knots, and off Inchcolm the formation was modified.

Wishing to use to the utmost the high speed and enormous batteries of his four battleships of the "Dreadnought" class, Lord Ebbfleet had determined to manoeuvre with them independently. They steamed three knots faster than the rest of his fleet; their armour and armament fitted them to play a decisive part in the approaching action. They took station to starboard, and to port steamed the other ten battleships, headed by the *Captain*, under Sir Louis Parker, the second in command, who was given full authority to control his division. Behind the *Captain* steamed the *Sultan*, *Defiance*, *Active*, *Redoubtable*, *Malta*, *Excellence*, *Courageous*, *Valiant*, and *Glasgow*— a magnificent array of two-funnelled, grey-painted monsters, keeping perfect station, with their crews at quarters, guns loaded, and battle-flags flying. To starboard were the enormous hulls of the four "Dreadnoughts," the *Vanguard* leading, with astern of her the *Thunderer*, *Devastation*, and *Bellerophon*. The great turrets, each with its pair of giant 45 ft. long 12-in. guns, caught the eye instantly; the three squat funnels in each ship emitted only a faint haze of smoke; on the lofty bridges high above the water stood white-capped officers, looking out anxiously to sea. Nearer and nearer came the roll of the firing; presently the four "Dreadnoughts" increased speed and drew fast ahead of the other line, while the spray flew from under their bows as the revolutions of the turbines rose and the speed went up to nineteen knots.

The other ten battleships maintained their speed, and fell fast astern. Off Leith a vast crowd gathered, watching the far-off fighting, and listening in disquietude to the roar of the firing of the cruiser battle, and cheered the great procession as it swiftly passed and receded from view, leaving behind it only a faint haze of smoke. A few minutes before 7 a.m. the group of officers on the *Vanguard's* bridge saw ahead of them three cruisers, evidently British, steaming towards them, and far away yet another British cruiser low in the water, smoking under the impact of shells, with about her a great fleet of armoured cruisers. The cruisers, as they approached, signalled the terrible news that Admiral Hardy was dead, three British cruisers out of action, and the *Gloucester* in desperate straits.

The battleships were just in time to effect the rescue. At 11,000 yards the *Vanguard's* fore-turret fired the first shot of the battleship encounter, and as the scream of the projectile filled the air, the German cruisers drew away from their prey. The "Dreadnoughts" were now two miles ahead of the main squadron. Steaming fast towards the *Bismarck*, which had been abandoned by her consorts, the *Vanguard* fired six shells at her from her fore and starboard 12-in. turrets. All the six 12-in. shells went home; with a violent explosion the German cruiser sank instantly, taking with her to the bottom most of her crew. Yet there was no time to think of saving men, for on the horizon ahead of the British Fleet, out to sea, could be seen a dense cloud of smoke, betokening the presence of a great assemblage of ships. Towards this cloud the German cruisers were steaming at their best pace.

Lord Ebbfleet reduced speed to permit his other battleships to complete their formation and take up their positions for battle. The ten battleships of the second division simultaneously increased speed from fifteen to sixteen knots, which was as much as their engines could be trusted to make without serious strain.

About 7.15 a.m. the British Fleet had resumed its original order, and was abreast of North Berwick, now fast nearing the cloud of smoke which indicated the enemy's presence, and rose from behind the cliffs of the Island of May.

The British admirals interchanged signals as the fleet steamed seaward, and Lord Ebbfleet instructed Vice-Admiral Parker and Rear-Admiral Merrilees to be prepared for the sudden charges of German torpedo craft.

That there would be many with the German Fleet was certain, for, although about twenty-four destroyers and torpedo boats had been sunk, damaged, or left without torpedoes as the result of the previous attacks during the night and early morning, the German torpedo flotilla had been enormously increased in the four years before the war, till it mustered 144 destroyers and forty large torpedo boats.

Even ruling thirty out of action and allowing for detachments, something like a hundred might have to be encountered.

Lord Ebbfleet was not one of those officers who expect the enemy to do the foolish thing, and he had no doubt but that the Germans would follow a policy of rigid concentration. They would bring all their force to bear against his fleet and strive to deal it a deadly blow.

Five minutes passed, and the smoke increased, while now at last the forms of ships could be made out far away. Rapidly approaching each other at the rate of some thirty knots an hour, the head ships of the two fleets were at 7.25 a.m. about nine miles apart. It could be seen that the German ships were in three distinct lines ahead, the starboard or right German line markedly in advance of the others, which were almost abreast. The German lines had wide intervals between them.

In the British ships the ranges were now coming down to the guns from the fire-control stations aloft: "18,000 yards!" "17,000 yards!" "16,000 yards!" "15,000 yards!" "14,000 yards!" followed in quick succession; the sights were quietly adjusted, and the tension of the crews grew almost unendurable. The hoses were all spouting water to wet the decks; every eye was turned upon the enemy. Far away to the south the Bass Rock and the cliffs near Tantallon Castle rose out of a heaving sea, and behind them loomed the upland country south of Dunbar, so famous in Scottish story. To the north showed the rocky coast of Fife. The sun was in the eyes of the British gunners.

The guns of the *Vanguard*, and, indeed, of all the British battleships, were kept trained upon the leading German. It could now be seen that she was of the "Kaiser" class, and that five others of the same class followed her. Her tier on tier of turrets showed against the sun; the grim brownish-grey hulls produced an impression of resolute force.

In the centre German line appeared to be stationed several ships of the "Braunschweig" and "Deutschland" classes – how many the British officers could not as yet make out, owing to the perfect order of the German line, and the fact that it was approaching on exactly the opposite course to the British Fleet.

The port or left German line was headed by one of the new monster battleships, built to reply to the *Dreadnought*, and of even greater size and heavier battery than that famous ship. It was, in fact, the *Sachsen*, flying Admiral Helmann's flag, armed with twelve of the new pattern 46 ft. long 11-in. guns, twenty-four 4-in. quick-firers, and ten pom-poms.

The monster German battleship could be plainly distinguished by the Eiffel Tower-like structure of her masts, each with its two platforms carried on an elaborate system of light steel girders, which rendered them less liable to be shot away. End-on she showed her four 11-in. turrets, each bristling with a pair of muzzles. She brought two more heavy guns to bear ahead and on the broadside

than did the *Dreadnought*, while her stern fire was incomparably more powerful, delivered from eight 11-in. guns.

It was the completion of two ships of this class that had caused Lord Ebbfleet so much anxiety for his position. Yet there were four of the class in the German line of battle, two of which did not appear in the official lists as ready for sea, but were given out to be only completing.

The range-finders in the fire-control stations in the British flagship were still sending down the distance. "13,000 yards!" "12,000 yards!" and the tension augmented. The centre and port German columns of ships slowed and turned slightly in succession, while the starboard line increased speed and maintained its original course. By this manoeuvre the German Fleet looked to be formed in one enormous irregular line, covering four miles of sea.

The numbers of the enemy could at last be counted; the British Fleet of fourteen battleships had twenty-two battleships against it, and of those twenty-two, four were as good ships as the *Vanguard*. The British Fleet turned a little to starboard to bring its batteries to bear with the best effect, and take advantage, as Lord Ebbfleet intended, of the dispersion of the German formation. "11,000 yards!" "10,000 yards!" came down to the barbettes. The *Vanguard* fired a 12-pounder, and as the flash was seen both Fleets opened with sighting shots, and the great battle began.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONTINUATION OF THE STRUGGLE AT SEA

But the German Admiral had anticipated the British move, and as the two fleets closed, replied with a daring and hazardous blow. His irregular line dissolved once more into its elements as the flashes came from every heavy gun that would bear in his twenty-two battleships. The Germans, as they drew abreast of the British Fleet, steaming on an opposite course, broke into three columns in three lines ahead, one of which steered straight for the British rear, one for the centre, and one for the van.

