

A BRIEF HISTORY

of the

U.S.S. TEXAS

*and Life Generally in the
North Sea During A War*



Extracts covering the Surrender of the German High Seas Fleet

"This is a queer place as you have found, but you are not the first to find it out. There was once a great explorer, Marco Polo, who, after traveling over the world for thirty years, one day found himself in the North Sea and then went home and went to bed and did not travel any more."

—From farewell address of ADMIRAL SIR DAVID BEATTY, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, on December 1, 1918.

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FALSE RUMORS

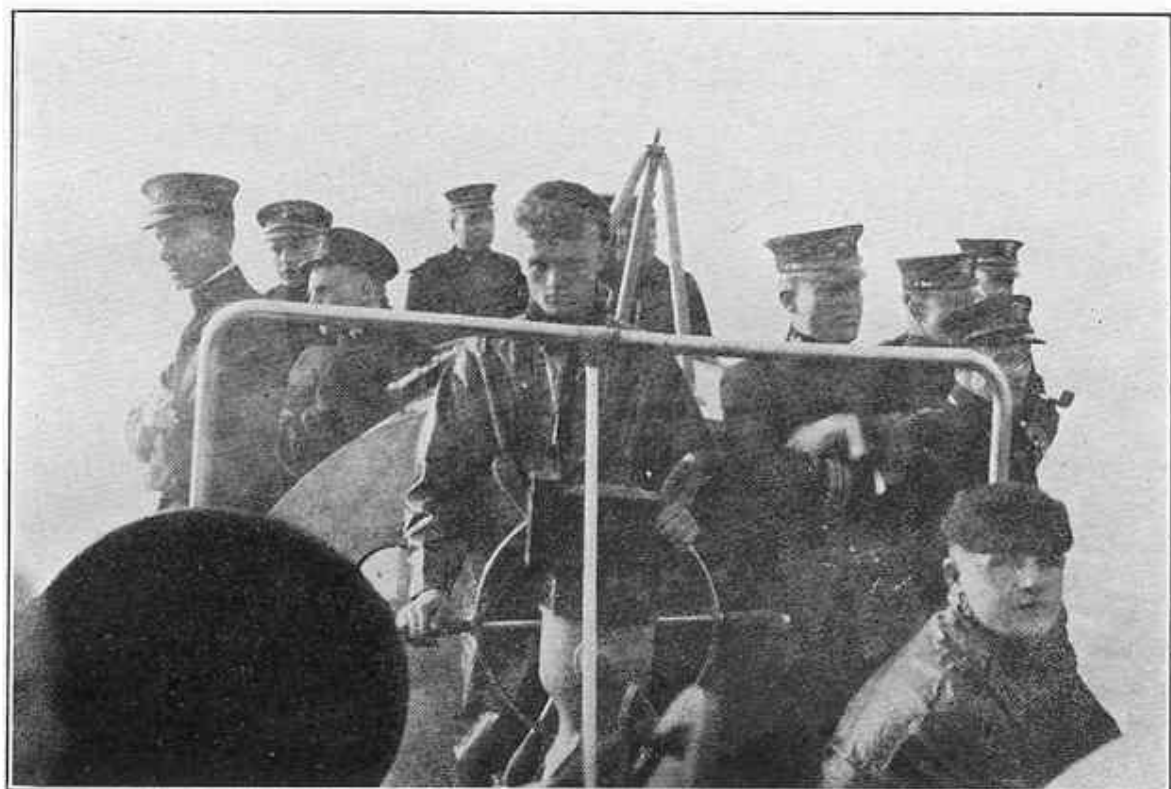
The following day, November 7th, a signal announced "Hostilities ceased at 2 p. m. today." All of the ships started impromptu celebrations, but two hours later another signal came nullifying the previous one. The general feeling, however, was that the end of the war was close at hand.

On the 9th a message from the Commander-in-Chief came and was read to all hands by Captain Blue. This was to the effect that a naval battle was more probable than it had ever been before and the men were not to take too much stock in the mutiny and peace reports coming from Germany.

THE ARMISTICE

Then came the evening of November 11. Oh, what a time! The Grand Fleet went wild with joy. All searchlights, whistles and sirens were put in action, rockets were fired and the men cheered, danced and celebrated hilariously. Flags were hoisted at the trucks with searchlights playing on them. It seemed as though every whistle and siren in the fleet was tied down and kept wide open. The next day the fleet began preparing for landing force work in the event that it should be necessary to land on German

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AMERICAN OFFICERS ON WAY TO GERMAN FLEET



ON BOARD A HUN BATTLESHIP

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soil. On the 13th, after wireless communication between the Commander-in-Chief and the Commander of the German High Seas Fleet was held, a rendezvous was established at which the Cruiser *Koenigsberg* of the High Seas Fleet was delegated to meet British escorts and come into Rosyth. The German warship was to bring an Admiral who was to be accredited by his superiors to confer with Admiral Beatty as to the carrying out of the terms of the armistice in so far as the navy was concerned.

