VICTORY

By ADMIRAL WILLIAM SOWDEN SIMS



Difficulties of Mine Laying in the North Sea

Was there no more satisfactory volving unlimited new construction, The unusually strong tides and performing such indispensable serof our critics as tedious and ill-conceived, and that a mere glance at a small map of the North Sea suggestgrounds, the German craft had either they certainly sounded a note which demands of the army on the munition Heligoland, and were then increasing abandoning the convoy system; this This implies more than a mere saving sage way of the North Sea that stretched between the Shetland Islands and Norway, and thence sail around the northern coast of Ireland. We necessarily had little success in attempting to interfere with the Uboats while they were making these lengthy open sea voyages, but concentrated our efforts on trying to oppose them after they had reached the critical areas.

But a casual glance at the map convinced many people that our procedure was a mistake. And most newspaper readers in these days were giving much attention to this map. Many periodicals, published in Great Britain and the United States, were fond of exhibiting to their readers diagrams of the North Sea; these diagrams contained one heavy black bar drawn across the Straits of Dover and another drawn across the northern passage from Scotland to Norway. The accompanying printed mat-ter informed the public that these pictures illustrated the one effective "answer" to the submarine. The black bars of printer's ink represented barrages of mines and nets, which, if they were once laid between the indicated spots, would blow to pieces any submarine which attempted to force a way across. Not a single German U-boat could therefore succeed in getting out of the North Sea. All the trans-Atlantic ships which contained the food supplies and war materials so essential to Allied success, would thus be able to land on the west coast of England and France; the submarine menace would automatically disappear and the war on the sea would be won. Unfortunately, it was not only the pictorial artists employed on newspapers and magazines who insisted that this was the royal road to success. Plenty of that time, demonstrated the futility number. The work of the Dover

When I arrived in London, in April other vessels across the Channel was where this so-called barrage was sup-1917, the great plan of confining the submarines to their bases was everywhere a lively topic of discussion. It is a fact of which the British public was justly proud. Yet it did not necessarily follow that the submarines could be submarines with the passage way between Scotland and Norway is 250 There was not a London club in which the Admiralty was not denounced for its stupidity in not adopting such a perfectly obvious plan. The way to destroy a swarm of hornets—such was the favorite simile—was to annihilate them in their nests and not war, did not offer an effective harrier. nihilate them in their nests, and not war, did not offer an effective barrier taken or even considered before by to hunt and attack them, one by one, to the submarines. This was due to any nation. The English Channel is

way of destroying submarines than to offset the increasing losses of life rough weather experienced in the vice. by pursuing them with destroyers, and shipping, and altogether too pro- vicinity of the Straits of Dover are The overwhelming fact was that we

"Dig Them Out."

open seas? It is hardly surprising and terrible blow, which would end expressed it at the time, "our ex- assemble for the convoy system. The tears"-blood because of the men who adequate; to have diverted any of The naval officers who expressed were lost in laying the mines and them for other duties would at that factories had prevented the Admir- these obstructions at the rate of 3,000 would have been sheer madness. One fact, not generally known at alty from obtaining a sufficient mines a month. Yet this vast explo-