The *Vanguard* and the other three large battleships with Lord Ebbfleet had increased speed, and moved ahead of their original station till their broadsides bore and they practically belonged to the British line. They circled at full battle speed of nineteen knots to pass across the German rear. Sheltering under the lee of the German battleships several destroyers or torpedo-boats could be discerned, and there were other destroyer or torpedo-boat divisions away to the north-east, moving gently apart and aloof from the battle out at sea.

The fire on either side had now become intense and accurate; the range varied from minute to minute, but it constantly fell. The tumult was indescribable. The German third division of six "Kaisers" passed round the rear of the main British division, executing against it the manœuvre of "crossing the T," but receiving serious injury in the process.

A stunning succession of blows rained upon the *Glasgow*, the sternmost battleship in the British line, and her excessively thin belt was pierced by three German 9.4-in. shells, one of which burst with dreadful effect inside the citadel, denting the armoured deck, driving bolts and splinters down into the boiler and engine-rooms, and for some instants rendering the ship uncontrollable. A great fire broke out where the shell had burst.

Almost at the same instant the *Glasgow's* fore barbette put two shells in succession home just above the upper level of the *Zahringen's* armour-belt amidships, and one of these shells bursting, wrecked and brought down the German battleship's after-funnel, besides putting two of her Schultz boilers out of action. The *Zahringen* took fire, but the flames were quickly got under; she carried no wood and nothing inflammable.

Dense clouds of smoke from funnels, from bursting shells, from burning ships, began to settle over the water, and the air was acrid with the taint of burnt cordite and nitrous fumes from the German powder. In the twilight of smoke the dim forms of monster ships marched and countermarched, aglow with red flame.

The four "Dreadnoughts" passed round the first German division containing the four battleships of the "Sachsen" class, interchanging with them a terrific fire at about 5000 yards. Each side made many hits, and some damage was done to unarmoured portions of the huge hulls. An 11-in. shell struck the *Thunderer's* centre 12-in. barbette, and jammed it for a few minutes; the *Vanguard*, at the head of the British division, received a concentrated fire, seven 11-in. shells striking her forward of her centre barbette. Several of her armour-plates were cracked; her port anchor gear was shot away, and her fore-funnel much shattered. Her whole structure vibrated under the terrific blows. Splinters swept her fore-bridge, and a hail of small projectiles from the German 40-pounder guns beat upon her conning-tower, rendering control of the battle exceedingly difficult.

The noise and concussion were terrible; the blast of the great 12-in. guns, when they fired ahead, shook the occupants of the tower, and extreme caution was needed to avoid serious injury. Lord Ebbfleet triumphantly achieved the manœuvre of "crossing the T," or passing across the head of the German line and raking it with all his ships, against the Germans, though the enormous bow-fire of the *Sachsen* served her well at this point.

But the German Admiral diminished the effectiveness of the manœuvre by turning away a little, and then, when the danger had passed, resuming his original course. The second German division rapidly came up on the port beam of the British main division, its head ships receiving a fearful fire from the British line. Closing upon the first German division, it formed up astern of it into one long line, and attacked the British rear.

Thus the Germans had surrounded the British ten battleships under Sir Louis Parker, and had concentrated against them twenty-two battleships. The fire of this great host of German ships told heavily upon the weak armour of the “Defiance” and “Valiant” classes. The “Sachsens,” at about 4000 yards, put shot after shot from their 11-in. guns into the hull of the *Glasgow*, the last ship in the British line, and clouds of smoke and tongues of flame leapt up from her. She was now steaming slowly, and in evident distress.

The four “Dreadnoughts” worked to the north of the Germans, maintaining with them a long-range action, and firing with great effect. But seeing the German concentration against the other division of his fleet, Lord Ebbfleet turned and stood towards it, while at the same time Admiral Parker began to turn in succession and move to meet the “Dreadnoughts.” As his line turned, the rearward ships received further injuries.

Outside the armour the structure of many ships on both sides was fast being reduced to a tangle of shattered beams and twisted and rent plating. Most of the smaller guns were out of action, though the 6-in. guns in the casemates of the British ships were still for the most part intact. The *Sultan*’s 7.5’s were firing with great effect; while the *Captain*, which headed the British main division, had resisted the battering superbly, and inflicted great injury on the *Preussen* by her fire. At moments, however, her guns were blanketed by the ships behind her, from the fact that the German columns were well astern. It was to bring his guns to bear as well as to rejoin his Commander-in-Chief that the British Vice-Admiral altered course and steamed south-westward.

The Germans now practised a masterly stroke.

Their third division of six “Kaisers” headed direct for the van of the British line, closing rapidly upon a generally opposite course. At the same time their other two divisions steered to prevent the British ships from making a countermarch and avoiding the charge which was now imminent.

Lord Ebbfleet saw the danger, and increased speed, closing on the “Kaisers,” well astern of them, and plying them with a terrific fire from the three 12-in. turrets which bore ahead in his flagship. Smoke and sparks flew upwards from the *Friedrich III.*, the last ship in the division. Her after-turret was out of action; her after-military mast fell amidst a rain of splinters; her stern sank slightly in the water.

At the same time the “Kaisers” began to catch the full fire of the other British division, and they were doubled upon. The head of their line was being raked by Sir Louis Parker; the *Captain* put shell after shell into the bows of the *Wilhelm II.*; her 9.2’s and 12-in. guns played with a steady stream of projectiles upon the German battleship, until, at 2000 yards, the *Wilhelm*’s upper works appeared to be dissolving in smoke and flame as before some irresistible acid.

The bows of the German battleship sank a little, but she turned, brought her broadside to bear, and the five ships behind her did the same. The range was short; the position favourable for torpedoes; and the six Germans fired, first their bow tubes as they came round, and then twice in quick succession their two broadside tubes at the British line. The thirty torpedoes sped through the sea; the British replied with the two broadside tubes in each ship, as those tubes bore.

There was amidst all the din and turmoil and shooting flame a distinct pause in the battle as the crews of both fleets, or all those who could see what was happening, watched spell-bound the issue of this attack and counter-attack. They had not long to wait. One of the huge German torpedoes caught the *Excellent* right astern and wrecked her rudder and propellers. Another struck the *Sultan* almost amidships, inflicting upon her terrible injury, so that she listed heavily. The *Wilhelm II.* was struck by a British torpedo right on her bows, and as she was already low in the water, began to fill and sink.

The scene at this point was one of appalling horror. One battleship, the *Wilhelm II.*, was sinking fast, with none to rescue her crew; the men were rushing up on deck; the fire from her guns had ceased; she lay on the sea a shattered wreck, riddled with shell, and smoking with the fires which still burnt fiercely amidst the débris of her upper works.

Not far from her lay the *Excellent*, completely disabled, but still firing. Near the *Excellent*, again, moving very slowly, and clearly in a sinking condition, but still maintaining gallantly the battle, was the *Glasgow*, in a dense cloud of smoke caused by the bursting shell from the guns of sixteen enemies and the blazing fires on board.