Life with the British Grand Fleet had contained its share of hardships. Disagreeable weather always. Frigid days with the sun seldom breaking through the scudding gray clouds that seemed to keep the world in a sort of perpetual twilight. Days of hard-blowing winds, when one small hurricane seemed to follow directly on the heels of the preceding one. Days when the *Texas* weighed anchor and stood out to sea, to find the waves running mountain high or broken and choppy so that the big Dreadnaught rolled and tossed like a cork. And then back to the base to the interminable coaling of the ship; shovelling in the dirty holds of colliers. Flesh-tearing and skin-cutting winds that slashed their way through navy uniforms and sweaters, while the men breathed and coughed suffocating coal dust.

Coaling days were followed with unfailing regularity by "field days." An American warship after coaling is cleaned back to a spick-and-span appearance at the first opportunity. "Field days" meant sluicing decks with water and sand and holystoning the planking with scrapers that felt like blocks of ice. When it was all over there was the dismal, depressing Orkney Islands to look at through the

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ON BOARD THE *BAYERN*



GERMAN SAILORS WE WERE AFTER

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port-holes—land that was barren of all greenery or vegetation. This, with an occasional visit to the Firth of Forth, was life on board the *Texas* while she waited day after day up there in a latitude the same as Greenland, for the German High Seas Fleet to come out.

And finally "Der Tag" that the Germans had been toasting for a score of years had come. But it was not "the day" the Germans had bargained for. Admiral Beatty flashed the following message to the fleet on the night of November 20:

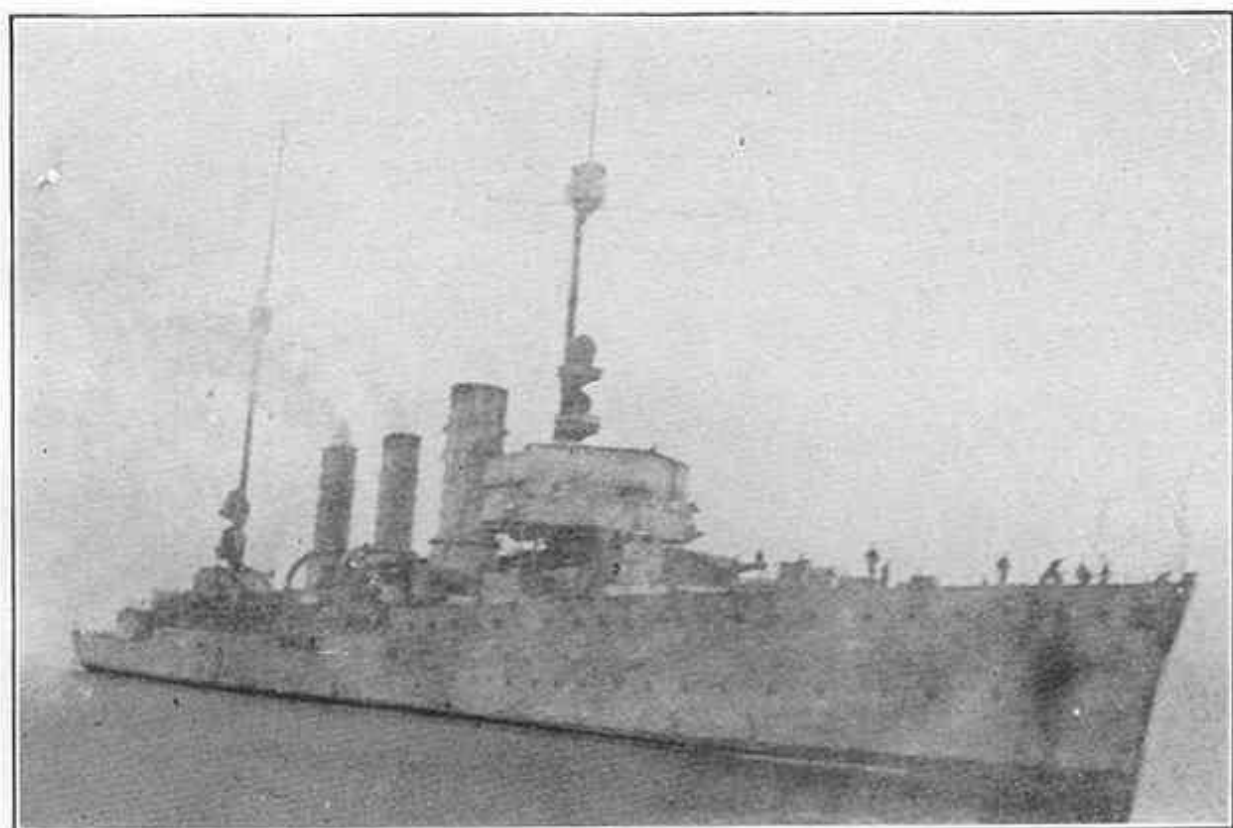
"A sufficient force will proceed to sea to take over at rendezvous X those ships of the German High Seas Fleet selected for internment."

At 2 o'clock the next morning, the Grand Fleet started to sea and for four hours the great ships weighed anchor and stood out of the harbor, the flagship *Queen Elizabeth*, being the last to leave at 6 o'clock. In the meantime the flagship was in constant communication with the light cruiser *Cardiff* which had been sent out to meet the German ships and pilot them to the rendezvous. The *Queen Elizabeth* was also in constant radio communication with the German flagship and the German fleet was being directed as to the manner in which it should maneuver and proceed.