rines were destroying Allied shipping submarine to strike the mine in order posed mine field was as long as the at the rate of nearly 800,000 tons a to produce the desired explosion. The distance from Washington to New month. The one thing which was cer- mine could be located at any depth York, some idea of its magnitude tain was that, if this destruction and from it a long "antenna," a thin may be obtained. Nothing like it had sloops, chasers, and other craft in the bable defeat in the end, but a swift well known. As one British officer needed all the surface craft we could to surrender unconditionally. The supported in that position by a small of detail which the lay mind can perience in attempting to close the destroyers which we had available that would check these depredations such as the hull of a submarine, 000,000—is perhaps not an astonishand that would check them in time. simply by striking this antenna at ing figure in the statistics of this war, ed a far more reasonable solution of fears that, under the shipping condinets, and tears because the arduous time have meant destruction to the emphatically—which in April and mitted to the mine, would cause this The convoy system was the one naval any point, would produce an electric but it gives some conception of the the problem. The bases from which tions prevailing in 1917, such a bril- work of weeks would be swept away Allied cause. The object was to in- May of 1917 held forth the certainty mine to explode. The great advantplan-the point cannot be made too current, which, instantaneously trans- size of the undertaking. the German submarines found their liant performance could not possibly in a storm of a single night. In adway to the great centers of shipping be carried out in time to avoid defeat, dition, at this stage of the war, the tempting to sweep a passage through sult. Other methods of opposing the Only about one-fourth the number rewere Ostend and Zeebrugge on the merely gained a reputation for British were still experimenting with it and facilitate its defense by our submarines were developed which quired under the old conditions would in Great Britain is strictly reserved. Belgian coast, Wilhemshaven and timidity and lack of resourcefulness. In the impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The impossibility of defending which is they had discovered gradually forces. The magnificently supplemented the con-Cuxhaven on the German coast, and When the First Lord of the Admirthat the design which they had used ing a mine barrier placed too far voy; but the convoy, at least in the tion estimated that 100,000 mines without their permission no quotathe harbor of Kiel in the Baltic Sea.

From all these points the voyage to alty, Winston Churchill, in 1915, declared that the British fleet would be that the British fleet would be the Convoy, at least in the tion estimated that 100,000 mines without their balts south was shown by experience in spring and summer of 1917, was the would form a barrier that would be the would be the would be the convoy, at least in the would be the the waters that lay west and south of "dig the Germans out of their holes had been defective. But the process known as the "wet triangle." By Allied cause. To have started the passing over it or through it, where-Ireland was a long and difficult one; like rats," his remarks did not great- of developing new mines in war time April, 1917, the British had laid more North Sea barrage in the spring and as, under the old conditions, about in order to reach these hunting ly impress naval strategists, but had proved slow and difficult; and the had proved slow and difficult; and the summer of 1917, would have meant 400,000 would have been required.

It Couldn't Be Done. could be laid in such deep waters in prosecution as the more spectacular try Gentleman. sufficient numbers to have formed any details. barrier at all; and even if we had I wish to emphasize the fact that, possessed one, the construction of the in laying such a barrage, our object barrage would have demanded such was not to make an absolute barrier court?" an enormous number that they could to the passage of submarines. To "Used such highbrow language not have been manufactured in time have done this we should have needed that even the court interpreter was to finish the barrage until late in the such an enormous number of mines baffled."-Yonkers Statesman. year 1918. Presently, the situation that the operation would have been began to change. The principal fact impossible. Nor would such a dense which made possible this great enter- barrier have been necessary to sucprise was the invention of an entirely cess; a field that could be depended new type of mine. The old mine con-sisted of a huge steel globe, filled with fifth of the submarines that attempthigh explosive, which could be fired ed the passage, would have representonly by contact. That is, it was neces- ed complete success. sary for the surface of a ship, such | Another circumstance which made as a submarine, to strike against the the barrage a feasible enterprise was surface of the mine, to start the that, by the first of the year 1918 it mechanism which ignited the ex- was realized that the submarine had plosive charge. The mere fact that ceased to be a decisive factor in the this immediate contact was essential, war. It still remained a serious emenormously increased the difficulty of barrassment, and every measure successfully mining waters that which could possibly thwart it should range in depth from 400 to 900 feet. be adopted. But the writings of Ger-If the mines were laid anywhere near man officers, which have been publi-

in manufacturing resources; it meant "come up to our house quick!" that we should need a proportionately

smaller number of mine laying ships, ed the dostor. Thus in 1917 the North Sea barrage crews, officers, bases, and supplies-

I have already made the point, and I cannot make it too frequently, that time is often the essential element in war—and in this case it was of vital importance. Whether a program is a wise one or not depends not only upon the feasibility of the plan itself, but upon the time and the circumstances in which it is proposed. In the spring of 1917 the situation which we were facing was that the German submarines were destroying Allied shipping.