Making off to the south to beach herself was the *Sultan*, in lamentable plight, with a heavy list. It was 8.40 a.m., or little more than an hour since the joining of battle, and the German Admiral at this moment signalled that victory was his.

The news was sent by wireless telegraphy to the German cruisers out at sea, and by them transmitted to Emden and Berlin.

At 11 that morning newspapers were selling in the streets of the German capital with the news that the British Fleet was beaten, and that Britain had lost the command of the sea. Five British battleships, it was added, in the brief wireless message, had been already sunk or put out of action.

**Berlin um Eins! Berlin um Eins!**

**Das Kleine Journal**

**Mittags-Ausgabe. Berlin, Montag, den 3 September 1910**

**Triumph der**

**Deutschen**

**Waffen**

**Vernichtung der**

**Englischen**

**Flotte**

**Von Kronhelm Auf**

**Dem Vormarsche**

**Nach London**

**The First News in Berlin of the German Victory**

The German lines closed upon the two injured British ships, *Exmouth* and *Glory*, showering shells upon them. At once the two British Admirals turned and moved to the rescue, through the clouds of smoke which had settled on the sea, and which were rendering shooting at long range more than ever difficult. Through the smoke German torpedo-boats could be made out on the move, but they did not attempt as yet to close on the intact battleships, and kept well out of the range of the British guns. The first and most powerful German battleship division covered the other German ships

in their attack upon the disabled British battleships, and encountered the fire of the eleven British battleships which still remained in action. Meantime the other thirteen German battleships closed to about 1000 yards of the injured British ships. The 11-in. shells from the German turrets at this distance inflicted terrible injury. The German guns were firing three shots in two minutes, and under their fire and the storm of 6-in. and 6.7-in. shells which their smaller guns delivered it was impossible for the British gunners to shoot with any effect. Great explosions occurred on board the *Glory*; an 11-in. shell struck her fore barbette, where the plating had already been damaged by a previous hit, and, perforating, burst inside with fearful effect, blowing the crew of the barbette to pieces, and sending a blast of fire and gas down into the loading chamber under the barbette, where it exploded a cordite charge. Another shell struck the conning-tower, and disabled or killed all inside it. The funnels fell; both the masts, which were already tottering, came down; the ship lay upon the water a formless, smoking hulk. Yet still her crew fought on, a hopeless battle. Then several heavy shells caught her waterline, as the Germans closed a little, and must have driven in the armour or pierced it. More explosions followed; from the centre of the ship rose a column of smoke and flame and fragments of wreckage; the centre lifted visibly, and the ends dropped into the sea. The *Glory* parted amidships, and went to the bottom still firing her after barbette in that supreme moment, having proved herself worthy of her proud name. Several German torpedo-boats steamed towards the bubbles in the water, and fell to work to rescue the crew. Others had drawn near the *Wilhelm II.*, and in neither case were they molested by the fire of the British fleet.

A scene as terrible took place on board the *Exmouth*. To save her was impossible, for only a few brief minutes were needed to complete the torpedo's work, and no respite was given by the German officers. They poured in a heavy fire from all their guns that remained battle-worthy upon the *Exmouth's* barbettes and conning-tower, raining such a shower of projectiles upon the ship that, as in the case of the *Glory*, it was impossible for the British crew to fight her with effect. Her 7-in. armour did not keep out the German 11-in. projectiles at short range, and the citadel of the ship became a perfect charnel-house.

Amid the tangled steel-work, amid the blaze of the fires which could no longer be kept under, amid the hail of splinters, in the choking fumes of smoke from burning wood and linoleum and exploding shells, officers and men clung manfully to their posts, while under them the hull sank lower and lower in the water. Then the *Braunschweig* headed in to 500 yards, and at this range fired her bow torpedo at the British ship amidships. The torpedo struck the British battleship and did its dreadful work. Exploding about the base of the after-funnel, it blew in the side, and immediately the British ship listed sharply, showed her deck to her enemy, and with a rattle of objects sliding across the deck and a rush of blue figures, capsized amid a cloud of steam.

While the two disabled battleships were being destroyed, and the *Swiftsure* was crawling off to the south in the hope of reaching the shore and beaching herself, the fight between the rest of the British Fleet and the German divisions had reached its full intensity. For some minutes, indeed, both fleets had been compelled by the smoke to cease fire, but the heavy thunder of the firing never altogether stopped. The four big German battleships were still seemingly undamaged in any vital respect, though all showed minor injuries. The four British "Dreadnoughts" had stood the stern test as well.

But the other battleships had all suffered grievously. The *Duncan* and *Russell* had lost, one both her funnels and the other both her masts, and the speed of the *Duncan* could scarcely be maintained in consequence. The *Montagu* had one of her barbettes out of action, and one of the *Albemarle's* 12-in. guns had either blown off its muzzle or else had it shot away. The *Albemarle* had received a shell forward below the waterline, and had a compartment full of water. In the German line the *Lothringen* was on fire amidships, had lost her fore and centre funnels, and was low in the water, but her heavy guns were still in action. On her the British line now concentrated most of its fire, while the Germans plied with shell the *Duncan* and *Russell*. The second and third German divisions used



their port batteries against the British main fleet, while their starboard batteries were destroying the *Exmouth* and *Glory*.

At this juncture the *Duncan* fell astern and left the British line, and almost at the same moment the *Lothringen* quitted the German line. The British Admiral turned all his ships eight points simultaneously, inverting the order of his line, to rescue his injured vessel. To attempt an attack upon the *Lothringen* would have meant forcing his way through the German line, and with the ever-growing disparity of numbers he did not dare to risk so hazardous a venture. But before he could effect his purpose, the German Admiral closed on the *Duncan*, and from the *Sachsen's* and *Grosser Kurfuerst's* 11-in. turrets poured in upon her a broadside of twenty 11-in. shells, which struck her almost simultaneously – the range was now too short for the gunners to miss – and caused fearful slaughter and damage on board her. Two of the projectiles, which were alternately steel shell and capped armour-piercing shell, perforated her side-armour; two more hit her fore barbette; one exploded against the conning-tower; the others hulled her amidships; and when the smoke about her lifted for an instant in a puff of the wind, she was seen to be slowly sinking and motionless. One of her barbettes was still firing, but she was out of the battle and doomed. Four British battleships had gone and two German, though one of these was still afloat and moving slowly off to the north-east, towards two divisions of German destroyers, which waited the moment to close and deal a final blow against the British Fleet.

It was now about 10 a.m., and both fleets drew apart for some minutes. Another German battleship, the *Westfalen*, quitted the German line, and followed the *Lothringen* away from the fight. Her two turrets had been jammed temporarily by the British 12-in. shells, while most of her smaller guns had been put out of action by the *Agamemnon's* 9.2-in. weapons, which had directed upon her a merciless fire. The Germans could be seen re-forming their divisions, and one of the battleships moved from the second to the first division. With seven battleships in each of these two divisions and five in the third, the Germans once more approached the British line, which had also re-formed, the *Agamemnon* taking station to the rear. The battle was renewed off Dunbar. Astern of the Germans, now that the smoke had cleared away, could be seen fifteen or twenty torpedo craft. Other destroyer and torpedo divisions were farther away to sea.

