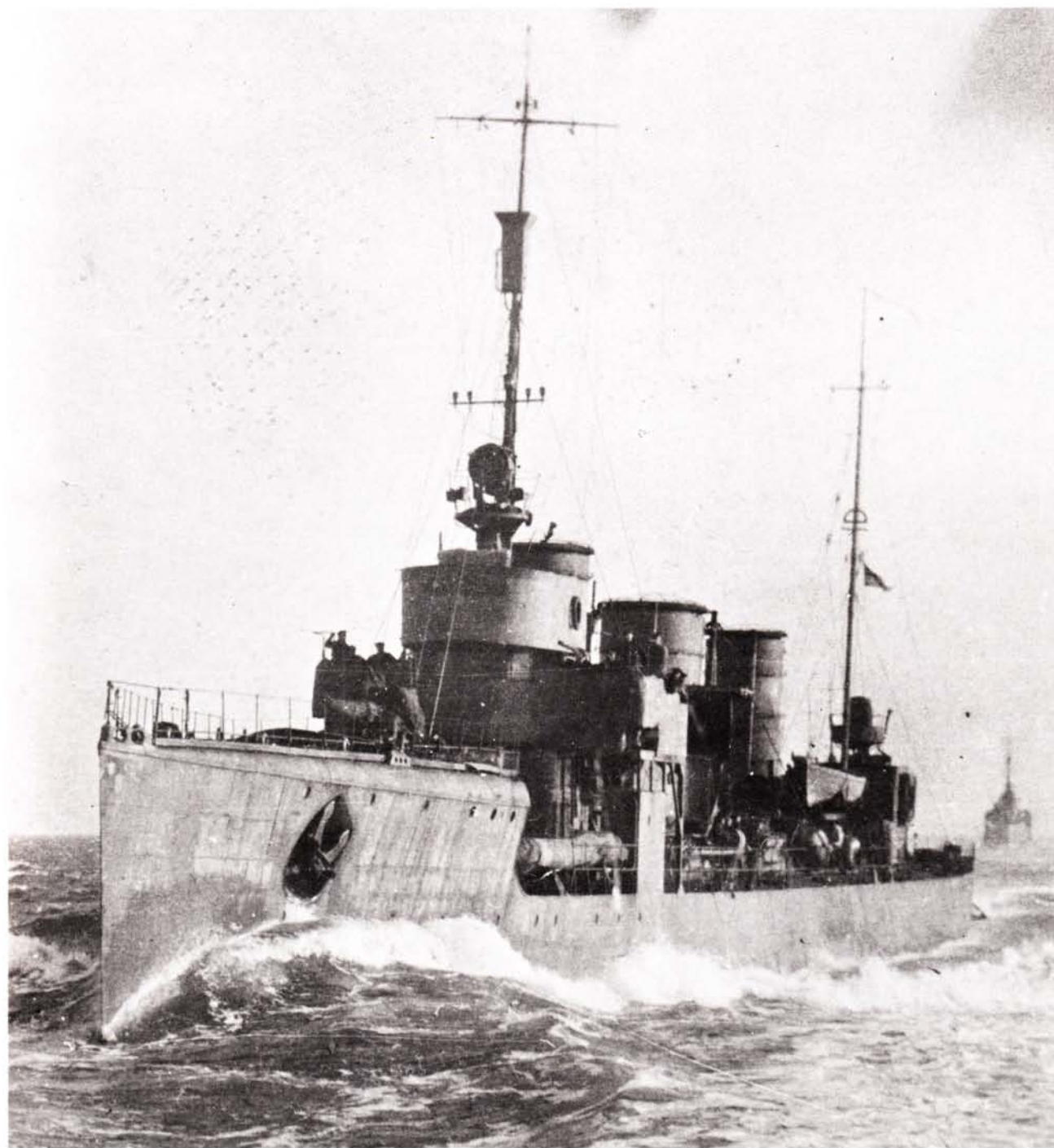


# Profile **Warship** 27

SM TORPEDO BOAT B110

by Professor F. Ruge,  
Vice-Admiral a.D. DSO DSC

50p



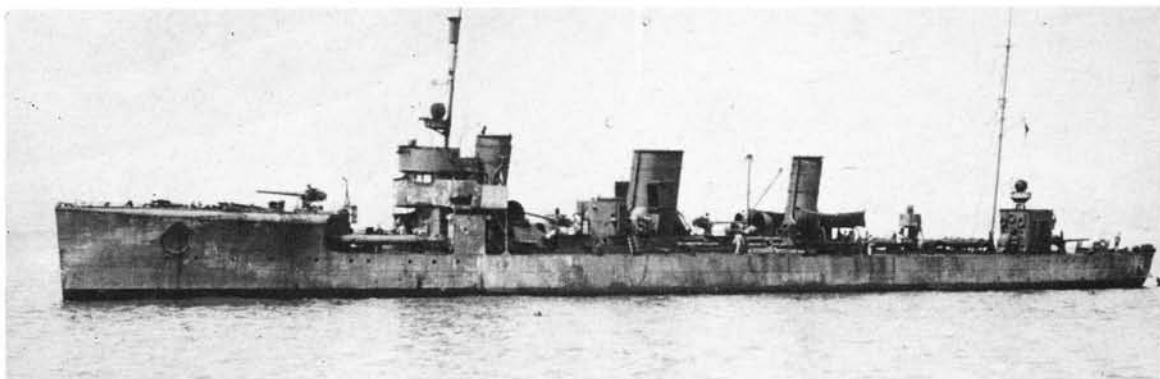
## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

As a result of many requests, we have decided, from Warship Profile No 30 onwards, to increase the size of the colour illustration on the centre spread. This will be done by increasing the pages to make double throw-outs. We are sure you appreciate that this additional size necessitates extra production costs to cover paper; colour reproduction and printing; binding and additional black and white illustrations.

The Warship series has enjoyed a stable selling price since it was launched in 1970 but, like our readers and other publishers, we have been faced with rising and inflationary costs in all aspects of our business—not least in the cost of production.

It was our intention to raise the price on 1 January 1973 to cover these costs, but in view of the Government legislation and despite the fact that we are confident we could justify an increase, we propose delaying this until 1 April 1973, in the national interest.

We would like to take this opportunity of apologising in advance for having to publish some of the forthcoming Warships out of sequence. May we please ask you to accept that this has arisen due to circumstances totally outside the control of the Editor and ourselves.



1 SMS Torpedo Boat B.110 in 1918 (Author's collection) 2 B-Boats in line ahead, 1918. The open bridges are protected by canvas dodgers. Note the propeller guard on the starboard quarter (Author's collection) 3 B.110 leads the line (Courtesy Serge Pillar)

# SM Torpedo Boat B110

by Professor F. Ruge, Vice-Admiral a.D.

## Historical Background

In 1882 the German Navy bought a number of Whitehead torpedoes. The idea that they could be launched from small craft against large ships appealed to General von Caprivi, who was put at the head of the Navy in 1883. He concentrated on the construction of torpedo boats with a displacement of 80 to 90 tons, a speed of 15 to 17 knots and armed with three torpedo tubes and one 50mm gun. His successors continued this policy so that by 1900 about a hundred of these boats were available. Their size had increased somewhat, and there were among them ten boats of 350 tons, designed as 'division boats' or flotilla leaders, with three tubes and three guns. This type was not continued, however, but merged instead with the normal

torpedo boats built and trained for torpedo attack by night.

In contrast, the Royal Navy developed the torpedo boat destroyer, which was larger and had heavier guns, but was as fast as the torpedo boats and also armed with torpedo tubes. In 1914 the British 'L' and 'M' classes had a displacement of 950 tons, three 4in (102mm) guns and four torpedo tubes. The largest German boats displaced 650 tons and had four tubes and two short-barrelled 88mm guns. The series V.1. to S.24 which was ordered in 1911 and 1912, had the same armament but displaced only 570 tons to keep them as small as possible for night attack. However, they were not very seaworthy and their quarters were cramped.

In the Battle of Jutland one of them picked up the

boatswain of a British 'M' class destroyer. When he stepped on the narrow deck, littered with coal bags, he is said to have vividly expressed his indignation at having to stay on board such an unsatisfactory craft.

The following 12 boats, *V.25* to *S.36*, were much better. They displaced 800 tons and were armed with three 88mm guns and six tubes. Their main purpose was still attacking by night.

Before 1914 three shipyards specialised in the construction of German torpedo boats, Schichau at Danzig, Vulkan at Stettin and Germania at Kiel. The torpedo boats were not given names, only numbers from 1 to 197 and then starting again at 1, with the initial letter of their shipyard, i.e. *S.90* or *G.137* or *V.156*. The well-known shipyard of Blohm and Voss at Hamburg built larger ships, mainly cruisers and battle cruisers, and in all probability no B-boats would have come into existence but for the Russians.

### Design History

Only a few years after the disasters at Port Arthur and Tsushima the Russian Navy started on a large programme of reconstruction which for the Baltic alone was to provide a strength of 60% of the whole German Navy. Russian industry was to be brought to such a capacity that it could build and equip the largest types of warship. However, at first British, French and German assistance was used freely, so Vickers-Armstrong built the armoured cruiser *Rurik* (15,400 tons), and Vulkan furnished the turbines, boilers, stem and other parts of the first large destroyer *Novik*, which was launched at St Petersburg (now Leningrad) in 1911. This four-funnelled ship displaced 1,280 tons, carried four 102mm guns and four tubes. On her trials she reached 37 knots, which made her the fastest destroyer in the world.

The excellent qualities of this type caused the Russian government to order 36 similar ships to be delivered in 1914, 1915 and 1916. Again engines, boilers and other parts were ordered in Germany, but were naturally not delivered. When war broke out Schichau offered to build nine of these boats for the German Navy, using this material. However, the Reichs Marineamt (Navy Department of the Reich) declined because 18 months seemed too long, and the advantages of such a large type were doubtful—still the idea of night attacks prevailed.

Then Blohm and Voss as well as Vulkan offered to build two boats each of this type, also with existing engines, to be delivered early in 1915. This time the Navy Department consented, and *B.97*, *B.98*, *V.99* and *V.100* were laid down. Two more, also offered by Blohm and Voss in October 1914, were accepted. In the meantime four destroyers under construction for the Argentine at Germania in Kiel had been taken over as *G.101* to *G.104*. They were slightly smaller (1,200 tons) and slower because they had only three boilers as against four in the others. Therefore they had three funnels of equal diameter whereas in the Bs and Vs the middle funnel was much thicker and served two boiler rooms. Four small torpedo boats (350 tons) building for the Netherlands were also taken over as *V.105* to *V.108*. For this reason the two additional large boats had to be numbered *B.109* and *B.110*.

In January 1915 another offer for two, *B.111* and *B.112*, was also accepted but four more were declined because they would have retarded the construction of a light cruiser. In this way 12 large 'torpedo boats' were commissioned in the spring and summer of 1915, all armed with four 88mm guns and six 500mm torpedo tubes (two singles just behind the forecastle firing forward at an angle of 15°, and two twin tubes behind the funnels which could be trained to starboard or port). The G-boats reached 33.5 knots on trials, the others between 36 and 37. All proved seaworthy and handy in spite of their size and were good gun platforms. A great advantage was that they burnt oil exclusively in contrast to the older German boats (up to *S.24*) which had one boiler for oil and two for coal.

In their arrangements for minelaying they followed the example of the smaller boats whose cluttered decks had insufficient room for rails. Each mine (18 in the smaller and 24 in the larger boats) was put on board in a kind of frame which was screwed to the deck and could be tilted to throw the mine overboard. The shipyards suggested rails for about 50 mines but the Navy Department declined.