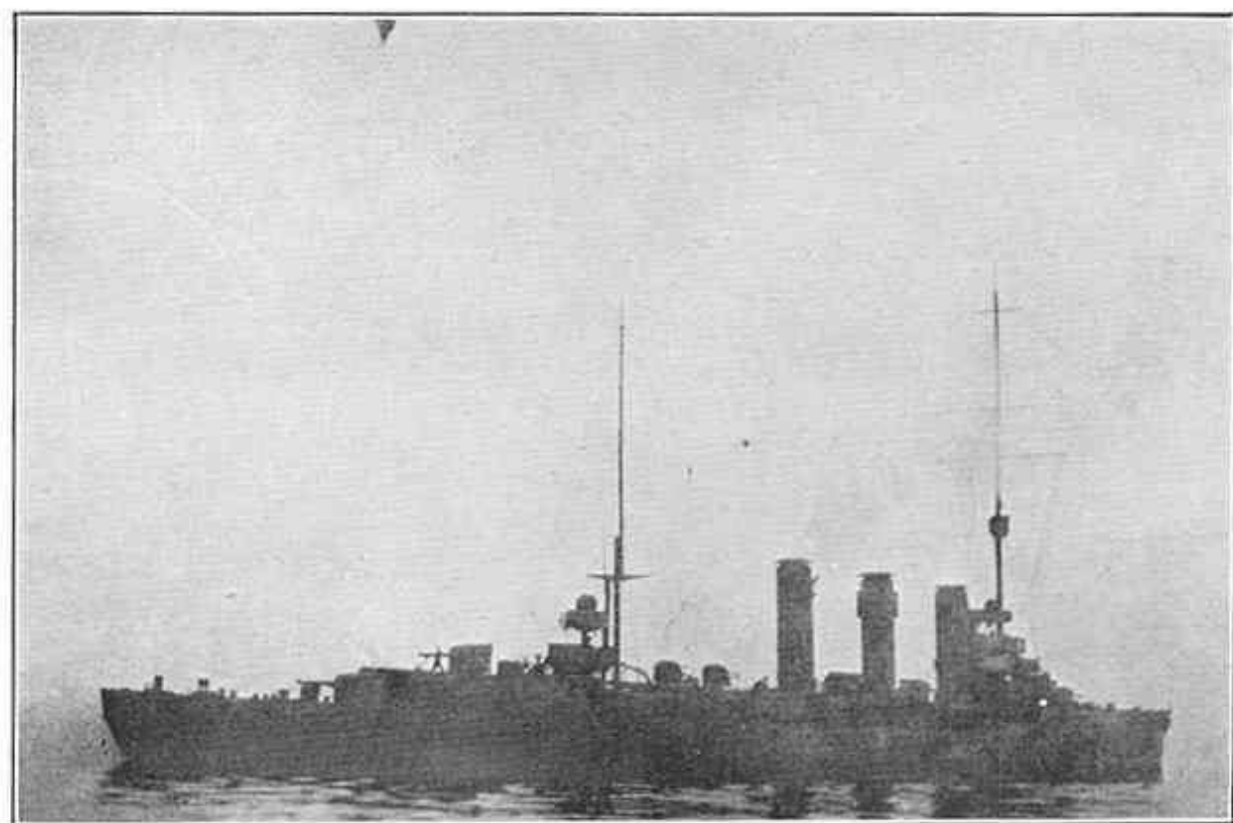
SURRENDER OF GERMAN HIGH SEAS FLEET

As the *Texas* made the open reaches of the North Sea one of the usual icy mists hung over the water, and the seas were short and choppy, excellent weather for submarines. The paravanes had been swung over the sides and at 7:30 o'clock came the call to general quarters. Ad-

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SURRENDERED HUN LIGHT CRUISER



GERMAN LIGHT CRUISER *EMDEN*

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miral Beatty was taking no chances with his enemy. Decks were cleared for action, guns were manned, additional supplies of ammunition were placed in strategic points, the crew was at battle stations, the magazines were opened up and the powder gang were all in their appointed places, while the medical corps kept busy distributing extra bandages and supplies of first-aid kits—in case of necessity. Oh, for a chance to fight!

Captain Blue and other officers on the bridge, the lookouts in the foretop and maintop, intently scanned the surface of the misty sea for the first sight of the German warships. Soon the fleet was in a location about forty miles off the May Island and the *Cardiff* sent over the radio signal, according to British Navy custom:

“Unknown number of unknown ships steaming line ahead.”

This was followed by a message from the *Cardiff* giving her longitude and latitude. Captain Blue, after plotting the position on the chart, announced that the enemy was a bit more than six miles away and should soon come into sight.