The German battleships steamed direct towards the British battleships, repeating the manœuvre which they had employed at the opening of the battle, and forming their two first divisions in one line, which moved upon the port bow of the British, while the other division, the third, advanced against the starboard bow. Both fleets reopened fire, and to avoid passing between the two German lines, Lord Ebbfleet turned towards the main German force, hoping, at even this eleventh hour, to retrieve the fortunes of the disastrous day by the use of his big ships' batteries. Turning in succession in the attempt to cross his enemy's bows, his ships received a very heavy fire from both German lines; simultaneously the conning-towers of the *Vanguard* and the *Sachsen* were struck by several shells. Two British 12-in. projectiles caught the *Sachsen's* tower in succession; the first weakened the structure and probably killed every one inside, among them Admiral Helmann; the second practically demolished it, leaving it a complete wreck.

The blow of the German 11-in. shell upon the *Vanguard's* tower was equally fatal. Lord Ebbfleet was killed by a splinter, and his chief-of-the-staff received mortal injuries. Not a man in the tower escaped untouched. The brains of both fleets were paralysed, and the *Vanguard* steered wildly. The German destroyers saw their opportunity, and rushed in. Four boats came straight at the huge hull of the British flagship from ahead, and before she could be got under control, a torpedo fired from one of them hit her right forward, breaching two compartments and admitting a great quantity of water. Her bows sank in the sea somewhat, but she clung to her place in the line for some minutes, then dropped out, and, in manifest difficulty, headed for the shore, which was close at hand to the south. Another division of four destroyers charged on her, but her great turrets were still intact, and received them with a murderous fire of 12-in. shrapnel.

Two of the six guns made hits and wrecked two boats past recognition; the other four missed the swiftly moving targets, and two boats survived the first discharge and closed, one to port, and one to starboard. Her smaller guns were out of action, or unable to stop the boats with their fire. Both boats discharged two torpedoes; three torpedoes missed, but the fourth struck the flagship under the fore-turret. She took in so much water that she grounded, east of Dunbar, and lay there submerged up to the level of her main deck, and unable to use her big guns lest the concussion should shake her in this position to pieces. The Germans detached the battleship *Preussen* to wreck her with its fire. With the rest of their fleet they followed the remaining British ships, which were now heading seawards. Admiral Parker had determined to make a vigorous effort to escape to the south-east along the British coast, and surviving, to fight again on a less disastrous day, with the odds more even. Nothing could be achieved with nine ships against eighteen, even though many of the eighteen were much damaged. Moreover, on board some of the British ships ammunition was beginning to run low.

The seventeen German ships formed into a single line and pursued the British, steering a parallel course, the head of the German line somewhat overlapping the head of the British line, so that the four German battleships of the "Sachsen" class could bring their entire fire to bear upon the three remaining "Dreadnoughts." The other fourteen German battleships pounded the six older and weaker British battleships in the line. The distance between the two fleets was from 4500 to 6000 yards, and the fire of each fleet was slow, as the want of ammunition was beginning to be felt. For nearly five hours the two fleets had fought; it was now 11.30 a.m. Well out to sea, and some distance to leeward of the German battleships, the British captains could discern several German armoured cruisers, which, after having effected hasty repairs and shipped further ammunition from a store-ship in the offing, were closing once more. With them were at least four or five divisions of torpedo craft, shadowing and following the movements of the two fleets, prepared to rush in if a favourable opportunity offered. Both fleets were making about thirteen knots, for the worst damaged of the British battleships were not good for much more.

The fire of the *Thunderer's* 12-in. guns, concentrated on the hull of the *Sachsen*, at last began to produce some effect. The conning-tower had already been wrecked by the *Vanguard's* guns, which rendered the control and direction of the ship a matter of great difficulty. Two of her 11-in. turrets were also out of action, jammed by shells or completely disabled. She turned northward out of the German line, about twelve, leaving the *Bayern* at its head. About the same time the *Albemarle* signalled that she was in extreme difficulty; a great fire was raging on board her, her funnels were much damaged, both her masts were down, two compartments were full, and but few of her guns could fire. Looking down the British line from the battered afterbridge of the *Thunderer*, it was evident that other ships were finding difficulty in keeping station. Strange changes and transformations had been worked in their outward appearance. Funnels and cowls were gone, masts had been levelled, heaps of wreckage appeared in place of the trim lines of the grey-painted steel-work. The sea was red with the blood that poured from the scuppers. Great rents gaped everywhere in the unarmoured works.

In the German line the conditions were much the same. Certain ships were dropping from their stations and receding to the rear of the long procession; many of the German battleships had been grievously mauled; all showed evident traces of the British gunners' handiwork. The huge steel superstructures of the "Deutschland" class were wrecked beyond recognition. The *Braunschweig*, as the result of receiving a concentrated broadside from the *Bellerophon*, which caught her near the foot of her foremast, had an immense opening in the hull extending from the fore-turret to the foremast 6.7-in. gun turret, and her fore-funnel and foremast were completely shot away; her conning-tower, with its armoured support, stood up out of the gap, from which poured volumes of smoke and steam. She was clearly in a parlous condition, and only her after-turret still fired.

About 1 p.m. the *Albemarle* could keep up with the British line no longer. Admiral Parker signalled to her, with extreme difficulty, for most of his signalling appliances were shot away, and his message had to be conveyed by "flag-wagging," to beach herself if possible on the coast to the

south. To have turned with his fleet to protect her would have meant annihilation of the rest of his force. She stood away to the south, and as the rest of the British fleet, now only six ships strong, increased speed to about fifteen knots, two German battleships were seen to follow her, shell her, and then rejoin the German fleet. The remnant of the British fleet, with the *Agamemnon* at the rear in the place of honour, began slowly to draw out of range, though still to the north the German torpedo craft followed in a sinister manner, and caused the more anxiety because, in view of the large quantity of ammunition that had been expended, and the great damage that had been done to all the smaller guns in the surviving British ships, their attacks would be extremely difficult to resist with success.

About 2 p.m. the German Admiral fired the last shot of the great battle of North Berwick at a range of 10,000 yards.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SITUATION IN THE NORTH

Meanwhile let us turn to the state of affairs on land. When the intelligence of the invasion was received, Lancashire and Yorkshire were in a state of utter panic.

The first news, which reached Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool, and the other great centres of commerce, about four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, was at once discredited.

Everyone declared the story to be a huge hoax. As the people assembled in the places of worship that evening, the amazing rumour was eagerly discussed; and later on, when the Sunday evening crowds promenaded the principal thoroughfares – Briggate in Leeds, Market Street in Manchester, Corporation Street in Birmingham, Cheapside in Barnsley, and the principal streets of Chester, Liverpool, Halifax, Huddersfield, Rochdale, Bolton, and Wigan – wild reports of the dash upon our east coast were upon everyone's tongue.

There was, however, no authentic news, and the newspapers in the various towns all hesitated to issue special editions – first because it was Sunday night, and secondly because the editors had no desire to spread a wider panic than that already created.

Upon the windows of the *Yorkshire Post* office in Leeds some of the telegrams were posted and read by large crowds, while the *Manchester Courier*, in Manchester, and the *Birmingham Daily Post*, in Birmingham, followed a similar example.

The telegrams were brief and conflicting, some from the London correspondents, and others from the Central News, the Press Association, and the Exchange Telegraph Company. Most of the news, however, in that early stage of the alarm was culled from the exclusive information obtained by the enterprise of the sub-editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*.