### Manning

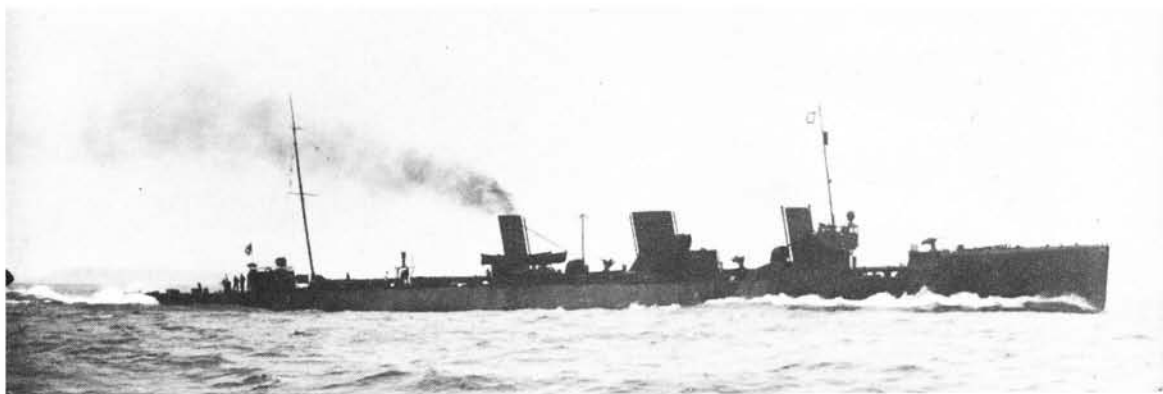
Officers and men came from *S.138* to *S.149* (530 tons) which had formed Torpedo Boat Flotilla II. Their numbers had to be increased from three officers and 77 others to five officers (captain, three officers of the watch, engineer) and 110 others (ten less in the Gs) with an additional two or three members of the staff of the half-flotilla (purser, medical personnel etc). In this way *B.110* had a doctor and his two sick berth attendants.

With technical improvements (anti-submarine weapons, the change from 88mm to 105mm guns, a bigger wireless installation, director-firing etc) more personnel were needed, and finally there were 140 men in all, officers included. This made for very cramped living quarters, especially for sailors and stokers. In port when a few only were on watch, the hammocks had to be hung in three tiers on the mess decks.

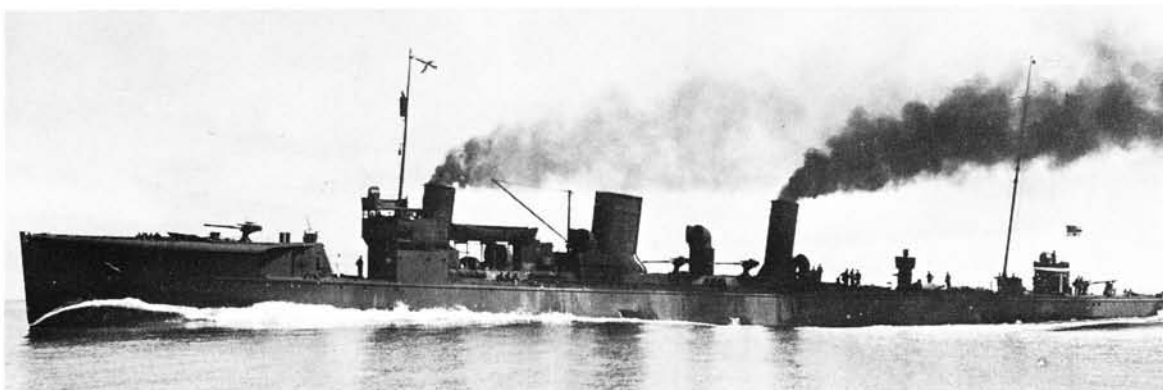
Looking back, it must be said that not enough was done for the men when in port. Wilhelmshaven, the main North Sea base, offered only a Sailors' Home, some films and a number of bars, which were not nearly enough for the many thousand men of the High Seas Fleet. Nevertheless, in *B.110* relations between all ranks and all departments were good to the end of the war. The sailors came largely from the seafaring and fishing population with a few farmers qualifying as 'semi-maritime' because they tilled the land near the coast. Among the stokers many were called up from the industrial areas of the Ruhr, Saxony and Silesia. The petty and warrant officers came from all parts of Germany; e.g. the senior engine room petty officer came from Cologne, whereas the excellent torpedo machinist (responsible for the smooth working of our 'eels' as they were called) from a small town near Lake Constance.

Most of the men were comparatively old. They had begun their service in 1912 and normally would have gone home in 1915. This was another problem, because promotion to the rank of petty

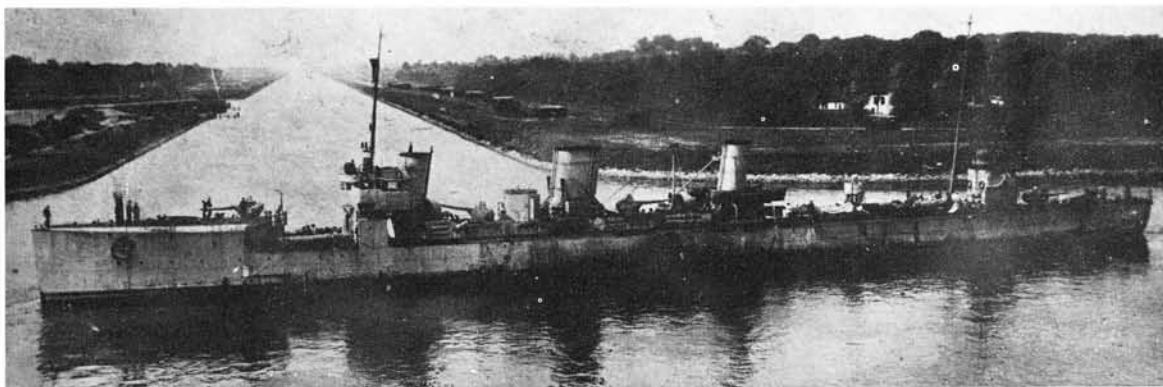




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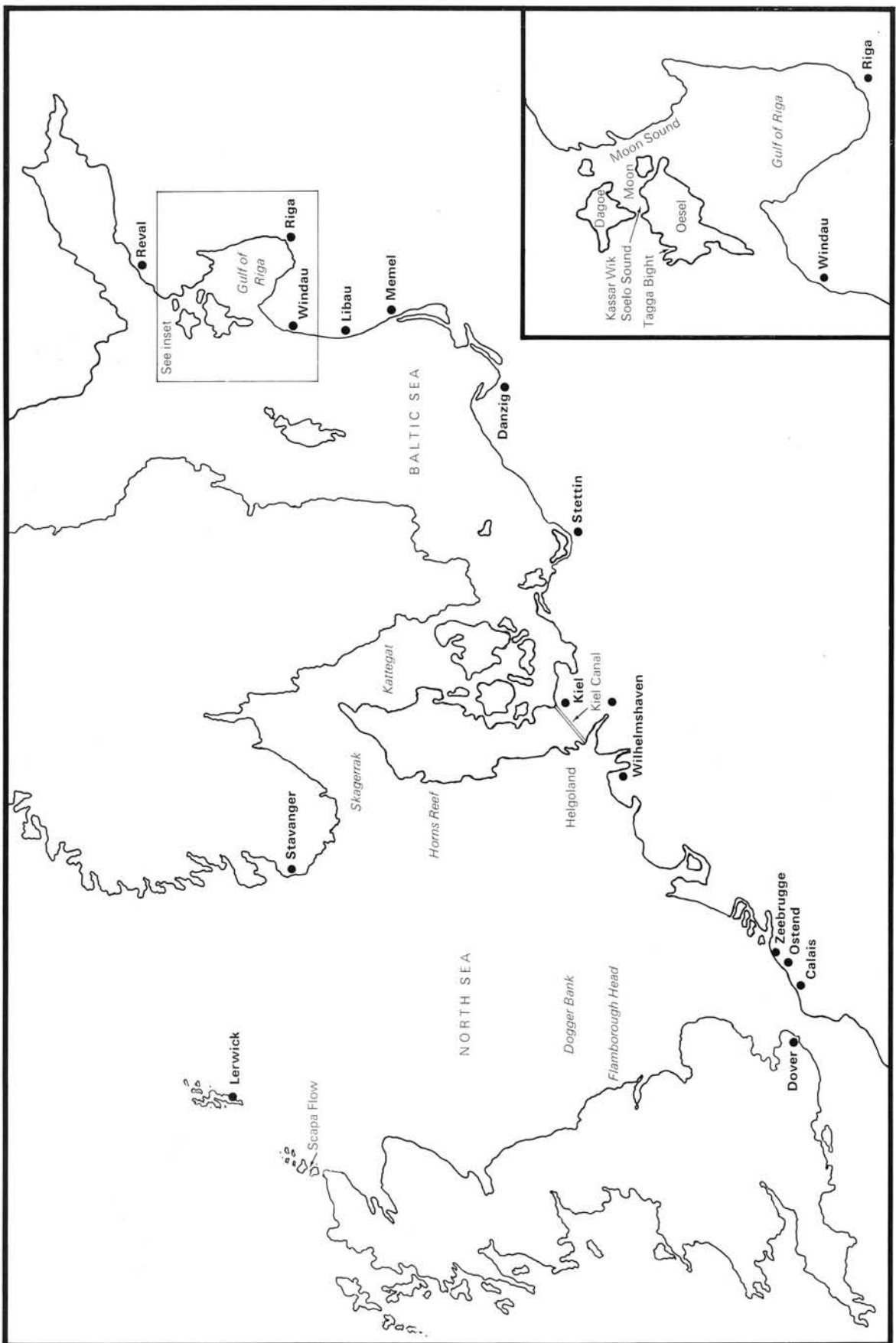


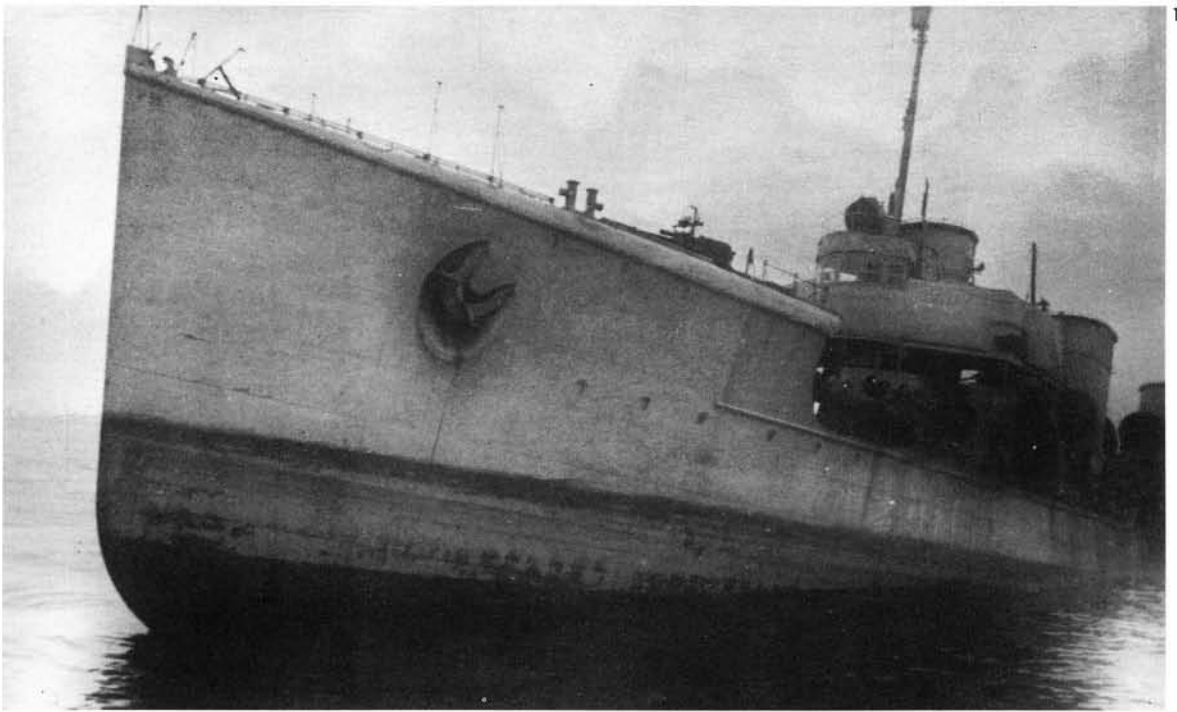
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4

1 B.98 on trials (Bundesarchiv) 2 V.99 on trials in 1915, without torpedo-tubes (NMM) 3 B.110 in Wilhelmshaven (Author's collection) 4 The Second Torpedo Boat Flotilla at sea, 1918 (Author's collection)





1 V.99 damaged and aground at the entrance of the Gulf of Riga after her action with a Russian destroyer, August 1915 (Author's collection) 2 A B-Boat in silhouette which is easily identifiable (Author's collection) 3 A B-Boat, in quarter-line, lifts her forefoot out of the water (Author's collection)

officer was reserved for those who had volunteered for four or nine years' service. In this respect, too, more should and could have been done. The switch from peace training to war conditions had been prepared very well materially but not psychologically.