It was exactly 9:21 o'clock when one of the lookouts, perched high in the swaying foretop, sang out:

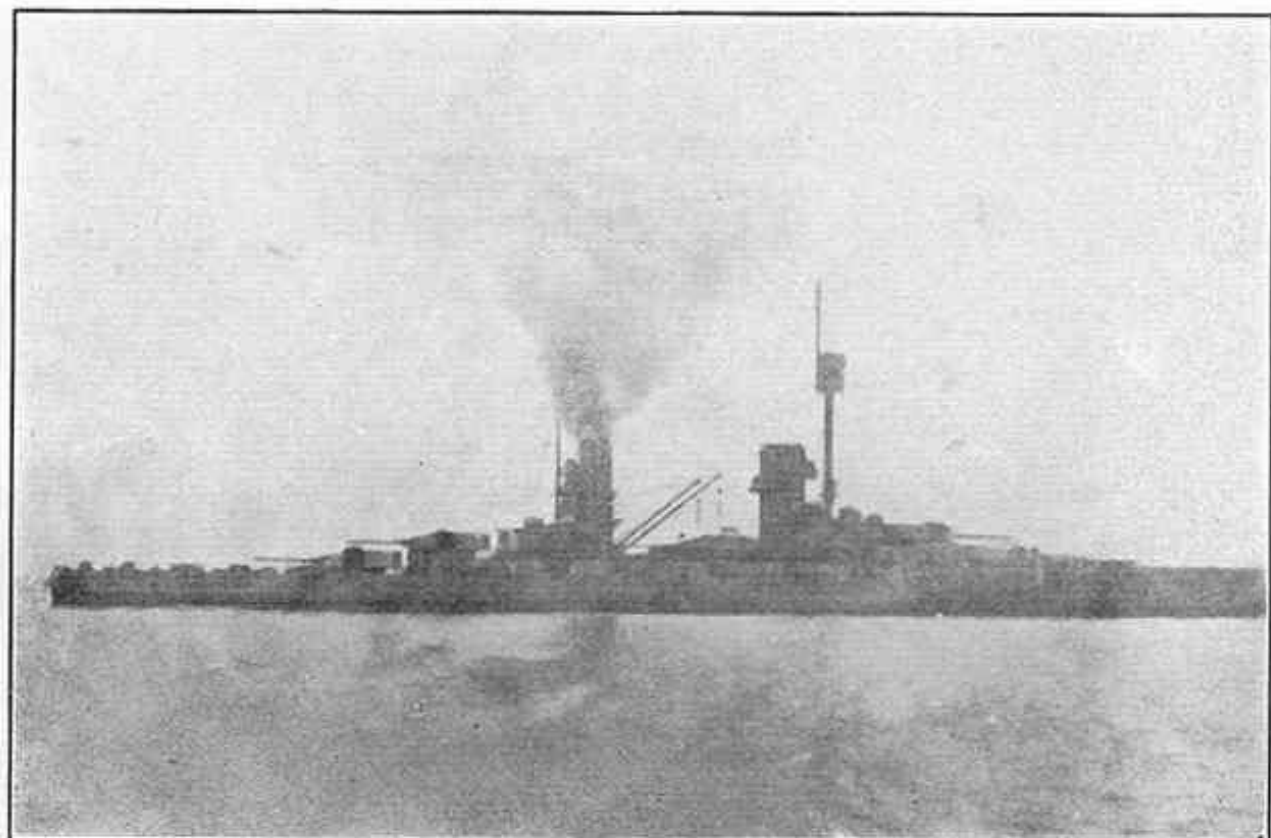
“German High Seas Fleet, ho, sir!”

“Where away?”

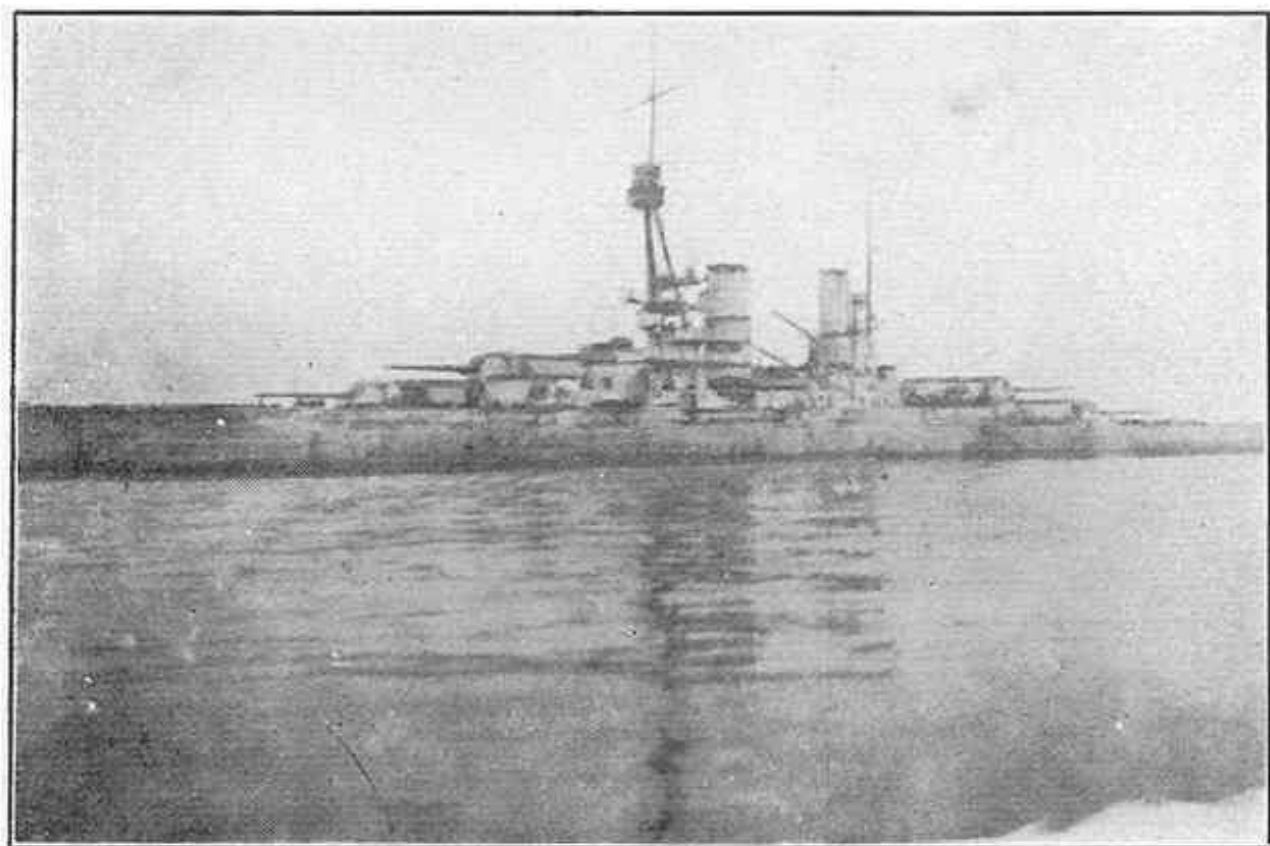
“Two points off the starboard bow, sir!”