Leeds, the first city in Yorkshire, was the centre of most intense excitement on that hot, stifling Sunday night. The startling report spread like wildfire, first from the office of the *Yorkshire Post* among the crowds that were idling away their Sunday evening gossiping in Boar Lane, Briggate, and the Hunslett Road, and quickly the whole city from Burton Head to Chapel Town, and from Burmantofts to Armley Park, was in a ferment.

The sun sank with a misty, angry afterglow precursory of rain, and by the time the big clock in the tower of the Royal Exchange showed half-past seven the scene in the main streets was already an animated one. The whole city was agog. The astounding news, carried everywhere by eager, breathless people, had reached to even the remotest suburbs, and thousands of alarmed mill-hands and workers came flocking into town to ascertain the actual truth.

As at Leeds, so all through Lancashire and Yorkshire, Volunteers were assembling in breathless eagerness for the order to mobilise. But there was the same cry of unpreparedness everywhere. The Volunteer battalions of the Manchester Regiment at Patricroft, at Hulme, at Ashton-under-Lyne, at Manchester, and at Oldham; those of the Liverpool Regiment at Prince's Park, at St. Anne's, at Shaw Street, at Everton Brow, at Everton Road, and at Southport; those of the Lancashire Fusiliers at Bury, Rochdale, and Salford; the Hallamshire Volunteers at Sheffield; the York and Lancasters at Doncaster; the King's Own Light Infantry at Wakefield; the battalions of the Yorkshires at Northallerton and Scarborough, that of the East Yorkshires at Beverley, and those of the West Yorkshires at York and Bradford.

## **BY THE KING**

### **PROCLAMATION**

#### **FOR CALLING OUT**

#### **THE ARMY RESERVE**

EDWARD R.

WHEREAS by the Reserve Forces Act, 1882, it is amongst other things enacted that in case of imminent national danger or of great emergency, it shall be lawful for Us, by Proclamation, the occasion being declared in Council and notified by the Proclamation, if Parliament be not then sitting, to order that the Army Reserve shall be called out on permanent service; and by any such Proclamation to order a Secretary of State from time to time to give, and when given, to revoke or vary such directions as may seem necessary or proper for calling out the forces or force mentioned in the Proclamation, or all or any of the men belonging thereto:

AND WHEREAS Parliament is not sitting, and whereas WE have declared in Council and hereby notify the present state of Public Affairs and the extent of the demands on our Military Forces for the protection of the interests of the Empire constitute a case of great emergency within the meaning of the said Act:

NOW THEREFORE We do in pursuance of the said Act hereby order that Our Army Reserve be called out on permanent service, and We do hereby order the Right Honourable Charles Leonard Spencer Cotterell, one of our Principal Secretaries of State, from time to time to give, and when given, to revoke or vary such directions as may seem necessary or proper for calling out Our Army Reserve, or all or any of the men belonging thereto, and such men shall proceed to and attend at such places and at such times as may be respectively appointed by him to serve as part of Our Army until their services are no longer required.

Given at our Court at James', this fourth day of September, in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and ten, and in the tenth year of Our Reign.

#### **GOD SAVE THE KING**

In Halifax great crowds assembled around the office of the *Yorkshire Daily Observer*, at the top of Russell Street, where the news received by telephone from Bradford was being constantly posted up. Huddersfield, with its cloth and woollen factories, was paralysed by the astounding intelligence. The electric trams brought in crowds from Cliff End, Oakes Fartown, Mold Green, and Lockwood, while telephone messages from Dewsbury, Elland, Mirfield, Wyke, Cleckheaton, Overdon, Thornton, and the other towns in the vicinity all spoke of the alarm and excitement that had so suddenly spread over the West Riding.

The mills would shut down. That was prophesied by everyone. And, if so, then before many days wives and families would most certainly be crying for food. Masters and operatives alike recognised

the extreme gravity of the situation, and quickly the panic spread to every home throughout that densely populated industrial area.

The city of Bradford was, as may well be imagined, in a state of ferment. In the red, dusky sunset a Union Jack was flying from the staff above Watson's shop at the corner of Market Street, and the excited throngs, seeing it, cheered lustily. Outside the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* and the *Yorkshire Daily Observer* offices the latest intelligence was posted, the streets being blocked by the eager people who had come in by car from Manningham, Heaton, Tyersall, Dudley Hill, Eccleshill, Idle, Thackley, and other places.

Bolton, like the neighbouring towns, was ruled by Manchester, and the masters eagerly went there on Monday to go on 'Change and ascertain the exact situation. They knew, alas! that the alarm must have a disastrous effect upon the cotton trade, and more than one spinner when the astounding news had been told him on the previous night, knew well that he could not possibly meet his engagements, and that only bankruptcy was before him.

In every home, rich and poor, not only in Bolton but out at Farnworth, Kearsley, Over Hulton, Sharples, and Heaton the terrible catastrophe was viewed with abject terror. The mills would eventually close, without a doubt; if Manchester sent forth its mandate, then for the thousands of toilers it meant absolute starvation.

Those not at work assembled in groups in the vicinity of the Town Hall, and in Cheapside, Moor Street, Newport Street, Bridge Street, and the various central thoroughfares, eagerly discussing the situation, while outside Messrs. Tillotson's, the *Evening News* office in Mealhouse Lane, the latest telegrams from London and Manchester were posted, being read by a great crowd, which entirely blocked the thoroughfare. The *Evening News*, with characteristic smartness, was being published hourly, and copies were sold as fast as the great presses could print them, while a special meeting of the Town Council was summoned and met at twelve o'clock to discuss what steps should be taken in case the mills really did close and the great populace were thrown on the town in anger and idleness.

The cotton trade was already feeling the effect of the sudden crisis, for by noon startling reports were reaching Bolton from Manchester of unprecedented scenes on 'Change and of the utter collapse of business.

Most mill-owners were already in Manchester. All who were near enough at once took train – from Southport, Blackpool, Morecambe, and other places – and went on 'Change to learn what was intended. Meanwhile, through the whole of Monday authentic reports of the enemy's movements in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and East Yorkshire were being printed by the *Evening News*, each edition increasing the panic in that level-headed, hard-working Lancashire town.

Across at smoky Wigan similar alarm and unrest reigned. On that Monday morning, bright and sunny, everyone re-started work, hoping for the best. Pearson and Knowles' and the Pemberton Collieries were running full time; Ryland's mills and Ekersley's spinning mills were also full up with work, for there was an era of as great a prosperity in Wigan as in Bolton, Rochdale, Oldham, and other Lancashire towns. Never for the past ten years had the cotton and iron industries been so prosperous; yet in one single day – nay, in a few brief hours – the blow had fallen, and trade had become paralysed.

Spy mania was rife everywhere. In Oldham an innocent German, agent of a well-known firm in Chemnitz, while walking along Manchester Street about one o'clock, was detected as a foreigner and compelled to seek protection inside a shop. From Chadderton to Lees, from Royton to Hollinwood, the crisis was on everyone's lips. Here again was the crucial question: Would the mills close?

Meanwhile, across at Liverpool, the wildest scenes were also taking place on 'Change. News over the wires from London became hourly more alarming, and this, combined with the rumour that German warships were cruising off the Mersey estuary, created a perfect panic in the city. The port was already closed, for the mouth of the river had been blocked by mines; yet the report quickly got abroad that the Germans would send in merchant ships to explode them and enter the Mersey after thus clearing away the deadly obstacles.