### Operational History

In the spring of 1915 all the large boats went through a period of training. Then V.99 and V.100 were sent to the Baltic, the others under Korvettenkapitan Heinrich Schuur to the Scouting Forces in the North Sea. The story of B.110 is that of the 4th Torpedo Boat Half Flotilla (THfl) and, to a great extent, of Torpedo Boat Flotilla II (TFI). Torpedo boats never operated as independent units, particularly not after

the unexplained loss with all hands of V.25 (800 tons) near Heligoland early in 1915. From then on the strict rule was: 'Single torpedo boats will always proceed in pairs.'

At the end of July 1915 the first operation of Flotilla II was directed against the traffic between Southern Scandinavia and England. Some steamers were boarded and searched, and a Danish ship with a cargo of railway sleepers for England was scuttled.

In August, German naval forces attacked the Gulf of Riga. The first attempt had to be broken off because the minefields in the entrance were too strong. Before the assault was resumed (successfully) V.99 and V.100 were sent into the Gulf to attack the Russian battleship *Slava* which had fired at the minesweepers. On 16 August at dusk, hugging



1 The Second Torpedo Boat Flotilla in battle formation. Note that the two lines ahead are staggered (Author's collection) 2 The wash of a B-Boat. Note the method by which the top half of the guard rails were cleared away for action (Bundesarchiv)

the shore, the two boats slipped past the minefields sighting some surface failures. They did not find *Slava* but attacked and damaged some old destroyers. When they returned at slow speed waiting for dawn to get out again safely they were attacked by *Novik* and three smaller destroyers. The Russian 102mm guns proved superior to the German 88mm, and *V.99* received several hits which set her on fire. While trying to get clear she ran into a minefield; two mines detonated aft, the engines soon stopped, and she started settling by the stern. *V.100* took her in tow, but she made so much water that she had to be beached with her quarterdeck awash. The men and some material could be taken off, but she lost 21 dead and 22 wounded.

On the following night Flotilla II had its first encounter with British Forces in the North Sea. It made a sweep in the vicinity of Horns Reef to

surprise British submarines which used to surface there by night. During the approach several boats had to return with condenser trouble; only five were able to continue, *B.110* among them. In the evening they examined about 20 Dutch and German trawlers, but all proved harmless. Shortly after nightfall they sighted against the lighter western horizon what they took to be a light cruiser and destroyers. Actually it was the minelayer *Princess Margaret* and two divisions of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla. The minelayer turned away and the German boats lost touch with each other during the approach. In the ensuing confusion only *B.98* launched torpedoes, of which one hit the destroyer *Mentor* and blew her bows off. The German Senior Officer was under the impression that he had sunk her and withdrew but she reached England with some difficulty.

From then until the end of 1915 several similar



sweeps followed, two into the Skagerrak and Kattegat to intercept cargoes for England, but without success or any special events. From January 1916 onwards the 88mm guns were exchanged in boat after boat for the far better 105mm torpedo boat gun. Its shell weighed 17kg as against 9.5 of the 88mm gun, and it was semi-automatic and very handy, especially for night-fighting. Its only drawback was its limited elevation which did not permit fire beyond 9,600 metres.

In January 1916 Vice Admiral Reinhold Scheer took over as Commander-in-Chief High Seas Fleet from Admiral Pohl who was fatally ill. Scheer's energy soon made itself felt in much greater activity of the Fleet. One of the first operations was a sweep of light forces to the Dogger Bank to intercept British ships. On the evening of 10 February eight groups of three to four torpedo boats proceeded in line abreast with the light cruiser *Pillau* and some more boats 20 miles behind; Flotilla II formed the three groups on the right wing. Shortly before midnight the outer group (three G-boats) sighted four darkened ships which they took for light cruisers. However, they were minesweeping sloops of the new 'Flower' class, of 1,270 tons, a speed of 17 knots, armed with two 4in guns and some smaller ones. Nineteen torpedoes were launched at them but only *Arabis* was hit. She remained stopped, firing vigorously, but sank after more hits. The other sloops got away, and boats of Flotilla II saved the Commanding Officer and 30 members of the crew of *Arabis*.

In March and April 1916 Flotilla II went to Kiel for its annual overhaul. When this was finished all boats had 105mm guns and improved torpedo tubes. After some exercises they joined the Fleet at the beginning of May. They were at once sent against a British force which laid mines near Horns Reef, but no contact was made.

### Jutland, 31 May 1916

(For further details see Warship Profile 14)

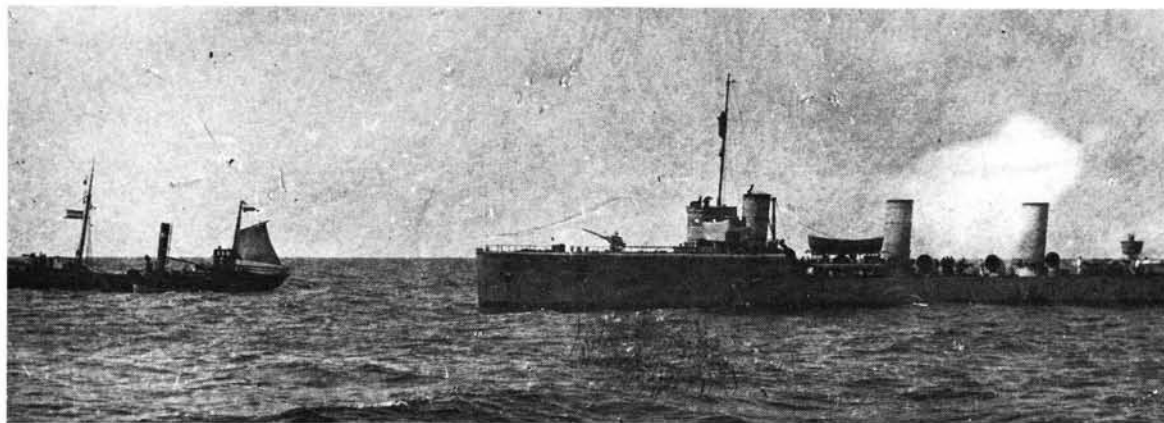
For the second half of May Admiral Scheer prepared another bombardment of the English coast but bad weather intervened. When it was time for the U-boats watching the British bases to return and

airship reconnaissance was still not possible Scheer compromised on a sweep by light forces through Skagerrak and Kattegat backed by the whole fleet. The Scouting Forces under Vice-Admiral Hipper put to sea early on 31 May followed by the Battle Fleet. The Grand Fleet was already at sea because U-boat and other activity had shown that something was in the wind.

Flotilla II proceeded with the Scouting Forces as usual. After passing the British minefields Hipper steered NNW and ordered five light cruisers and some torpedo boats to form a screen ahead of the battle cruisers eight miles distant. The light cruiser *Elbing* with *B.109*, *B.110* and *B.111* was stationed on the left wing. At 1600 she sighted the Danish steamer *U. Fjord* to the west and despatched *B.109* and *B.110* to examine her. They stopped the ship which as a consequence blew off steam. This was sighted by the light cruisers *Galatea* and *Phaeton* on the right wing of the British Battle Cruiser Force under Admiral Beatty, which steered a course almost parallel to that of the Germans. Now they went for that white cloud, sighted the two B-boats and fired on them. *Elbing* retaliated and obtained the first hit of the Battle of Jutland; under the bridge of *Galatea*. When Beatty and Hipper received the reports of their cruisers they changed course towards each other, and the first stage of the tremendous battle began.

*B.110* was mainly a spectator, although in the front seat. During the battle cruiser action (on course SE towards the German Battle Fleet) Flotilla II collected and tried to gain its battle station on the disengaged side of the flagship *Lutzow*. Some salvos fell near because the British fire at first was wide of its targets. The British ships could only be seen as dim silhouettes, but shell bursts on the German cruisers, and then the immense explosions of *Indefatigable* and *Queen Mary* showed how fierce the fight was.

When the German battleships came into sight Beatty reversed course and Hipper followed. Between the lines a melee between destroyers and torpedo boats ensued but Flotilla II was too far away to join. It kept station on the starboard bow of *Lutzow* behind the light cruiser *Regensburg*, the flagship of Commodore Heinrich.



G.102 and the Danish steamer Ufjord, photographed from B.111 at the beginning of the Battle of Jutland

(Courtesy, Herder Esslinger)

Now Beatty led the Germans to the British Battle Fleet under Jellicoe approaching from the NW. Suddenly the Germans sighted British ships to the East, too, as the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron and its screen closed in from that unexpected direction. With others Flotilla II fired first at the light cruiser *Chester*, which retired with many hits, and then at the destroyers *Acasta* (damaged) and *Shark* (sunk). *B.98* received a hit which destroyed the rear twin tubes; two men were killed and 11 injured. This was the only damage to the whole flotilla at Jutland.

The 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron lost *Invincible*, which blew up under the fire of the German battle cruisers, but it forced the German line to turn away. A kind of 'Windy Corner' developed, with the German flotillas almost stationary under fire from various directions. The light cruiser *Wiesbaden* was hit by heavy shells and remained stopped between the lines.

*Regensburg* had gathered three flotillas, and Commodore Heinrich repeatedly gave preparatory orders for an attack only to cancel them soon afterwards because the targets disappeared in the smoke from funnels and guns. To avoid the worst of the fire Flotilla II turned a full circle at its slowest speed, then helped to protect the heavily damaged *Lutzow* in her retreat when Scheer extricated his fleet from the British 'Crossing the T' by a battle turn, i.e. complete reversal of course, ship after ship, beginning from the rear. The fire soon ceased but Scheer ordered another battle turn and steered for the Grand Fleet 'to upset Jellicoe's plans'. Soon his van was under an overwhelming fire again. By the signal 'Go to it' (in German 'Ran') battle cruisers and torpedo boats were ordered to attack regardless of the consequences. Flotillas VI and IX went for the British line, and Flotilla II was about to follow but was kept back by *Regensburg* because the British fire slackened and then ceased completely. To avoid the oncoming torpedoes Jellicoe had turned his battleships away. At the same time the Germans executed their third battle turn, and the daylight action was over.