Eagerly officers on the bridge searched the horizon. As the mist cleared gradually, there came into view ship after ship of the proud Prussian fleet, flying for the last time the German man-o'-war ensign. The *Seydlitz*, the German flagship, displayed a white flag in token of surrender.

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S. M. S. *BAYERN*



S. M. S. *GROSSER KURFURST*

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The *Texas* and the other ships of the Sixth Battle Squadron were assigned to escort back to the base the *Bayern*, *Grosser Kurfuerst*, *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and the *Markgraef*. As the Grand Fleet turned and started back, ranging up in a long line on either side of its docile captives, the American warships in a double column with their German foe in the center, turned and followed the Grand Fleet.

As the crew of the *Texas* peered at the white flag, flying from the *Seydlitz*, the thought of the captain, officers and men reverted to that phrase of the great warship's first commander, Captain Grant, when he told the Texas Society of New York on the occasion of the first arrival of the *Texas*, "There is no white bunting on board the *Texas*."

The surrendering German armada consisted of thirteen dreadnaughts, superdreadnaughts, battleships and battle cruisers, six cruisers and light cruisers and forty-nine destroyers, carrying in all crews amounting to between 15,000 and 20,000 men. In the Grand Fleet, manned by 100,000 or more British and American tars, were forty-seven dreadnaughts, superdreadnaughts, battleships and battle cruisers, thirty-five cruisers and light cruisers and two hundred destroyers. The two armadas now covered a stretch forty miles in length and six miles in breadth, with the German ships in the center.

How much nobler were those heroes of a previous war who, when ordered to surrender, sent the reply: "The guard dies, but never surrenders."

The silhouettes which had been painted in the turrets and near the five-inch guns were compared by the men on the *Texas* with the German ships which they represented,

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and technicalities came in for much argument. Some held that there would have been no trouble in locating the German ships desired for the fire of the *Texas* by the silhouettes, while others were of the opinion that the silhouettes were not more than relatively correct.

All hands stared over bulwarks, through gun ports and port holes at the Huns. The ships were not close enough to distinguish individuals in that gray visibility, but through glasses, objects could be observed without trouble.

The men aboard the *Texas* would have preferred a fight, for they had come thousands of miles from home, suffered uncomplainingly; endured daily hardships just for a chance to get a whack at the Germans and here they were coming out flying the white flag. It was unbelievable. It seemed impossible. We felt ashamed for their cowardice. No other navy had ever been so humiliated.

The correspondent of a New York newspaper who was on board, turned to Captain Blue and said:

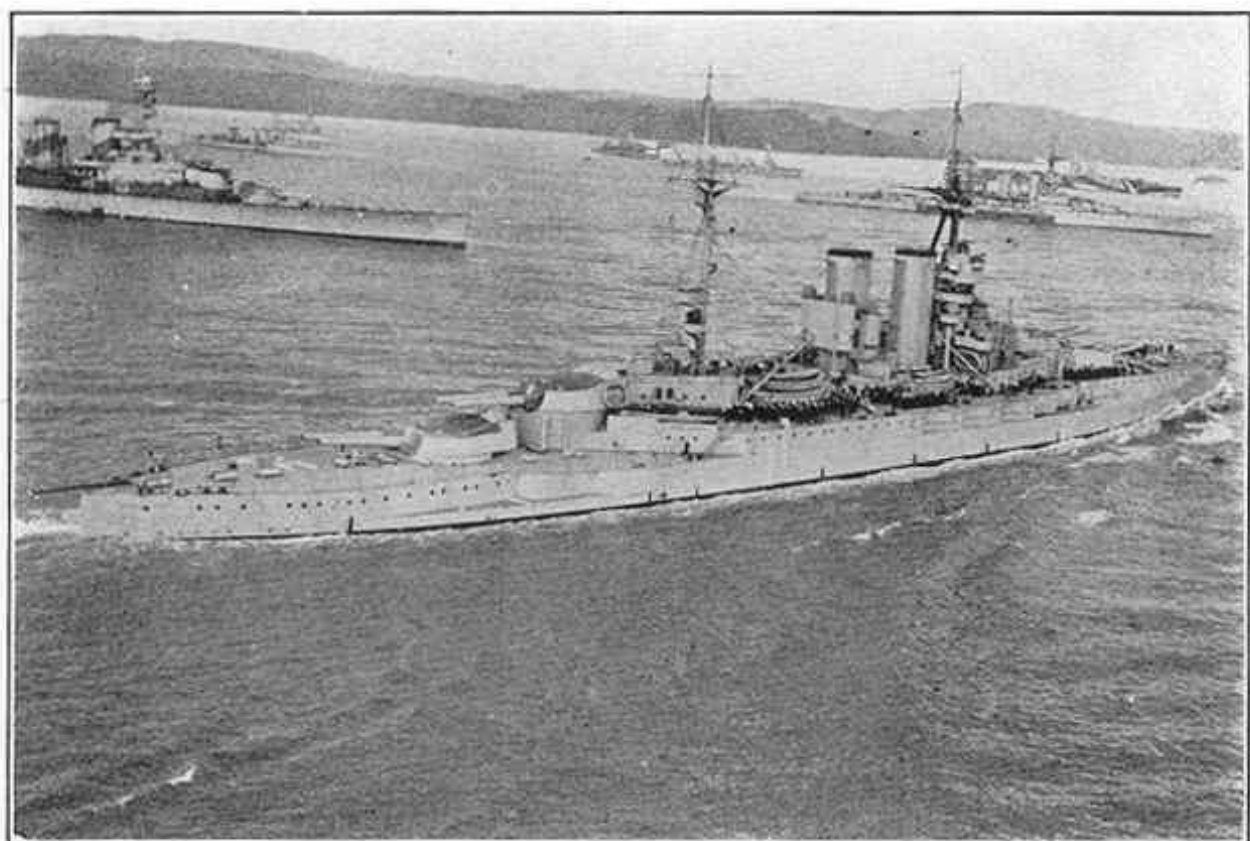
“Your ship’s company, sir, would, I gather, have preferred a fight.”

“Well, I wouldn’t,” returned the Captain. “This has been the most signal victory in Naval history and I’d much prefer to bring my boys home victorious to their mothers and sweethearts than to leave any of them at the bottom of the North Sea.”

It was a remark illustrative of the affection the commander of the *Texas* felt for his men.

There was no ceremony when the two fleets drew into the Firth of Forth. The bands aboard each of the great ships of the Grand Fleet played the national anthem and on

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H. M. S. QUEEN ELIZABETH



H. M. S. REVILLE

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orders of Admiral Beatty, religious services were held throughout the fleet to give thanks "for the victory that Almighty God has this day vouchsafed our arms."

GERMAN BATTLE FLAG LOWERED

In the meantime the historic message from the *Queen Elizabeth* had been flashed to the German ships:

"The Imperial German ensign will be lowered at sunset and will not be hoisted again without my permission."

When the German battle flag came down that night it remained down, for the German nation was without its battle fleet and the Allies were undisputed masters of the seas.

The freedom of the seas had indeed been guaranteed.