Liverpool knew too well the ridiculously weak state of her defences, which had so long been a reproach to the authorities, and if the German ships that had done such damage at Penarth, Cardiff, and Barry were now cruising north, as reported, it seemed quite within the bounds of probability that a demonstration would really be made before Liverpool.

Outside and within the great Exchange the excitement was at fever heat. The Bank Charter was suspended, and the banks had closed with one accord. Upon the “flags” the cotton-brokers were shouting excitedly, and many a ruined man knew that that would be his last appearance there. Every moment over the telephones came news from Manchester, each record more disastrous than the last. Hot, perspiring men who had lived, and lived well, by speculation in cotton for years, surged around the great pediment adorned by its allegorical group of sculpture, and saw each moment their fortunes falling away like ice in the sunshine.

Thus trade in Lancashire – cotton, wool, iron, and corn – was, in the course of one single morning, utterly paralysed, all awaiting the decision of Manchester.

Thousands were already face to face with financial disaster, even in those first moments of the alarm.

The hours passed slowly. What was Manchester doing? Her decision was now awaited with bated breath throughout the whole of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

In Manchester, the *Courier*, the *Daily Mail*, and the several other journals kept publishing edition after edition, not only through the day, but also through the night. Presses were running unceasingly, and hour after hour were printed accounts of the calm and orderly way in which the enemy were completing their unopposed landing at Goole, Grimsby, Yarmouth, Lowestoft, King’s Lynn, and on the Blackwater.

Some British destroyers had interfered with the German plans at the latter place, and two German warships had been sunk, the *Courier* reported. But full details were not yet forthcoming.

There had been a good deal of skirmishing in the neighbourhood of Maldon, and again near Harleston, on the Suffolk border. The town of Grimsby had been half destroyed by fire, and the damage at Hull had been enormous. From a timber-yard there the wind had, it seemed, carried the flames across to the Alexandra Dock, where some stores had ignited and a quantity of valuable shipping in the dock had been destroyed at their moorings. The Paragon station and hotel had also been burned – probably by people of Hull themselves, in order to drive the German commander from his headquarters.

From Newcastle, Gateshead, and Tynemouth came harrowing details of bombardment, and the frightful result of those awful petrol bombs. Fire and destruction had been spread broadcast everywhere.

On the Manchester Exchange on Tuesday there was no longer any reason to doubt the accuracy of Sunday’s report, and the feeling on ‘Change became “panicky.” It seemed as though the whole of the ten thousand members had made up their minds to be present. The main entrance in Cross Street was blocked for the greater part of the afternoon, and late comers dodged round to the two entrances in Market Street, and the third in Bank Street, in the hope of squeezing through into the vibrating mass of humanity that filled the floors, the corridors, and the telephone, reading, and writing rooms. The attendants found they had an impossible task set them to make their way to the many lanterns around the vast hall, there to affix the latest messages, recording astounding fluctuations of prices, and now and again some news of the invasion. The master and secretary in the end told the attendants to give up the struggle, and he made his way with difficulty to the topmost balcony, where, above the murmurings of the crowd below, he read the latest bulletins of commercial and general intelligence as they arrived.

But there were no efforts made to do business; and had any of the members felt so inclined, the crush and stress were so great that any attempt to book orders would have ended in failure. In the swaying of the crowd hats were lost and trampled under foot; men whose appearance on ‘Change had

always been immaculate were to be seen with torn collars and disarranged neckwear. Never before had such a scene been witnessed. Lancashire men had often heard of such a state of things having occurred in the “pit” of the New York Exchange, when wild speculation in cotton was indulged in, but they prided themselves that they were never guilty of such conduct. No matter how the market jumped, they invariably kept their heads, and waited until it assumed its normal condition, and became settled. It had often been said that nothing short of an earthquake would unnerve the Manchester commercial man; those who were responsible for the statement had evidently not turned a thought to a German invasion. That had done it completely.

In the cafés and the hotels, where the master-spinners and the manufacturers had been wont to forgather after high 'Change, there were the usual gatherings, but there was little or no discussion on business matters, except this: there was a common agreement that it would, in present circumstances, be inadvisable to keep the mills running. Work must be, and it was, completely suspended. The shippers, who had the manufacturers under contract to supply certain quantities of goods for transportation to their markets in India, China, and the Colonies, trembled at the very contemplation of the financial losses they would inevitably sustain by the non-delivery of the bales of cloth to their customers abroad; but, on the other hand, they also paid heed to the great danger of the vessels in which the goods were placed falling into the hands of the enemy when at sea. The whole question was full of grim perplexities, and even the most impatient among the shippers and the merchants had to admit that a policy of do-nothing seemed the safest course of procedure.

The chaotic scenes on 'Change in the afternoon were reproduced in the streets in the evening, and the Lord Mayor, towards eight o'clock, fearful of rioting, sent special messengers to the headquarters of three Volunteer corps for assistance in regulating street traffic. The officers in command immediately responded to the call. The 2nd V.B.M.R. took charge of Piccadilly and Market Street; the 4th were stationed in Cross Street and Albert Square; and the 5th lined Deansgate from St. Mary's Gate to Peter Street. Mounted constabulary, by the exercise of tact and good temper, kept the crowds on the move, and towards midnight the pressure became so light that the officers felt perfectly justified in withdrawing the Volunteers, who spent that night at their respective headquarters.

It was Wednesday, however, before Manchester people could thoroughly realise that the distressing news was absolutely true, and on the top of the confirmation came the startling report that the Fleet had been crippled, and immense troops of Germans were landing at Hull, Lowestoft, Yarmouth, Goole, and other places on the east, with the object of sweeping the country.



## CHAPTER IX

### STATE OF SIEGE DECLARED

The authentic account of a further landing in Essex – somewhere near Maldon – was now published. The statement had been dictated by Mr. Henry Alexander, J.P., – the Mayor of Maldon, who had succeeded in escaping from the town, – to Captain Wilfred Quare, of the Intelligence Department of the War Office. This Department had, in turn, given it to the newspapers for publication.

It read as follows: —

“On Sunday morning, September 2, I had arranged to play a round of golf with my friend Somers, of Beeleigh, before church. I met him at the Golf Hut about 8.30. We played one round, and were at the last hole but three in a second round when we both thought we heard the sound of shots fired somewhere in the town. We couldn’t make anything at all of it, and as we had so nearly finished the round, we thought we would do so before going up to inquire about it. I was making my approach to the final hole when an exclamation from Somers spoilt my stroke. I felt annoyed, but as I looked round – doubtless somewhat irritably – my eyes turned in the direction in which I now saw my friend was pointing with every expression of astonishment in his countenance.

“ ‘Who on earth are those fellows?’ he asked. As for me, I was too dumbfounded to reply. Galloping over the links from the direction of the town came three men in uniform – soldiers, evidently. I had often been in Germany, and recognised the squat pickel-haubes and general get-up of the rapidly approaching horsemen at a glance.

“ ‘I didn’t know the Yeomanry were out!’ was what my friend said.

“ ‘Yeomanry be hanged! They’re Germans, or I’m a Dutchman!’ I answered; ‘and what the dickens can they be doing here?’

“They were upon us almost as I spoke, pulling up their horses with a great spattering up of grass and mud, quite ruining one of our best greens. All three of them pointed big, ugly repeating pistols at us, and the leader, a conceited-looking ass in staff uniform, required us to ‘surrender’ in quite a pompous manner, but in very good English.