The sun set, and the German flotillas received orders for a night attack on the British battleships. Each was allotted its sector, Flotilla II between ENE and ESE. After some minutes it sighted several light cruisers and many destroyers ahead which were taken for the van of the Grand Fleet. Flotilla II turned away, and the British made a short attempt to close, but then continued on a southerly course. Flotilla II passed behind them and searched its sector, but in vain, for the British battleships were actually ahead of their light forces. At dawn Flotilla II steered for the Skaw to return to Wilhelmshaven via Kattegat and Kiel Canal.

### Service in Flanders

*B.98* was quickly repaired, and on 7 June Flotilla II was on its way to the German base at Zeebrugge on the Belgian coast. Admiral von Schroder, in command of the German naval forces in Flanders, had asked for reinforcements. His plan was to use the arrival of Flotilla II to take the British ships on patrol off his bases between two fires. This plan failed, however, because five monitors and numerous

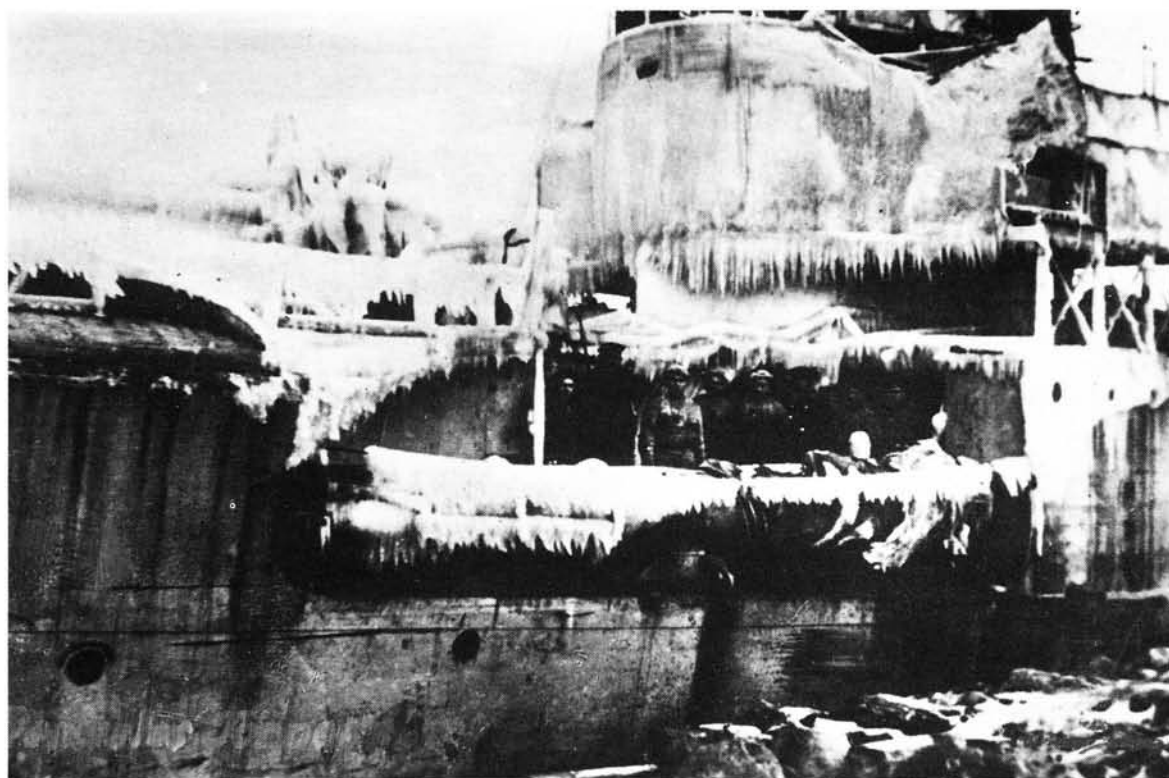
destroyers seemed too strong for a direct daylight attack. In the 'normal' fight at great distances which developed torpedo boat *V.67* of the Flanders Flotilla received a shell in a boiler-room but was brought home under cover of artificial smoke.

In the following weeks boats of Flotilla II were at sea almost daily to protect small minesweeping torpedo boats. In a number of scraps with monitors and destroyers several boats received minor injuries. The worst damage happened to *G.102* which struck a mine near her propellers and had to be towed in by *B.112*. The repairs in Ostend shipyard took several months. In night operations against the traffic between the Hook of Holland and the Thames two British steamers were captured and taken to Zeebrugge, and *B.110* and others undertook several minelaying operations. At the end of July 1916 Flotilla II returned to Wilhelmshaven without sighting a single vessel in the southern North Sea. Altogether a lively time had been had by everybody but far less had been accomplished than Admiral von Schroeder had expected.

After a short refit Flotilla II under a new Senior Officer, Commander Heinicke, took part in the operation of 19 August 1916. The High Seas Fleet put to sea to bombard Sunderland, and would have met the Grand Fleet but for an airship which reported the light cruisers and destroyers of the Harwich Force as the British main fleet when Scheer was 60 miles east of Flamborough Head. By steering for the Harwich Force he turned away from the Grand Fleet without knowing it. When the error was cleared up it was too late to reach Sunderland. The Grand Fleet had also turned back after losing two light cruisers by U-boat attacks.

For the time being this was Scheer's last attempt to come to grips with the British fleet under circumstances favourable for him, i.e. with airship reconnaissance and many U-boats off the British bases. Submarine war under prize regulations now was resumed, and the German fleet had enough to do to protect the minesweepers which kept the channels for the U-boats open. For more than a year Flotilla II did not take part in any major operation, although it was kept busy all the time. Alternately the 3rd and 4th Half-Flotillas were on guard duty, at anchor in some tidal roads or at sea near the minesweepers. Sometimes torpedo boats scouted along the Dutch islands or to the Dogger Bank or past Horns Reef; a number of ships were searched, a few brought in, but no British warships were encountered. U-boats with broken-down engines had to be assisted, missing planes and an airship or two looked for, and battleships and cruisers had to be screened against submarine attack. A few times, British submarines were spotted and chased, but without noticeable success.

In between there were spells of training, mainly in Kiel Bight after the boiler cleaning necessary following a certain amount of steaming. Commander Heinicke, a tall, taciturn, energetic man, soon had the measure of his flotilla. His main concern was to improve its gunnery which so far had been rather neglected. The annual refit of six weeks in spring 1917 was used not only to give leave but also for the training of specialists. During operational time we



Top: *Wash of a B-Boat: the funnels and topmasts of the next astern are just visible*  
 Bottom: *Winter conditions: a B-Boat, February 1917*

(Bundesarchiv)

always had two of the older men on leave. Our victualling officer who came from the Merchant Marine saw to it that those who were married could take home some tinned food and bread, for early in 1917 the food situation in Germany went through its worst phase in the whole war. On board it was sufficient in quantity, although the bread consisted for a considerable part of potatoes whereas in the hot meals potatoes often were replaced by turnips. These played a prominent part in the jam, too. Meat,

butter and lard were strictly rationed and just sufficient. Tea was non-existent unless one took to peppermint, coffee was made from chicory, and there was 'Ersatz' everywhere.

In February 1917 unrestricted U-boat war was declared, the British increased their mining activity, and all through the Summer Flotilla II was mainly occupied with protecting minesweepers. On 14 September *B.110* and some other boats were sent out because two minesweepers were missing and it





1 One of the V-boats, probably V.100, seen at the surrender in 1918 (NMM)

2 The first wave of Storm Troopers for the landing on Osel (Baltic Island) mustering on board the B-Boats. Note the large boiler-room intakes (Author's collection)

3 B.110 takes it green (Author's collection)

4 Storm Troopers boarding the Second Flotilla for the assault on Osel (Courtesy, Herder Esslinger)

was feared that they had foundered in a Force 10 gale blowing from the west. After some hours of strenuous search the two vessels were discovered in the lee of Heligoland, where they had sought shelter and snugly lain without saying anything.

### Return to the Baltic

Four days later, quite unexpectedly, we received orders to go to Kiel. This was always welcome, for the trip through Kiel Canal (about 100km) was interesting, and Kiel offered much more than Wilhelmshaven ever could. The enthusiasm grew when, after a short stop there to receive orders, Flotilla II proceeded to Libau to prepare there for an operation against the islands north of the Gulf of Riga. That would be very different from the uneventful North Sea routine. In Libau we tied up in the large artificial harbour constructed by the Russians. It was now free from the wrecks and debris left by them when they had to retreat in 1915. Here we met the troops which we had to take to the island of Oesel in order to bring the Gulf of Riga completely under German control. It was the 42nd Infantry Division, four regiments and strong divisional troops, 16,000 men in all. They were to be landed in Tagga Bight on the northwest coast of Oesel to take the defenders from the rear. Ten thousand more men of W/T, signal, sapper, supply and other special units were to follow.

Flotilla II was to land the first wave, each boat carrying one company of infantry. Nobody had any training or experience in this kind of operation, as precedents did not exist in our military history. A combined Army and Navy staff worked out the details which had to be kept very simple in accordance with our limited means. Each boat had two twelve-oared cutters; only the three 'flagships' of the Senior Officers (TFI II, THfI 3 and 4) had a small and not very reliable motor boat in the place of one of the cutters. Each boat received an additional cutter lent from other torpedo boats, which was put on deck and securely lashed.

Our guns were the only protection that could be given for getting ashore. So the gunlayers stayed with their guns which otherwise were served by the stokers of the free watch, for the sailors had to man the cutters. The stokers had already received some gunnery training and now were given a short refresher course while the infantry (138th Regiment for THfI 4 and 131st for THfI 3) learnt how to get into boats and how to behave in them.

*B.110* made preparations to fire at targets inland with the help of an army observation plane. We talked this over with an artillery observer of the army who was to accompany us, and W/T procedure was regulated. There was no opportunity for firing practice although this had never before happened to a torpedo boat. Strong westerly gales forced Vice-Admiral Eberhard Schmidt to postpone the beginning of the operation. During a short lull a landing exercise could be undertaken on the open beach north of Libau.

Eventually sailing was ordered for 11 October. Our guests arrived at 0500, and we sailed an hour later. The main part of Flotilla II screened an old gunboat and two small steamers which carried the rest of

regiments 131 and 138. *B.110* and *B.111* went to Windau, 55 miles north of Libau to pick up the steamer *Ammon*, the parent ship for the minesweeping launches which were to assist the landing. With 130 additional men quarters were rather crowded but our crew saw to it that every infantryman got good and ample food, a shower or a bath, and as much rest as he wanted. Fortunately, there was hardly any wind and only a slight swell.