MESSAGES PASSED BETWEEN VICTOR AND CONQUERED

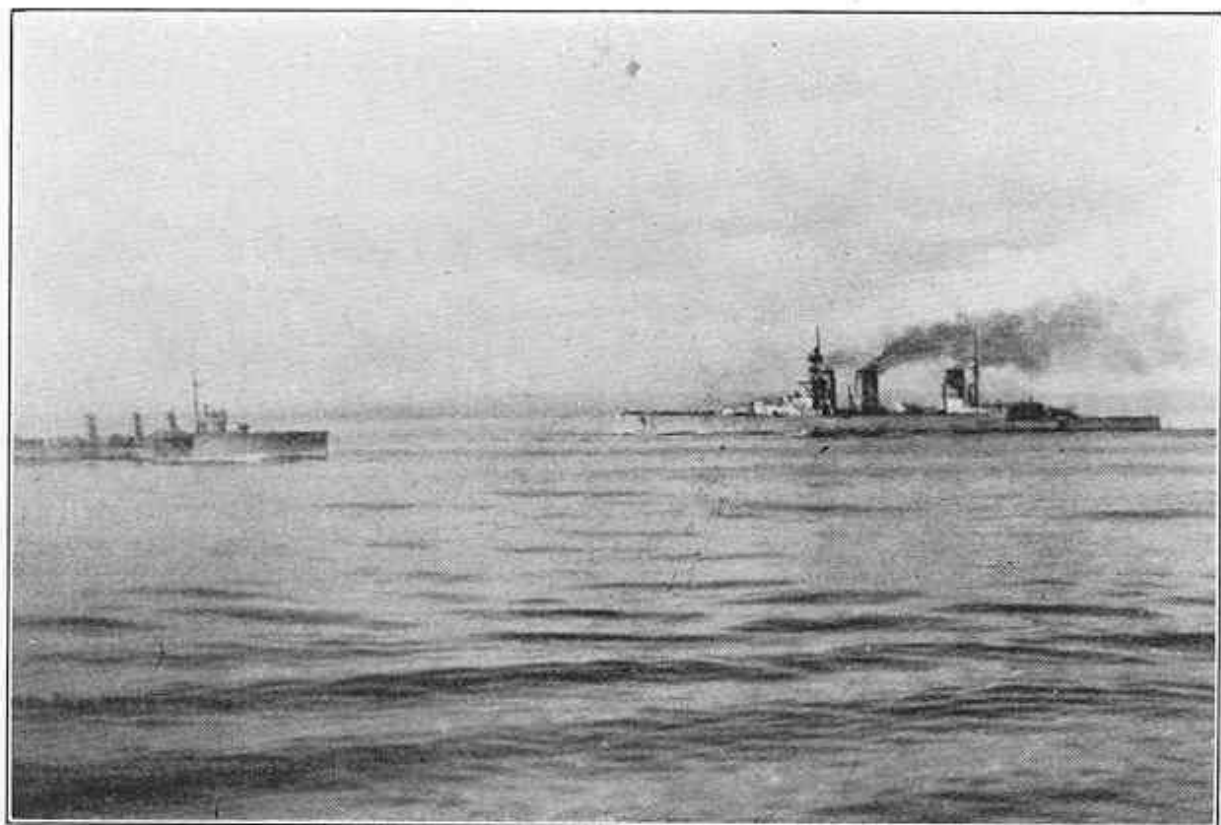
From the time the German High Seas Fleet left Kiel to meet the Grand Fleet, Admiral Beatty was virtually commander of the German craft. His messages of direction have become historic:

"Admiral commanding Grand Fleet to Cruiser *Koenigsberg*: You will stop using your wireless until further orders."

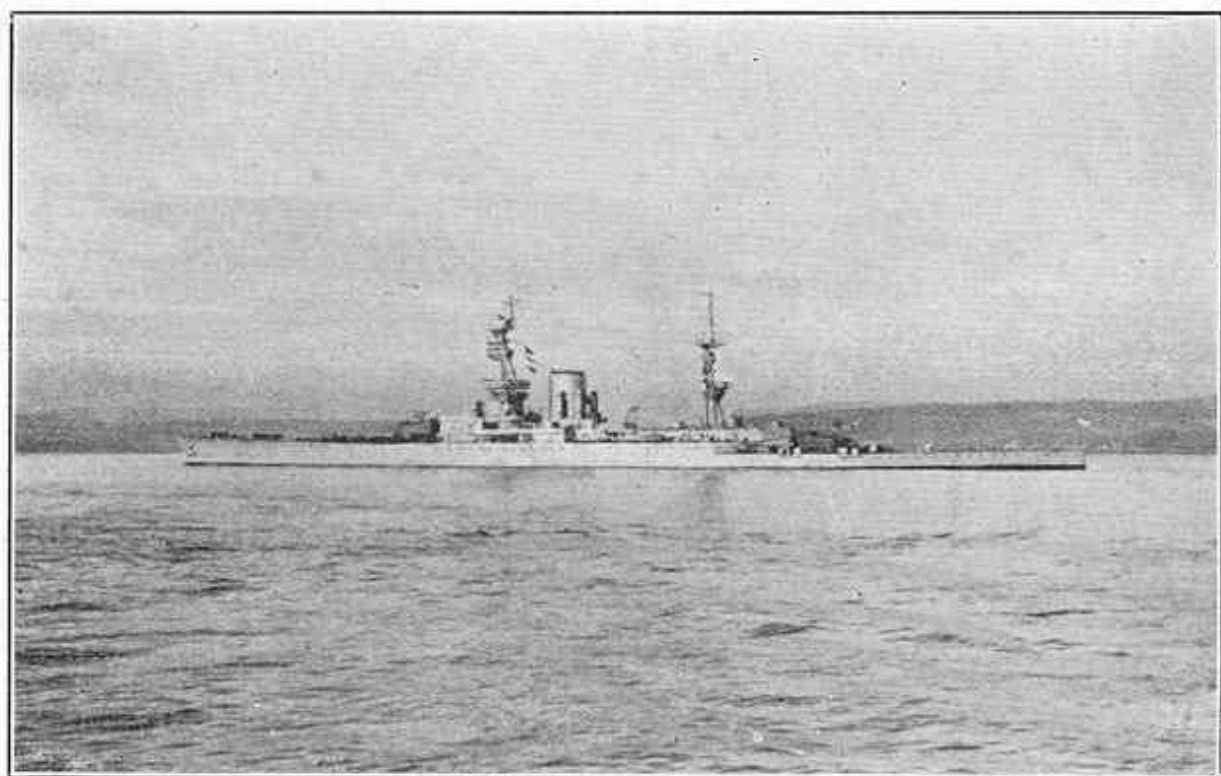
"German Admiralty to Admiral Beatty: Regret one submarine of latest batch to sail for Harwich has not her torpedoes aboard as stipulated."