Rewards of Punishment. "Doctor," called the small boy, "Who is sick at your house?" ask-

"Everybody but me. I'd been was not a ready answer to the popular all those things which are seldom con- naughty, so they would not give me proposal "to seal the rats up in their sidered by the amateur in warfare, any of the nice mushrooms that pa hole." We did not have a mine which but which are as essential to its picked in the woods!"-The Coun-

> Over Their Heads. "How did he acquit himself in



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MINES READY FOR THE NORTH SEA BARRAGE This mine field, extending from the Shetland Islands to Norway, was the greatest undertaking of its kind in the history of warfare. It was made possible by the manufacture of a new type of mine—the work of American inventors.

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naval men, in the United States and of the whole idea. Most newspaper in Europe, were constantly making critics assumed that the barrage from the contention, and statesmen in our Dover to Calais was keeping the sub-public knowledge. But in 1917 this own country and in Allied countries marines out of the Channel. That the destroyers, aircraft, and other patrols program.

Dover to Calais was keeping the Sub-public knowledge. But in 1917 this patrol was not preventing the U-boats from slipping through the Channel. The Straits of Dover, at the point after they had escaped into the open various reasons too complicated for celebrated for its strong tides and What the situation needed was not a description in an article of this brief stormy weather, but it is not the scene of the tempestuous gales which rage so frequently in the winter months in these northern waters. If the British navy had not succeeded in constructing an effective mine barrier across the English Channel, what was the likelihood that success would crown an effort to build a much greater obstruction in the far more difficult waters to the north?

REAR-ADMIRAL STRAUSS (Fourth Officer from the right)

In charge of the mine-laying forces, with his staff at head-

quarters in Inverness.

visit the scene, and sweep up enough laid mines in the same area in order of the obstruction to make a hole to trap the British minelayers; and through which their submarines could pass. It is evident that, in a barrage siderable losses on each side.

Barrage Must Be Protected.

The point which few understood at that time was the mere building of the barrage would not in itself prevent the escape of submarines from the North Sea. Besides building such a barrage, it would be necessary to protect it with surface vessels. Other-

The Browne Mine.

tect it with surface vessels. Other-wise German mine sweepers could attacks. Moreover, the Germans also ject impossible. ship-building facilities, was increasing at a tremendous rate. A diagram We Americans may take pride in of these, the two essential factors in extending 250 miles, it would not be difficult to find some place in which to conduct such sweeping operations, it is also clear that it would take a considerable number of patrolling vessels to watch such an extensive barrier and to interfere with such like the considerable number of patrolling to get a few submarines through the barrier and to interfere with such like the considerable number of patrolling to get a few submarines through the barrier and to interfere with such like the considerable number of patrolling to get a few submarines through the barrier and to interfere with such like the consideration of like the consideration of submarines had done their worst, we call the fact that it was an American who invented an entirely new type of mine, and therefore solved this difficult and nerve racking process; it sometimes required the submarine campaign, disclosed invented an entirely new type of mine, and therefore solved this difficult. In the summer of 1917, Mr. Ralph C. Browne, an electrical ensured the next that it was an American who invented an entirely new type of mine, and therefore solved this difficult and nerve racking process; it sometimes required the summer of 1917, Mr. Ralph C. Browne, an electrical ensured the next that it was an American who invented an entirely new type of mine, and therefore solved this difficult and nerve racking process; it sometimes required to the summer of 1917, Mr. Ralph C. Browne, an electrical ensured the next that it was an American who invented an entirely new type of mine, and therefore solved the summer of 1917, Mr. Ralph C. Browne, an electrical ensured the next that it was an American who invented an entirely new type of mine, and the summer of 1917, Mr. Ralph C. Browne, an electrical ensured t vessels to watch such an extensive barrier and to interfere with such operations. Moreover, we could not several were unquestionably destroyed in the operation, yet the activity of submarines in the Atlantic showed it would be necessary to detach a considerable part of our forces to the consideration of the commander submarines had done their worst, would show a promising increase. Note that the submarines in the Atlantic showed that these minefields had by no means invention did not seem to offer many it was, therefore, very important that we should leave no stone unturnit would be necessary to detach a considerable part of our forces to protect these ships while they were laying their mines. Those responsible for anti-submarine operations believed that, in the spring and summer of 1917, it would have been unwise to detach these anti-submarine vessels from the areas in which they were