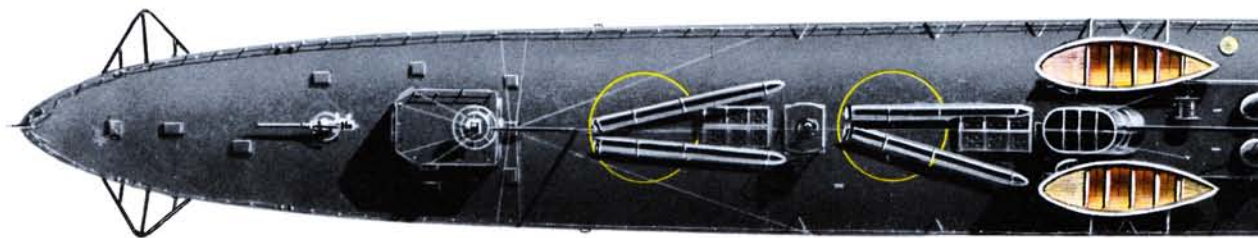
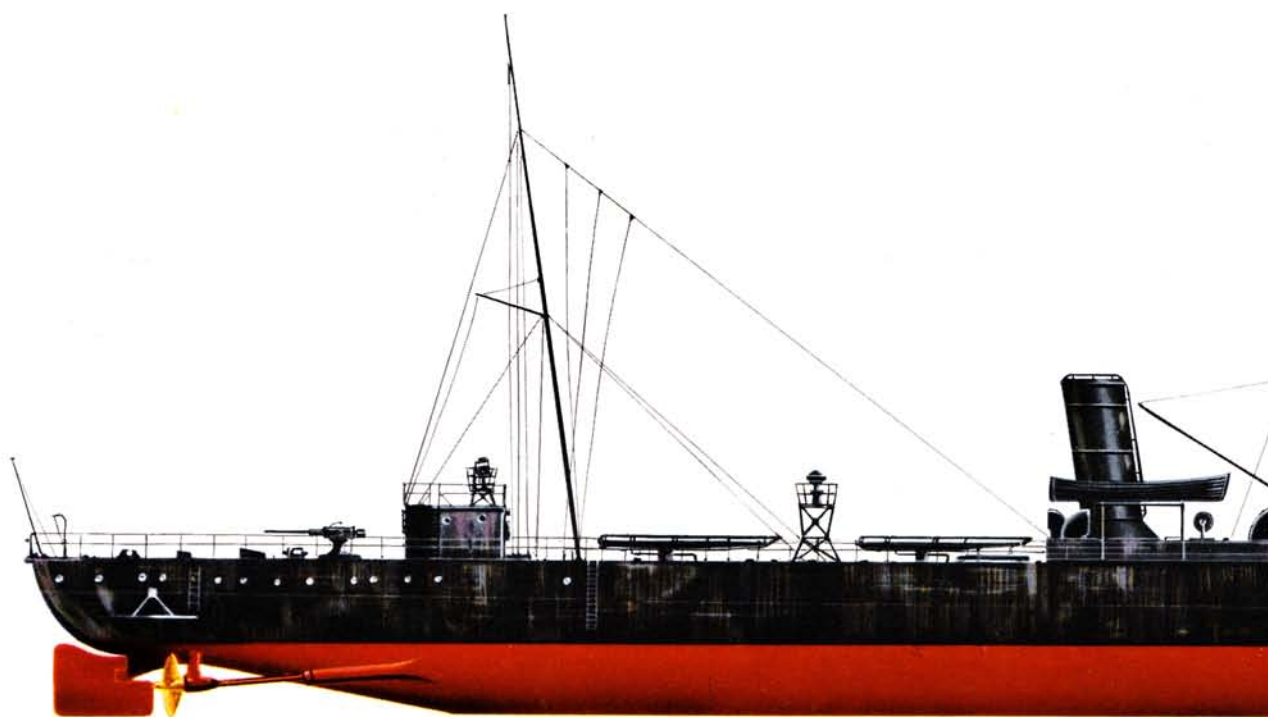
In the afternoon we joined the main convoy and took station behind the leading minesweepers. Two battle squadrons followed, between them the battle cruiser *Moltke*, the flagship of Admiral Schmidt, and the light cruiser *Emden*, flagship of Commodore Heinrich, commanding the torpedo boats. Then came a group of 'Sperrbrecher', i.e. mine-bumping ships, made as unsinkable as possible with a cargo of empty casks, and behind them 20 transports in five groups, each led by a light cruiser. All round this long and impressive line torpedo boats zigzagged to prevent submarine attacks.

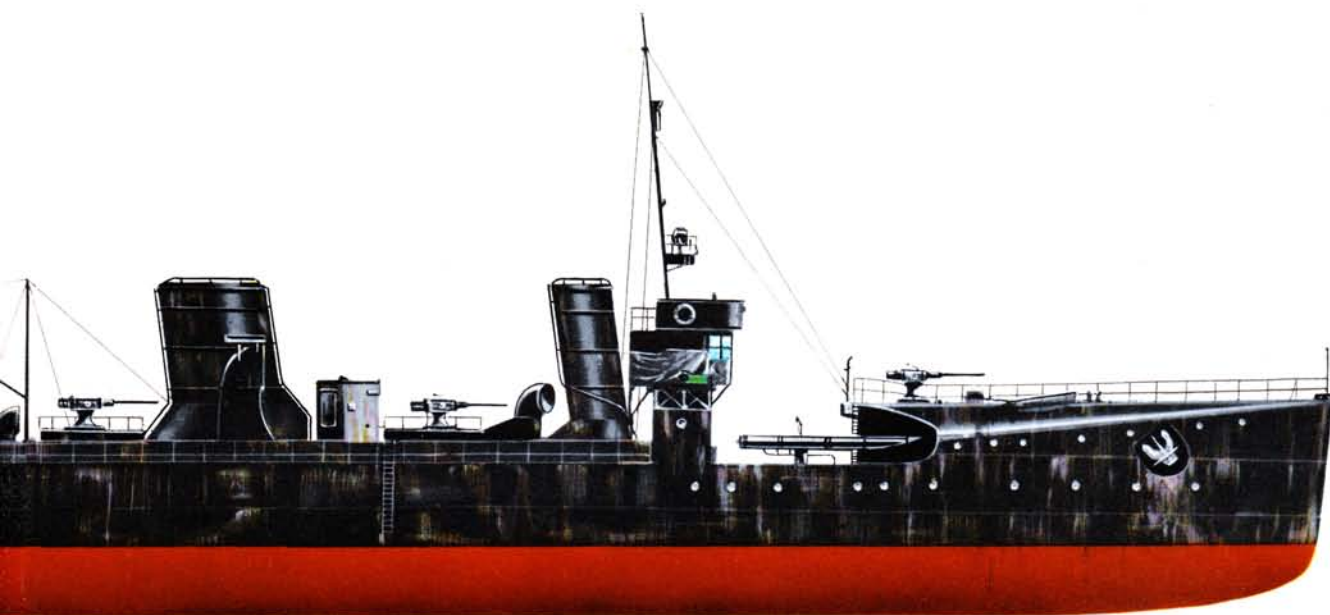
Landing on the northwest coast of Oesel meant passing deep Russian minefields. The minesweepers had already been busy to clear a channel but it was uncertain if they had succeeded completely. Therefore the convoy had to follow minesweepers all through the night. They were slower than expected, and when one hour already had been lost Admiral Schmidt decided to leave them behind. His luck held, and no mines were encountered.

When the van approached Tagga Bight it was almost dawn. Formation was single line ahead, Flotilla II leading, and the gunboat and the two small steamers bringing up the rear. One of them, the last ship but one in the long line, struck a mine but could be beached. The men were put ashore, and much material was saved.

The batteries on either side of the entrance could dimly be made out, but they let us pass unmolested. Then they were bombarded by battleships and taken by specially trained assault troops. Inside the Bight the 3rd HFfI steered for the west bank and 4th for the east bank to land the infantry. *B.110* stopped off the 'White Hill' which could be made out easily. Our cutters were quickly in the water, and our cook, too, because he had lent a hand with a painter for too long. While the infantry climbed down, the guns opened fire at barbed wire obstacles and trenches. Soon the first wave was ashore, and the cutters returned. When they went on their second trip a field battery began to fire at *B.110* from behind a wood. The pretty white clouds of bursting shrapnel high above our quarterdeck looked very nice and harmless but the army artillery specialist dived behind the canvas screen around the control position on top of the bridge. Unfortunately the observation plane which was to report the fall of shot now ran out of petrol and had to return to its base. However, we were not quite unprepared. The stereoscopic rangefinders measured the distance of the powder smoke, and the problem of laying the guns was solved with the help of a conspicuous tree, so that we could draw our fire over the area where the battery was concealed. At first the shrapnel followed *B.110* but never quite caught up while she very slowly steamed parallel to the shore, but then it

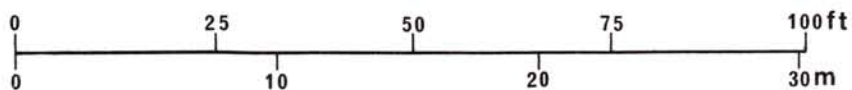
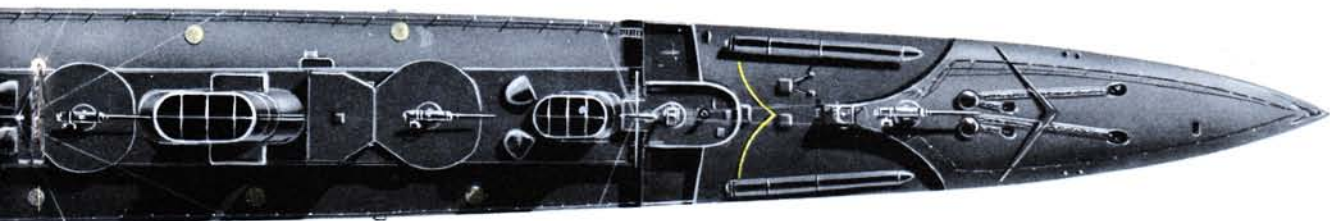






Torpedo Boat *B.110* is shown in the black colour-scheme used by German torpedo-craft in World War I. The guns shown are the 105mm which replaced the short-barrelled 88mm early in 1916. Note the very small platform for the forward gun's crew, and the amidships torpedo-tubes, which were set in pairs at a fixed angle in all German destroyers of this period

*Gordon Davies © Profile Publications Limited*



ceased fire. Later events prevented us from finding out whether the guns of *B.110* had silenced it or the infantry had taken it.

After the minesweepers had removed a single thin line of mines across the entrance the large transports entered and anchored. So did Flotilla II because there were no more targets. Work was not yet over, however, for an immense W/T traffic had begun, and it took two decoding groups till midnight to decipher all the messages. For the greatest part they were of little importance and held no secrets whatsoever, but one never could tell, and everybody was most interested in all events ashore and at sea.

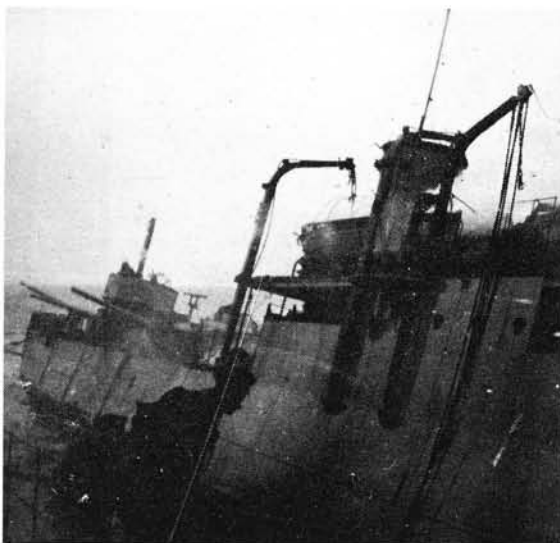
During the bombardment of the batteries, two battleships struck mines. Damage to the *Grosser Kurfurst* was insignificant; no more than 280 tons of water entered some compartments of her double bottom and repairs took only five weeks. *Bayern* caught a mine far forward, made 1,000 tons of water, and her bows sank six feet. This did not prevent her from continuing the bombardment, however.

Just outside Soelo Sound, the narrow channel between Oesel and Dagoe, a cyclist detachment and an assault company were landed on an undefended beach. Battery Toffri on the southern tip of Dagoe tried to intervene but was silenced by *Bayern* and *Emden*. Meeting no resistance the troops rapidly advanced east to the foot of the dam between Oesel and the island of Moon. Here they dug themselves in and beat off several attacks by the Russians whose line of retreat they had cut off. At first, small German torpedo boats assisted them but these were chased back to Soelo Sound by Russian destroyers which then shelled the German position on the dam. To ease the situation a stronger German force was needed in the Kassar Wik, the shallow waters between Oesel and Dagoe.