“ ‘Do we look so very dangerous, Herr Lieutenant?’ inquired I in German.

“He dropped a little of his frills when he heard me speak in his native language, asked which of us was the Mayor, and condescended to explain that I was required in Maldon by the officer at present in command of His Imperial Majesty the Kaiser’s forces occupying that place.

“I was absolutely staggered.

“When I left my house a couple of hours back I had just as much expectation of finding the Chinese there on my return as the Germans. I looked at my captor in complete bewilderment. Could he be some fellow trying to take a rise out of me by masquerading as a German officer? But no, I recognised at once that he was the genuine article. Everything about him, from the badly-cut riding-boots to the sprouting moustache curled up in feeble imitation of the Emperor’s characteristic adornment, bore witness to his identity. If anything were wanting, it was supplied by his aggressive manner.

“I suggested that he might point his pistol some other way. I added that if he wanted to try his skill as marksman it would be more sporting to aim at the flag at the Long Hole near Beeleigh Lock.

“He took my banter in good part, but demanded my parole, which I made no difficulty about giving, since I did not see any way of escape, and in any case was only too anxious to get back to town to see how things were.

“ ‘But you don’t want my friend, do you – he lives out the other way?’ I queried.

“ ‘I don’t want him, but he will have to come all the same,’ rejoined the German. ‘It isn’t likely we’re going to let him get away to give the alarm in Colchester, is it?’

“Obviously it was not, and without more ado we started off at a sharp walk, holding on to the stirrup leathers of the horsemen.

“As we entered the town there was, on the bridge over the river, a small picket of blue-coated German infantry. The whole thing was a perfect nightmare. It was past belief.

“ ‘How on earth did you get here?’ I couldn’t help asking. ‘Did you come down from town in an excursion train or by balloon?’

“My German officer laughed.

“ ‘By water,’ he answered shortly, pointing down the river as he spoke, where I was still further astonished – if it were possible after such a morning – to see several steam pinnaces and boats flying the black and white German ensign.

“I was conducted straight to the Moot Hall. He already knew his way about, this German, it seemed. There I found a grizzled veteran waiting on the steps, who turned round and entered the building as we came up. We followed him inside, and I was introduced to him. He appeared to be a truculent old ruffian.

“ ‘Well, Mr. Mayor,’ he said, pulling viciously at his white moustache, ‘do you know that I’ve a great mind to take you out into the street and have you shot?’

“I was not at all inclined to be browbeaten.

“ ‘Indeed, Herr Hauptman?’ I answered. ‘And may I inquire in what way I have incurred the displeasure of the Hochwohlgeboren officer?’

“ ‘Don’t trifle with me, sir. Why do you allow your miserable Volunteers to come out and shoot my men?’

“ ‘My Volunteers? I am afraid I don’t understand what you mean,’ I said. ‘I’m not a Volunteer officer. Even if I were, I should have no cognisance of anything that has happened within the last two hours, as I have been down on the golf course. This officer will bear me out,’ I added, turning to my captor. He admitted that he had found me there.

“ ‘But, anyway, you are the Mayor,’ persisted my interrogator. ‘Why did you allow the Volunteers to come out?’

“ ‘If you had been good enough to inform us of your visit, we might have made better arrangements,’ I answered, ‘but in any case you must understand that a mayor has little or no authority in this country. His job is to head subscription-lists, eat a dinner or two, and make speeches on public occasions.’

“He seemed to have some difficulty in swallowing this, but as another officer who was there, writing at a table, and who, it appears, had lived at some period in England, corroborated my statement, the choleric colonel seemed to be a little mollified, and contented himself with demanding my parole not to leave Maldon until he had reported the matter to the General for decision. I gave it without more ado, and then asked if he would be good enough to tell me what had happened. From what he told me, and what I heard afterwards, it seems that the Germans must have landed a few of their men about half an hour before I left home, down near the Marine Lake. They had not entered the town at once, as their object was to work round outside and occupy all the entrances, to prevent anyone getting away with the news of their presence. They had not noticed the little lane leading to the golf course, and so I had gone down without meeting any of them, although they had actually got a picket just beyond the railway arch at that time. They had completed their cordon before there was any general alarm in the town, but at the first reliable rumour it seems that young Shand, of the Essex Volunteers, had contrived to get together twenty or thirty of his men in their uniforms and foolishly opened fire on a German picket down by St. Mary’s Church. They fell back, but were almost instantly reinforced by a whole company that had just landed, and our men, rushing forward, had been ridden into by some cavalry that came up a side street. They were dispersed, a couple of them were killed and several wounded, among them poor Shand, who was hit in the right lung. They had bagged four Germans, however, and their commanding officer was furious. It was a pity that it happened, as it

could not possibly have been of any use. But it seems that Shand had no idea that it was more than a very small detachment that had landed from a gunboat that someone said they had seen down the river. Some of the Volunteers were captured afterwards and sent off as prisoners, and the Germans posted up a notice that all Volunteers were forthwith to surrender either themselves or their arms and uniforms, under pain of death. Most of them did the latter. They could do nothing after it was found that the Germans had a perfect army somewhere between Maldon and the sea, and were pouring troops into the town as fast as they could.

“That very morning a Saxon rifle battalion arrived from the direction of Mundon, and just afterwards a lot of spike-helmeted gentlemen came in by train from Wickford way. So it went on all day, until the whole town was in a perfect uproar. Another rifle battalion, then some sky-blue hussars and some artillery, then three more battalions of a regiment called the 101st Grenadiers, I believe. The infantry were billeted in the town, but the cavalry and guns crossed the river and canal at Heybridge, and went off in the direction of Witham. Later on, another infantry regiment came in by train and marched out after them.

“Maldon is built on a hill that slopes gradually towards the east and south, but rises somewhat abruptly on the west and north, humping up a shoulder, as it were, to the north-west. At this corner they started to dig entrenchments just after one o’clock, and soon officers and orderlies were busy all round the town, plotting, measuring, and setting up marks of one kind and another. Other troops appeared to be busy down in Heybridge, but what they were doing I could not tell, as no one was allowed to cross the bridge over the river.

“The German officer who had surprised me down on the golf course did not turn out to be a bad kind of youth on further acquaintance. He was a Captain von Hildebrandt, of the Guard Fusilier Regiment, who was employed on the Staff, though in what capacity he did not say. Thinking it was just as well to make the best of a bad job, I invited him to lunch. He said he had to be off. He, however, introduced me to three friends of his in the 101st Grenadiers, who, he suggested, should be billeted on me. I thought the idea a fairly good one, and Von Hildebrandt, having apparently arranged this with the billeting officer without any difficulty, I took them home with me to lunch.

“I found my wife and family in a great state of mind, both on account of the untoward happenings of the morning and my non-return from golf at the expected time. They had imagined all sorts of things which might have befallen me, but luckily seemed not to have heard of my adventure with the choleric colonel. Our three foreigners soon made themselves very much at home, but as they were undeniably gentlemen, they contrived to be about as agreeable as could be expected under the circumstances. Indeed, their presence was to a great extent a safeguard against annoyance, as the stable and back premises were stuffed full of soldiers, who might have been very troublesome had they not been there to keep them in order.