"Admiral commanding Grand Fleet to German Admiralty: You will send on the missing torpedoes by the next transport."

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H. M. S. LION



H. M. S. GLORIOUS, ONE OF THE 35-KNOT "HUSH" BOATS

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“German Admiralty to Admiral Beatty: Regret to report loss of one of the submarines while on its way to point of surrender.”

“Admiral commanding Grand Fleet to German Admiralty: You will forward a vessel of the latest type in place of the sunken U-Boat.”

“German Admiralty to Admiral Beatty: Regret to report one of our destroyers foundered while on the way to the rendezvous to surrender.”

“Admiral commanding Grand Fleet to German Admiralty: You will forward a full report of the sinking, as it appears that same was avoidable.”

Once when the German Fleet did not follow the sailing directions as indicated by Admiral Beatty, he wirelessly for an explanation.

Came back the reply:

“We are sailing around one of our mine fields.”

“Sail through on course as indicated. We swept that mine field a long time ago.”

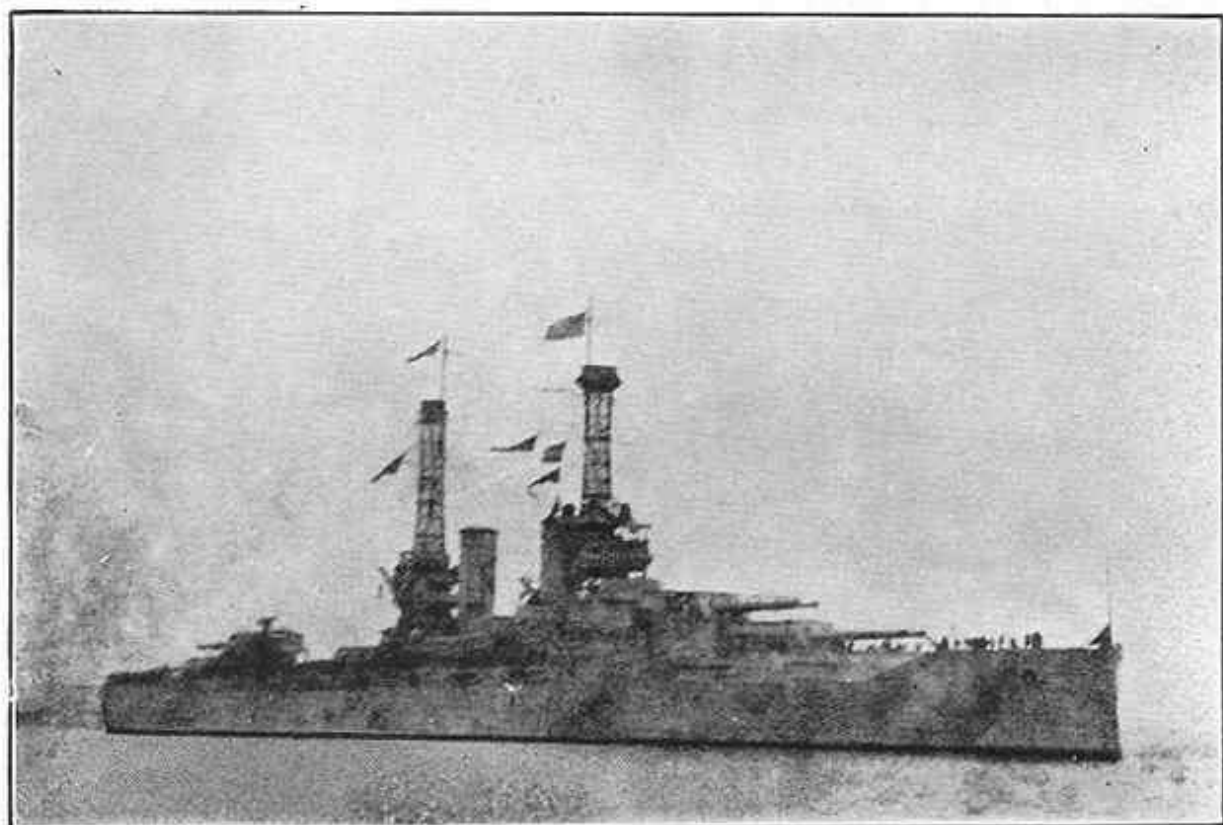
Another message sent from the British flagship read:

“Want to know exactly how many officers and men are coming in each ship. You will report this by 9 a. m. tomorrow.”

It was on November 24 that word came that the American ships would leave for home in about one week. At this time the German High Seas Fleet was anchored in the Firth with a column of British battleships on one side of them and a squadron of battle cruisers on the other. The German ships now appeared almost deserted except for a thin streamer of smoke coming from one or two stacks.

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They were anchored in several long columns and when the American officers and sailors inspected them, they showed the need of paint. The Germans on the decks of their ships would watch the Americans with a bit of curiosity and considerable indifference. Officers would glance at the Americans and then turn away.



U. S. S. *TEXAS* AT THE GERMAN SURRENDER, FLYING THE BATTLE FLAGS