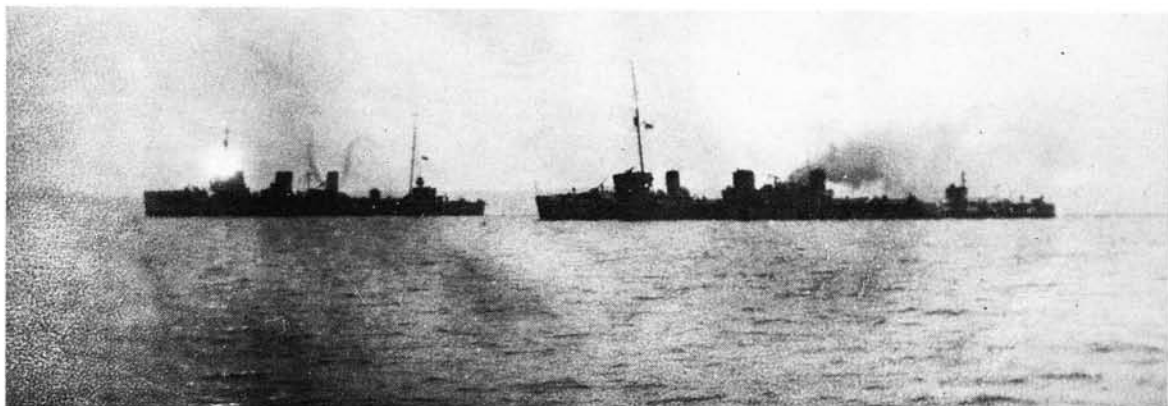
In the afternoon when it was evident that the landings had succeeded *Bayern* received orders to return to Kiel. She soon ran into trouble for her forward bulkheads started to buckle. She had to reduce speed to four knots and asked for assistance. Third THfl was ordered to bring her back to Tagga Bight. Everybody was relieved when she was safely inside the anti-submarine net which had been laid in the entrance. Her bows were deep in the water, and temporary repairs took two weeks. Even then she had some difficulties when she steamed to Kiel. In the minefield where *Bayern* and *Grosser Kurfurst* were damaged, two minesweepers were lost.

### Action against Russian Destroyers

In the morning of 13 October 1917 Flotilla II was sent to *Emden* at anchor off Soelo Sound. Her 150mm guns fired with maximum elevation at targets we could not see. Commodore Heinrich decided that a battleship was needed to protect the minesweepers which had to make sure that we could enter Kassar Wik. So we had to wait until next day when the battleship *Kaiser* anchored nearby and at 1145 started firing with her 305mm guns at the Russian destroyers and forced them to fall back. After an early Sunday lunch (goose, honestly bought in Libau) we followed Commodore Heinrich who had transferred his flag to *V.100*, through the narrow Soelo Sound into Kassar Wik. There was a strong cross current, and in spite of all precautions *G.101* ran on a rock. Free of the Sound Flotilla II and some smaller torpedo boats formed four groups and went to the attack. Ahead about a dozen destroyers could be made out, some almost exactly the same type as our B-boats. They opened fire at more than 10,000 metres and quickly straddled us. The spread of their salvos was very large, and their only success was a near miss which considerably damaged the stern of



*The Russian destroyer Grom alongside a B-Boat, 14 October 1917. Her guns are trained to starboard and below B.98 takes the Russian destroyer Grom in tow in Kassar Wik on 14 October 1917 (Author's collection)*





German infantry waiting on board the boats of the Second Torpedo Boat Flotilla, just before landing on Ösel, 12 October 1917 (Author's collection)

*G.103*. We steered for them until we could open fire. *B.110* tried to hit several destroyers and a gunboat but it was very difficult to keep the guns laid long enough on any one of the continuously shifting targets.

In any case, the Russians retreated to the east. But not all of them; the destroyer *Grom* lagged behind and was hit again. *V.100* and *B.98* made for her when a gunboat went alongside, took the crew off and retreated blazing away with all guns. *Grom* remained stopped with a heavy list and burning, so *B.98* went alongside behind a smoke screen laid by *B.110* and others, took five prisoners and secured a mine chart and the log book (which is still in the German Military Archives). Then she took *Grom* in tow but the fire spread and the list increased, and soon we saw the destroyer heel over and sink. In the shallow water her starboard side remained above the surface.

Our minesweepers did not lose any time getting in contact with the infantry which, under increasing pressure, had moved away from the foot of the dam. With ammunition and rations coming up from the sea this was soon remedied.

In the eastern part of Kassar Wik we got under fire from battleships and cruisers in the deeper Moon Sound. Soon it fell dark, and we anchored near Soelo Sound. *G.101* was off again, but with her propellers severely damaged. Before she and *G.103* went back for repairs they were stripped of their ammunition for we had expended about half of ours. Next morning we moved east again and repeatedly came under the fire of gunboats and larger ships which could not cross the shallow 'Strumpf' (i.e. 'stocking') between Kassar Wik and Moon Sound. Because some shells fell rather near, Commodore Heinrich ordered us back a bit. Near the wreck of

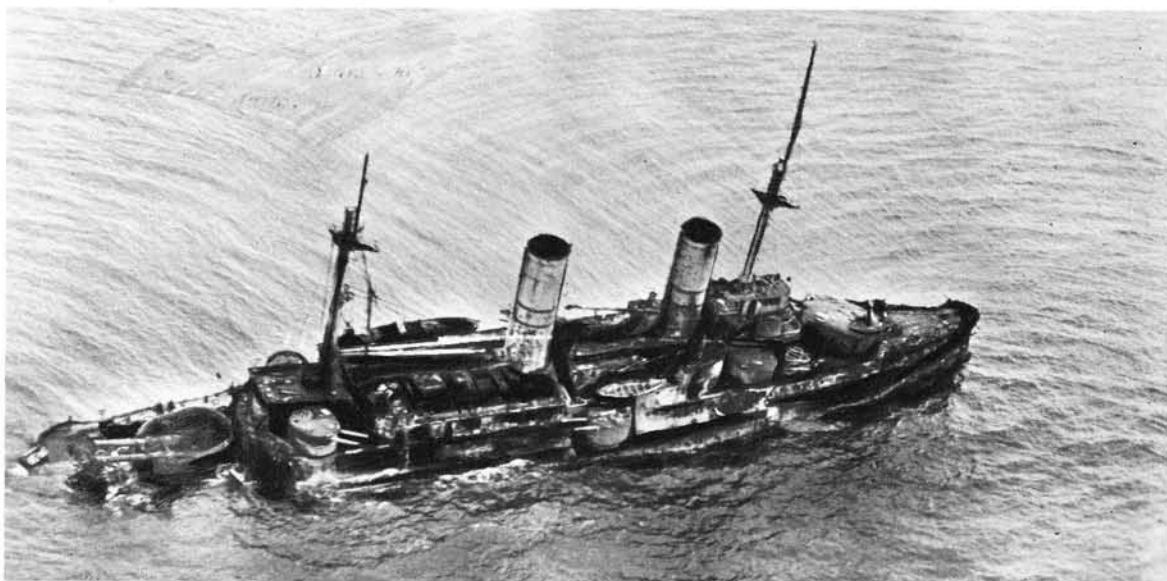
*Grom*, *B.98* struck a mine which broke off the fore half of her forecastle. It came to rest on the bottom with the stem well above the water and was a good navigation mark. *B.98* had 14 killed (the men had been below deck for lunch) and seven injured but could proceed under her own power to Tagga Bight, and later with a temporary wooden bow from Libau to Kiel.

After the war it became known that the Russians had intended to mine Soelo Sound in the first night after the landing but the Sailors' Council of their minelayer had refused to act. Then men from the destroyers took over and in the following night laid a minefield in the middle of Kassar Wik. Our patrolling area was now moved away from the danger zone but too close to some uncharted rocks. *B.110* lost part of two propeller blades but could carry on whereas *B.112* damaged her propellers and oil bunkers so heavily that she had to be sent back.

In the following days destroyers made several attempts to enter Kassar Wik but retreated under our fire. The large ships shelled us when we came too far east. The main thing was that the supply route for our infantry was always kept open.

On 17 October the Russian ships opened fire to the south. With the help of the mine chart found in the *Grom* the German battleships *König* and *Kronprinz* had entered the Gulf of Riga and now approached Moon Sound. The British submarine *C.27* fired two torpedoes at them but missed. Then she hit a parent ship for minesweeping launches (which was beached) and left the Gulf of Riga for lack of torpedoes. *König* and *Kronprinz* obtained hits on the battleships *Slava* and *Graschdanin* and on the cruiser *Bajan*. These retreated but *Slava* made so much water that her draught was too deep for the dredged channel in Moon Sound. She was run

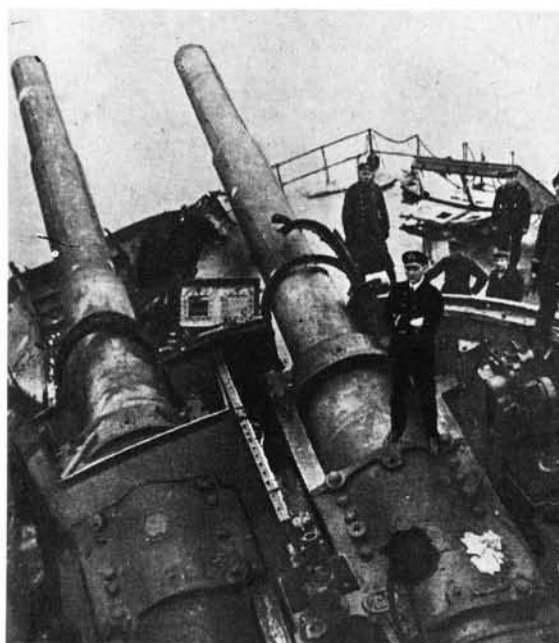




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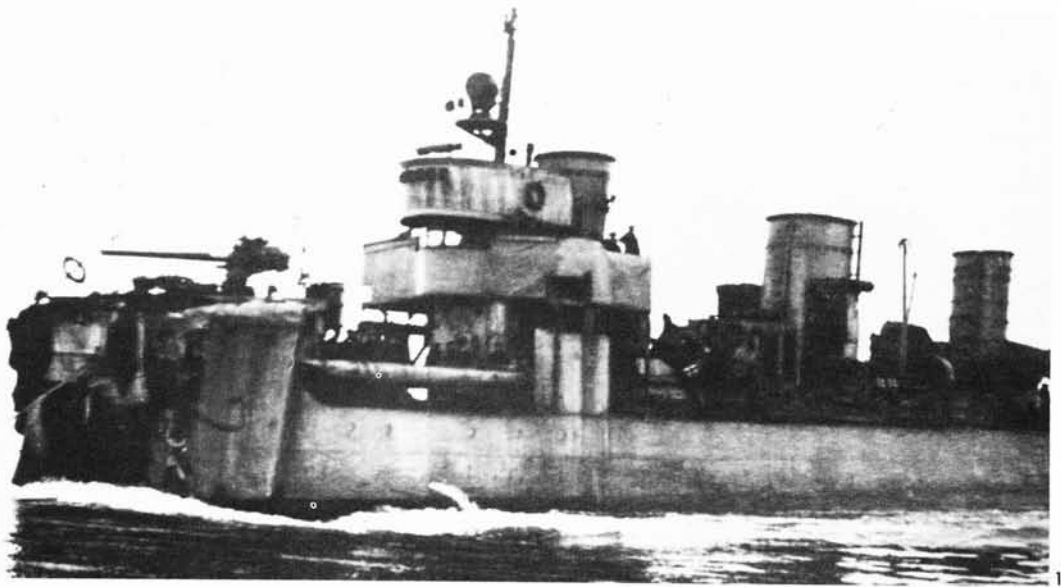
1 The Russian battleship Slava aground. Her after funnel has blown up  
(Author's collection)