“Of what was happening up in London we knew nothing. Being Sunday, all the shops were shut; but I went out and contrived to lay in a considerable stock of provisions one way and another, and it was just as well I did, for I only just anticipated the Germans, who commandeered everything in the town and put everybody on an allowance of rations. They paid for them with bills on the British Government, which were by no means acceptable to the shopkeepers. However, it was ‘Hobson’s choice’ – that or nothing. The Germans soothed them by saying that the British Army would be smashed in a couple of weeks, and the defrayment of such bills would be among the conditions of peace. The troops generally seemed to be well-behaved, and treated those inhabitants with whom they came in contact in an unexceptionable manner. They did not see very much of them, however, as they were kept hard at work all day with their entrenchments and were not allowed out of their billets after eight o’clock that evening. No one, in fact, was allowed to be about the streets after that hour. On the other hand, a couple of poor young fellows in the Volunteers who had concealed their connection with the force and were trying to slip out of the town with their rifles after dark, were caught, and the next morning stood up against the three-cornered tower of All Saints’ Church and

shot without mercy. Two or three other people were shot by the sentries as they tried to break out in one direction or the other. These affairs produced a feeling of horror and indignation in the town, as Englishmen, having such a long experience of peace in their own country, have always refused to realise what war really means.

“The German fortifications went on at a rapid rate. Trenches were dug all round the northern and western sides of the town before dark on the first evening, and the following morning I woke up to find three huge gun-pits yawning in my garden, which looked to the northward. One was right in the middle of the lawn – or rather of where the lawn had been, for all the grass that had not been displaced in the digging had been cut up in sods to build up the insides of their parapets. During breakfast there was a great rattling and rumbling in the street without, and presently three big field howitzers were dragged in and planted in the pits. There they stood, their ugly snouts pointing skyward in the midst of the wreck of flowers and fruit.

“Afterwards I went out and found that other guns and howitzers were being put in position all along the north side of Beeleigh Road, and round the corner by the Old Barracks. The high tower of the disused Church of St. Peter’s, now utilised for the safe custody of Dr. Plume’s library, had been equipped as a lookout and signal station.”

Such was the condition of affairs in the town of Maldon on Monday morning.

The excitement in London, and indeed all over the country, on Tuesday night was intense. Scotney’s story of the landing at Weybourne was eagerly read everywhere.

As the sun sank blood-red into the smoke haze behind Nelson’s Monument in Trafalgar Square, it was an ominous sign to the panic-stricken crowds that day and night were now assembled there.

The bronze lions facing the four points of the compass were now mere mocking emblems of England’s departed greatness. The mobilisation muddle was known; for, according to the papers, hardly any troops had, as yet, assembled at their places of concentration. The whole of the East of England was helplessly in the invader’s hands. From Newcastle had come terrible reports of the bombardment. Half the city was in flames, the Elswick works were held by the enemy, and whole streets in Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, and Tynemouth were still burning fiercely.

The Tynemouth fort had proved of little or no use against the enemy’s guns. The Germans had, it appeared, used petrol bombs with appalling results, spreading fire, disaster, and death everywhere. The inhabitants, compelled to fly with only the clothes they wore, had scattered all over Northumberland and Durham, while the enemy had seized a quantity of valuable shipping that had been in the Tyne, hoisted the German flag, and converted the vessels to their own uses.

Many had already been sent across to Wilhelmshaven, Emden, Bremerhaven, and other places to act as transports, while the Elswick works – which surely ought to have been properly protected – supplied the Germans with quantities of valuable material.

Panic and confusion were everywhere. All over the country the railway system was utterly disorganised, business everywhere was at a complete deadlock, for in every town and city all over the kingdom the banks were closed.

Lombard Street, Lothbury, and other banking centres in the City had all day on Monday been the scene of absolute panic. There, as well as at every branch bank all over the metropolis, had occurred a wild rush to withdraw deposits by people who foresaw disaster. Many, indeed, intended to fly with their families away from the country.

The price of the necessities of life had risen further, and in the East End and poorer districts of Southwark the whole population were already in a state of semi-starvation. But worst of all, the awful truth with which London was now face to face was that the metropolis was absolutely defenceless.

Would not some effort be made to repel the invaders? Surely if we had lost our command of the sea the War Office could, by some means, assemble sufficient men to at least protect London? This was the cry of the wild, turbulent crowd surging through the City and West End, as the blood-red

sun sank into the west, flooding London in its warm afterglow – a light in the sky that was prophetic of red ruin and of death to those wildly excited millions.

## **NOTICE**

### **TO ALL GERMAN SUBJECTS RESIDENT**

### **IN ENGLAND**

WILHELM.

To all OUR LOYAL SUBJECTS, GREETING.

We hereby COMMAND and enjoin that all persons born within the German Empire, or being German subjects, whether liable to military service or not, shall join our arms at any headquarters of either of our Army Corps in England within 24 hours of the date of this proclamation.

Any German subject failing to obey this our Command will be treated as an enemy.

By the EMPEROR'S Command.

Given at Beccles, Sept. 3rd, 1910.

*VON KRONHELM,*

*Commanding the Imperial German Army in England.*

## **FACSIMILE OF A PROCLAMATION POSTED BY UNKNOWN**

### **HANDS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY**

Every hour the papers were appearing with fresh details of the invasion, for reports were so rapidly coming in from every hand that the Press had difficulty in dealing with them.

Hull and Goole were known to be in the hands of the invaders, and Grimsby, where the Mayor had been unable to pay the indemnity demanded, had been sacked. But details were not yet forthcoming.

Londoners, however, learnt late that night more authentic news from the invaded zone, of which Beccles was the centre, and it was to the effect that those who had landed at Lowestoft were the IXth German Army Corps, with General von Kronhelm, the Generalissimo of the German Army. This Army Corps, consisting of about 40,000 men, was divided into the 17th Division, commanded by Lieutenant-General Hocker, and the 18th by Lieutenant-General von Rauch. The cavalry was under the command of Major-General von Heyden, and the motor infantry under Colonel Reichardt.

According to official information which had reached the War Office and been given to the Press, the 17th Division was made up of the Bremen and Hamburg Infantry Regiments, the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg's Grenadiers, the Grand Duke's Fusiliers, the Lübeck Regiment No. 162, the Schleswig-Holstein Regiment No. 163, while the cavalry brigade consisted of the 17th and 18th Grand Duke of Mecklenburg's Dragoons.

The 18th Division consisted of the Schleswig Regiment No. 84, and the Schleswig Fusiliers No. 86, the Thuringen Regiment, and the Duke of Holstein's Regiment, the two latter regiments being

billeted in Lowestoft, while the cavalry brigade forming the screen across from Leiston by Wilby to Castle Hill were Queen Wilhelmina's Hanover Hussars and the Emperor of Austria's Schleswig-Holstein Hussars No. 16. These, with the smart motor infantry, held every communication in the direction of London.

As far as could be gathered, the German commander had established his headquarters in Beccles, and had not moved. It now became apparent that the telegraph cables between the East Coast and Holland and Germany, already described in the first chapter, had never been cut at all. They had simply been held by the enemy's advance agents until the landing had been effected. And now Von Kronhelm had actually established direct communication between Beccles and Emden, and on to Berlin.

Reports from the North Sea spoke of the enemy's transports returning to the German coast, escorted by cruisers; therefore the plan was undoubtedly not to move until a very much larger force had been landed.

Could England regain her command of the sea in time to prevent the completion of the blow?

The *Eastminster Gazette*, and similar papers of the Blue Water School, assured the public that there was but very little danger. Germany had made a false move, and would, in the course of a few days, be made to pay very dearly for it.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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