

## Foreword

Photo Foreword-1



Surrendered German battleships *Westfalen* and *Posen* of the *Nassau*-class at the Firth of Forth in 1919. These additional ships had to be provided by Germany to compensate for vessels scuttled at Scapa Flow.

From Duddy collection; photo taken by George S. M. Duddy

It is unlikely that my dad, George S. M. Duddy, as a fifteen-year-old school boy, boarded the train at his home village of Kinghorn in Fife, Scotland, for his usual journey across the Firth of Forth bridge to his school in Edinburgh on 21 November 1918. This was to be a momentous day for the area. After four draining years of war an armistice had been agreed upon and the German High Seas Fleet was to come to the Firth of Forth to be interred pending conclusion of the final terms of the surrender agreement in the presence of the Royal Navy Grand Fleet. This ostentatious event was the greatest assembly of capital ships the world had ever witnessed – it truly was not a day for school.

Far to the south, a far less ostentatious event—but equally significant—was already underway. An article of the armistice agreement was that the German Navy surrender its entire submarine fleet to the Royal Navy at Harwich, England. This fleet, perhaps more than any other threat to

Britain's existence, was a particular welcome sight for many, as it came to surrender. The German U-boat fleet had presented not only an obvious threat to Atlantic shipping but also, to the very existence of ordinary citizens across Britain.

As an ongoing legacy of the repeal of the Corn Laws in the mid-nineteenth century and the redirection of agricultural labour to the industrial revolution, Britain, unlike other combatants of WWI, was highly dependent on imports for its food supply. A substantial portion of its food supply was imported, with a particularly high portion of its vital wheat supply for bread making. Much of it came from Canada and other dominions and colonies. The National Farmers' Union article *The Few that Fed the Many* noted the following about Britain's supply at the time of the outbreak of WWI:

The outbreak of war should have prompted a change in attitude towards food security. However, the Government remained confident in the Royal Navy's ability to keep the shipping lanes open and committed to imports to reduce costs to the exchequer. History shows that this strategy came dangerously close to costing Britain the war.

Prior to 1917, when the German submarine fleet was in its earlier stage of expansion, its terrible impact upon the shipping on which the Allies were so vitally dependent was still tolerable. In Britain, with its huge merchant fleet, superiority of surface naval power, and help from and access to its huge empire and other neutral sources of supply, it was still unnecessary to evoke food rationing. The situation for Germany however, with a hungry population and a huge need for war supplies, was becoming desperate. There was no succour in the East where they faced a huge Russian army, while in the West a superior naval fleet and extensive mine fields prevented importation of goods by sea from colonies and neutral countries. Meanwhile in the south, advance was bogged down in the mire of the trenches that daily involved millions of all the combatants' young men with their almost insatiable needs for food, munitions and other war supplies. At the beginning of 1917, the prospects for the Central Powers were further eroded when it became evident that the United States, with its huge resources, might enter the war on the side of the Allies.

Faced with this desperate situation, the German Naval Command struck back with the only weapon in which it had superiority - the submarine. The belief was that by attacking shipping bound for Britain, Germany

could starve Britain's population and weaken her ability to support the war, thereby forcing her to sue for peace before the United States could enter the war.

Further, if the United States did enter before this goal was obtained, the expanding submarine fleet could be used to sink troop ships bringing fresh soldiers to press the battle on the western front. It was a bold and effective strategy, and it nearly worked but fortunately it was implemented too late. Nevertheless, in 1917 the German submarine fleet had decimated Britain's merchant fleet forcing it by 1918 to introduce wide scale food rationing.

The US Navy's contribution to WWI includes the American battleships constituting the 6th Battle Squadron of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet and their crews, which were present at the German surrender at the Firth of Forth. While this contingent formed part of the necessary blockading force, it saw little active participation as it remained almost exclusively at anchor in Scapa Flow as a deterrent "force in being" during its war service. Another important USN contribution was the installation of the massive North Sea barrage (minefield), which is discussed in David's and Rob Hoole's book *Home Waters*.

*Queenstown Bound* relives perhaps the American navy's least known but greatest contribution: the deployment of its destroyer fleet to attack German U-boats in the western approaches to Europe and their use in protecting supply convoys bringing troops, food, arms, and war materiel to sustain the Allies and fortify the war. Although the added destroyers were unable to destroy many enemy submarines, their presence and employment on patrols, and as convoy escorts, held U-boats at bay and successful attacks were greatly diminished, allowing Britain's population to avoid the privations that Germany's population endured. Further, their employment, together with the use of convoying, allowed all US troopships to successfully cross to Europe without loss.

David's well-researched and illustrated volume tells the detailed story of how the German submarine fleet was deployed and expanded throughout the war, and how the USN destroyer and related anti-submarine force was quickly organized, deployed, and expanded to counter the growing threat once the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917. Many interesting incidents, some depicting acts of civility while others shocking in their brutality, are presented. One interesting tactic employed by the Germans was to use some of their underwater

fleet to attack shipping and underwater telecommunications cables off the east coast of North America. Their clear intention was to encourage the withdrawal of US destroyers to lessen their presence in the prime U-boat hunting grounds in the western approaches to Europe.

While the USN casualties (431 killed and 819 wounded) in WWI were minuscule compared to the millions of Allied soldiers lost in land combat, their contribution, and those of their shipmates, was monumental. Seemingly endless numbers of dreary, cold, sea-sick patrols by destroyers saved the lives of many fellow mariners and civilian passengers aboard ships which would otherwise have fallen victim to U-boats to perish if not retrieved from the cold sea. More importantly, destroyer contributions were fundamental to the continued supply of Britain and its allies pending the mobilization of two million US troops. The fact that these troops were transported across the Atlantic without any loss is further testament to the significance of the USN destroyers' contribution in the war against the U-boat.

Maritime history has cried out for a new book on the USN destroyers of WWI. David has provided such a book in excellent fashion.

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