2 B.111 after striking a mine. Her fore-ends have been entirely destroyed  
(Author's collection)

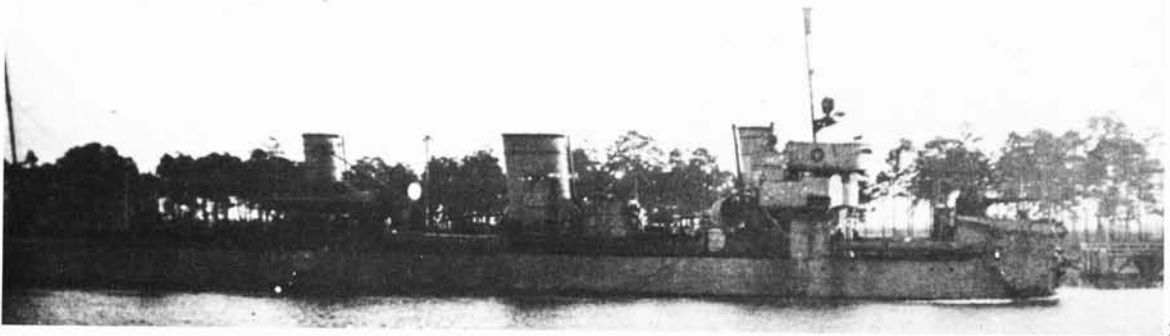
3 The Russian battleship Slava after the explosion  
(Author's collection)

4 Another close-up of B.111 alongside, after mining. Her port torpedo tube has been blown upside-down and both torpedoes are still in the tubes  
(Bundesarchiv)





1



2

1 Another disaster: B.98 after striking a mine, October 1917. The sturdy construction of the B-Boats is proved beyond doubt 2 B.98 after mining, October 1917. She still manages to steam slowly ahead 3 Another view of B.98 after mining, October 1917 4 A bows-on view of B.98. A seaman can be seen standing amidships in the wreckage. (Bundesarchiv)



3



4



V.100 (right) and G.101-104 (3rd Half-Flotilla) ready at Liban for the Oesel operation in October 1917

(IWM)

aground on Schildau Island and blown up. We saw the cloud of the detonation at a distance of 25km.

On the following day *B.111* struck a mine just forward of the bridge. Her forecastle sagged to the bottom and kept *B.111* anchored until next morning when it broke off completely. There were five dead and 16 injured. One man who had just retired for entirely private reasons suddenly found himself in the water somewhat dazed but unhurt. Evidently the deck above him had opened quickly enough to let him pass. He was very proud of that unusual feat.

In the clear autumn weather we saw the other Russian ships disappear behind the northern horizon. Our infantry took the islands of Dagoe and Moon. Kassar Wik was no more important. On 24 October the six remaining boats of Flotilla II were sent to Kiel screening battleships on the way. After repairs and boiler cleaning they returned to Wilhelmshaven and North Sea routine on 10 November.

### Action off Heligoland, November 1917

Two days later *B.110* with three other boats made a sweep across the southwest part of Dogger Bank. On 16 November the same group tried to intercept traffic between Dutch ports and England. Not a single steamer was sighted but many fishermen, and some were searched. On the way back Flotilla II tried to join a fight 70 miles WNW off Heligoland. There a large British cruiser force had attacked minesweepers protected by some light cruisers and torpedo boats. The British felt hampered by the minefields and succeeded in sinking one trawler only. When after two hours battleships *Kaiser* and *Kaiserin* ('the married couple', as they were nicknamed) arrived the British cruisers retreated. Flotilla II was just in time to see the last salvos and the light cruiser *Königsberg* with a long train of coal-black dense smoke which started on her upper deck. A heavy shell had pierced her three funnels and started a large fire in a coal bunker. On the following day Flotilla II had to sink the buoys laid by

the minesweepers because the swept channel now was known to the other side.

Some of the boats damaged in the Baltic finished their repairs in the following weeks. On 11 December *Emden* led Flotilla II through the minefields and parted company not far from the North Dogger Bank Lightship. *B.97*, *B.109*, *B.110* and *B.112* steered for the English coast north of the Tyne to attack traffic there, while 3rd Hfl (three Gs and *V.100*) went north to intercept one of the convoys between Norway and Scotland.

Both operations succeeded. About 30 miles north of the Tyne 4th Hfl sighted a steamer steering south, almost empty, her propeller churning the surface. *B.97* fired a torpedo which ran true but passed under its target. The second remained on the surface and ended ignominiously in the propeller of its intended victim. Then *B.112* took a hand. Her first torpedo hit amidships but the steamer stayed afloat until another torpedo hit her.

Going south 4th Hfl again overtook a steamer this time fully loaded. A torpedo from *B.97* hit her forward and *B.112* gave her the *coup de grâce*. Both crews left in their boats. After the war it was learned that both steamers were stragglers of a convoy going south. Fourth Hfl did not catch up with it because it met four small ships, probably minesweepers. Two were sunk by gunfire and two escaped in the darkness because *B.110* and *B.109* waited too long for orders to open fire. Then it was time to leave the coast and to return at high speed.

To the north 3rd Hfl ran into heavy weather and had to slow down. In the forenoon it reached the latitude of Stavanger and cruised out of sight of land. Shortly after noon it sighted a convoy from Lerwick to Norway, eight small steamers protected by the destroyers *Pellew* and *Partridge* and four armed trawlers. The British report says that in spite of the rough sea the German shooting was extremely accurate and rapid, so Commander Heinicke's efforts to improve gunnery had been successful. *Partridge* was sunk, and *Pellew* succeeded in escaping in a

rain squall and reached Norway with only one engine working. All the other ships were sunk, but 75 men were saved. Third Hfl returned through the Skagerrak and in this way avoided two groups of cruisers on patrol.

When the two half-flotillas were back in Wilhelmshaven, Admiral Scheer talked impressively to the crews and decorated some of their members. On 22 December Flotilla II screened heavy ships in exercises near Heligoland and then went to Kiel for Christmas, boiler cleaning and exercises. On 10 January it was back in the North Sea. An operation to intercept traffic near Flamborough Head had to be cancelled because the weather was too bad. There followed the usual sweeps along the Dutch Islands and to Dogger Bank. A group of trawlers escorting some U-boats through the mined area was carried by unexpectedly strong currents into a German minefield near Horns Reef and had to be extricated. The U-boats could be got out but seven of the 15 trawlers were lost on mines.

### Dover Raid, February 1918

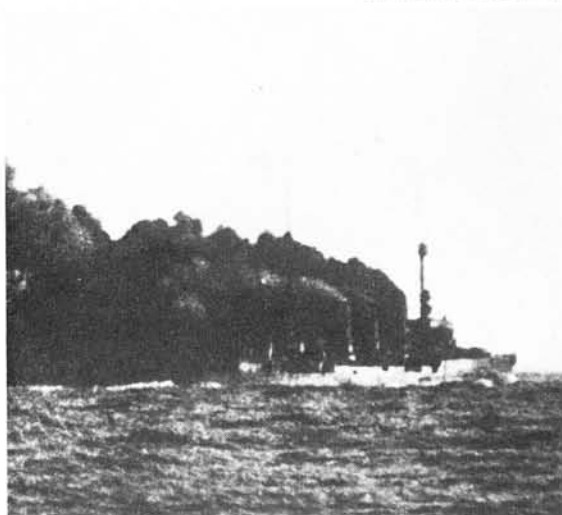
On 13 February 1918 *Emden* again led Flotilla II through the mined area and then sent it away for an attack on the British anti-submarine vessels in the Dover Straits. Thick fog upset the timetable so much that Commander Heinicke returned to *Emden* at anchor in the mined area. The next day was clear, and the attempt was repeated. Visibility was too good, for the Dutch Islands were in full view (and Flotilla II from them); more than 100 fishing vessels were sighted. At night *G.104* had to be sent back because of condenser difficulties. These had become frequent again, as the quality of the condenser tubes had evidently deteriorated as a result of the scarcity of some metals.

Shortly after midnight the two half-flotillas (four boats each) separated, the 4th to attack the northern part of the anti-submarine barrage, the 3rd the southern part. It had to reduce speed because *G.103*

had condenser trouble, too, but could not be sent back. It was a dark and quiet night and the Dover Straits were full of ships and fireworks. There were several strong revolving searchlights, one ashore near Dover and another on a vessel some miles to the south. Across the whole of the Straits a chain of small ships burnt magnesium flares which, about every 15 minutes, brightly lit up a large area for two or three minutes. Bypassing them to attack from the rear as planned was impossible. *B.97* went directly for the searchlight nearest to us. Soon we passed a small guardship at less than 100 yards but she did not take any action. Probably in order not to blind her, the revolving searchlight was elevated each time before it reached us. Eventually its bearer (the paddle minesweeper *Newbury*) was fired on at a distance of a few hundred yards. With her siren she tried to persuade us that it was all a mistake. Then her siren stuck, and she screamed like a wounded animal. After a few more salvos she was left behind in what seemed to be a sinking condition. Actually she kept afloat but had no means of giving the alarm or of making any signals.

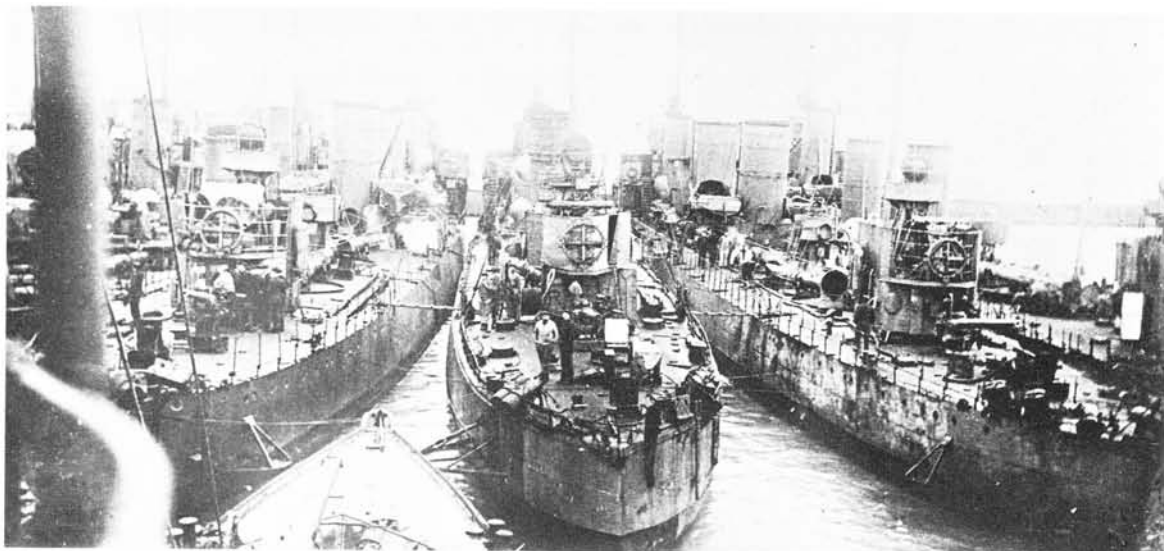
For about an hour 4th Hfl attacked several groups of small vessels. In most of them the magnesium flares went up which gave the impression that the whole ship had blown up. Actually only a few sank. At 0230 no more targets were near us, so Commander Heinicke set course for Zeebrugge which we reached without sighting any British ships. Third Hfl had worked in a similar way on the Calais side. On the way back it sighted some destroyers and turned away because *G.103* could not work up any speed with her leaky condensers. Near Zeebrugge *G.102* struck a mine forward but could enter under her own steam. It was probably a small mine from a British anti-submarine net. After refuelling Flotilla II left Zeebrugge the same evening and returned to Wilhelmshaven without sighting any ships. *G.102* was able to follow four nights later. Admiral Scheer again talked to our crews, and then

*The light cruiser Königsberg, 17 November 1917, after a shell hit through the lower part of her fore funnel*  
(Author's collection)



*The British destroyer, HMS Partridge, at the exact moment of being torpedoed, December 1917. A remarkable photograph*  
(Author's collection)





B-boats at Bruges dock in 1916

(IWM)

we went to Kiel for boiler cleaning and exercises.

By the middle of March we were in the North Sea again and mainly occupied with patrolling and protecting minesweepers. A sweep through Skagerrak and Kattegat on 12 to 14 April netted one small steamer only. Another could not be stopped by *B.110* before it reached Swedish territorial waters.

To complement the Spring offensive in France with a naval operation the entire fleet left its bases on 23 April. Originally it had been planned to attack traffic off the Thames and Dover Straits but then it was decided to aim for the convoys between Scotland and Norway. However, our intelligence proved unreliable. When, on the morning of 24 April, in calm weather, the German Scouting Forces searched the waters off the Norwegian coast north of Stavanger, not a single vessel came in sight. A day earlier or later would have made all the difference.

The battle cruiser *Moltke* selected this somewhat exposed position for a complete engine breakdown. It was the only time in the whole war that this happened to one of the big ships. The Battle Fleet had to be called up by W/T, and *Moltke* to be taken in tow by a battleship and brought back at a speed of about 10 knots. The Grand Fleet did not intervene. In the course of 25 April *Moltke* had her engines working again. Forty miles north of Heligoland she was hit in the starboard engine room by a torpedo from the British submarine *E.42*. Flotilla II, on the way home, was ordered back. At a speed of 30 knots and in close formation it ran into a bank of artificial fog laid by torpedo boats around *Moltke*. Within seconds visibility changed from a few miles to practically nil. However, Flotilla II was so practiced by now that it got through this tricky situation without any harm. *Moltke* could proceed at slow speed and reached Wilhelmshaven without further mishap.

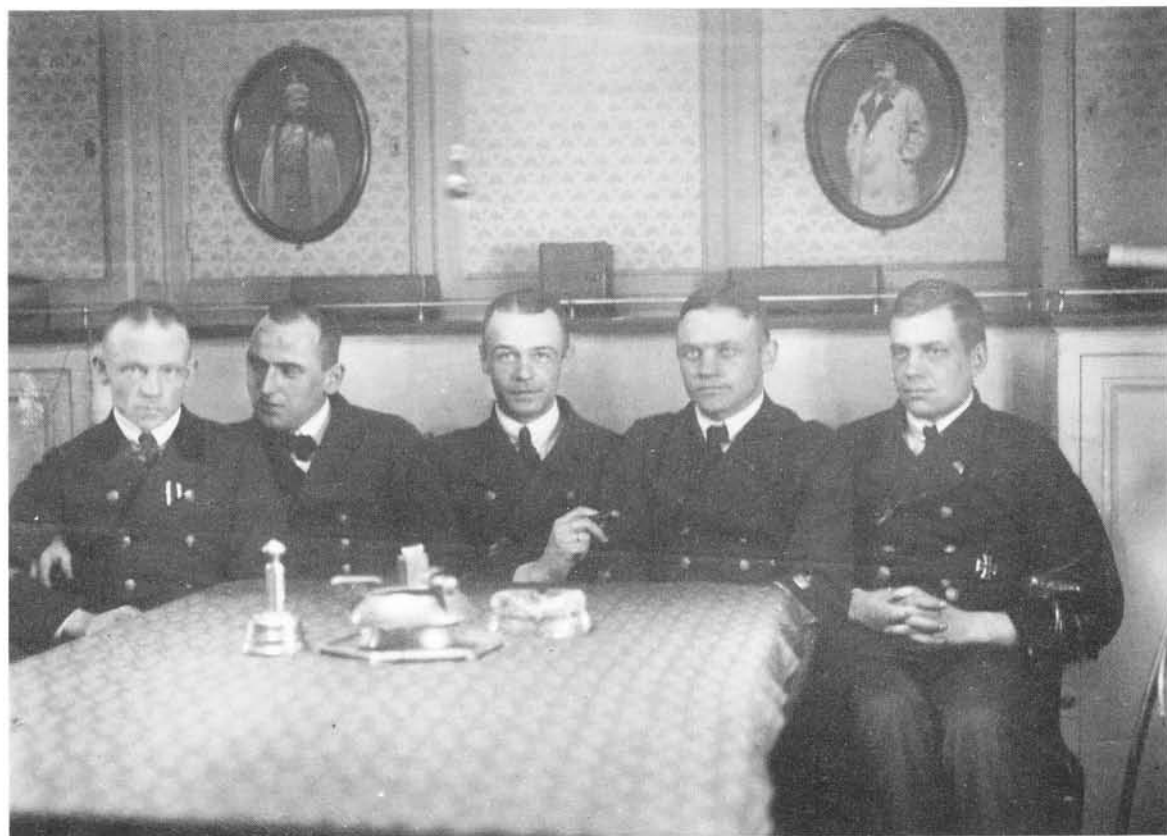
In the following weeks the narrow roadsteads around the island of Borkum served as bases for the protection of minesweepers and for submarine hunting. In June Flotilla II was sent to Kiel for its

annual refit. Firing directors were installed, and the gunnery officers sent to the Siemens factory at Berlin for three days' instruction. Berlin was the Imperial Residence, and the standing order there to wear frockcoat and stiff white collar had not been suspended even after four years of war. This formal dress was neither suited for travelling in a crowded tram for an hour nor for visiting the workshops of a large factory.

By the middle of September we were in the North Sea again. Minesweeping went on, but losses through British mines mounted. At the end of September the bases in Flanders had to be given up; the situation on land grew rapidly worse, and on 20 October the U-boat war was stopped. On 29 October the fleet assembled in Schillig Roads, officially for exercises. In the afternoon orders for a fleet operation were issued. Flotilla II was to attack traffic off the coast of Flanders, other torpedo boats off the Thames, while the main fleet was to keep near the Dutch coast and then to retire slowly. Its northern flank was to be protected by deep minefields.

This was a well-thought out and sensible plan with a good chance of success, not at all a suicide of the fleet as was alleged later on. When we heard noises on some big ships we thought they were cheers. Next morning the operation was cancelled and we learned that there had been riots in some ships. Battle Squadron III was sent to Kiel, while Battle Squadron I received orders to protect the minesweepers. When the *Thuringen* refused to weigh anchor 4th Hfl was ordered to assist in getting the mutineers off the ship. We manned our guns and torpedo tubes, and as a submarine was also present, in a short time the mutineers were on their way to Wilhelmshaven prison. After a few days they were free again, and 4th Hfl was not exactly welcome in Wilhelmshaven. It remained at sea until 10 November when everything was over. Our crews were completely reliable to the last day. In *B.110* a man who had just been sent on board (probably





Top: The officers of B.110 in the wardroom, 24 March 1918 Bottom: The nucleus crew of B.112 in Scapa Flow. Her ensign drapes the rail in the background (Author's collection)







- 1 *The Second Flotilla at Scapa Flow. Note the big ships in the background* (Herder Esslinger)
- 2 *The wardroom officers of B.110, after catching fish* (Author's collection)
- 3 *B.98 after the Armistice in the big lock at Wilhelmshaven. All armament, rangefinders and fire control have been removed as she is carrying mail to Scapa Flow* (NMM)
- 4 *A G-Boat of the Third Half Flotilla, 1912* (Author's collection)
- 5 *The captain of B.110 going on watch in Scapa Flow* (Author's collection)



specially picked) was on his way to put various demands to the commanding officer. The old hands intercepted him and treated him in such a way that he left on all fours and was not seen again.

#### Armistice and Surrender, November 1918

We had our hands full preparing for the internment which was arranged under the Armistice. On 19 November the fleet to be interned assembled in Schillig Roads. Here 4th Hfl had to send officers over to 3rd Hfl which had been in Hamburg where the Soldiers' Council sent all officers home. On 21 November ten battleships, five battle cruisers, eight light cruisers and 49 torpedo boats (one had struck a mine and sunk on the way) entered the Firth of Forth. There they were told that they would be interned in Scapa Flow.

In Scapa the big ships anchored, the torpedo boats were secured to buoys in pairs. Only nucleus crews remained, 20 men including one officer in the torpedo boats. Food had to come from Germany, but some fuel was provided by the British. Visits to other units were forbidden by our hosts, so for seven months 4th Hfl was practically on its own. We kept our boats ready for sea until May 1919 when the peace conditions were published and no hope remained to get a single ship home again. Our radio was taken away, mail took six weeks, and papers from London several days. We thought it possible that the fleet might be taken away by force and prepared our boats for scuttling. Admiral von Reuter who commanded the interned fleet learned of the ultimatum which ended on 21 June at noon but was not informed that signing of the Treaty of Versailles was postponed by two days. Shortly before noon on Midsummer Day he gave orders to scuttle the ships. Of the torpedo boats *B.112* sank first, soon followed by *B.110*, somewhat later by *B.111* and *B.112*. Of Flotilla II only *G.102* remained afloat. The crews were sent to prison camps and returned to Wilhelmshaven at the end of January 1920. Some of the men who sailed in *B.110* still keep contact with each other.

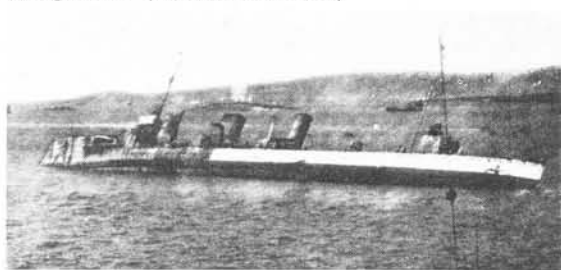


Surrendered torpedo boats at Scapa Flow in 1919. 'B' class boats on the left and smaller boats behind

(NMM)

	Launched	Fate
<b>B97</b>	15 December 1914	Italian <i>Cesare Rosso</i> 1920
<b>B98</b>	2 January 1915	Scuttled 1919
<b>V99</b>	9 February 1915	Mined 17 August 1915
<b>V100</b>	8 March 1915	Scrapped in France 1921
<b>B109</b>	11 March 1915	Scuttled 1919
<b>B110</b>	31 March 1915	Scuttled 1919
<b>B111</b>	8 June 1915	Scuttled 1919
<b>B112</b>	17 June 1915	Scuttled 1919

B.111 *Fourth Torpedo Boat Half-Flotilla*, scuttled in Scapa Flow 21 June 1919. Note the scuttled big ship in the background (Author's collection)



#### Characteristics of B109 to 112 \*

##### Displacement

1374 tons (at designed draught)  
1843 tons (fully loaded and equipped)

##### Dimensions

Length 98 metres, Beam 9·35m, Draught 3·39/3·83m

##### Machinery

2 turbines, 4 boilers 18·5 atmospheres 40,000 HP  
(Turbines built for Russian destroyers of the *Gavril* class)  
730 revolutions 527 cbm oil top speed on trials 37·4 knots

##### Endurance

2,620 nautical miles at 20 knots

##### Method of Construction

Longitudinal and transverse bulkheads  
double bottom  
2 engine rooms, 4 boiler rooms  
3 funnels, at first all the same height,  
Later forward funnel made higher  
Anti-rolling tanks (B-boats only)

##### Guns

4×88mm L/45; from 1916 4×105mm guns  
L/45 semi-automatic

##### Torpedo Tubes

6×500mm (2 singles, 2 doubles)

\*B97 and 98 practically the same, V99 and 100 very similar.