

ty agreed, for on October 28 he sacked First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg—an easy scapegoat because of his German parentage. The new First Sea Lord was to be none other than Jacky Fisher, who, in Churchill's view, "was right in nine tenths of what he fought for."

Fisher and Churchill were an extraordinary pair to run the Royal Navy: the irascible, opinionated old admiral and the gifted amateur not much more than half his age. Many people predicted that it would not be long before they quarreled. But in the beginning, at least, they got on famously, and Fisher impressed everyone with his drive. The old man appeared to possess all the verve of his bygone youth, talking nonstop, using his favorite clichés and telling his favorite stories over and over again. One observer at the Admiralty, Baron George Riddell, called him "a wonderful old boy—full of life and energy. At lunch he got up and showed us how he taught a Polish countess dancing. He waltzed round the room in great style."

Scarcely had Fisher moved into his Admiralty office when he ordered a massive warship construction program. His plan included five battleships, five light battle cruisers, two light cruisers, five flotilla leaders, 56 destroyers, 65 submarines and numerous smaller vessels—for a total of some 600, all to be completed as quickly as possible. Instructions went out to block U-boats from the northern bases with minefields and jetties of sunken, concrete-laden merchant ships and with heavy submarine nets across the harbor entrances. Dirigibles would patrol the coastal waters; shore batteries were to be augmented. This was the sort of impetus the Royal Navy badly needed.

But Fisher was only four days in office when he received news of yet another devastating defeat for the world's largest and greatest navy. This time the calamity had occurred in the Southeast Pacific off the coast of Chile, some 7,000 miles away.

German Admiral Maximilian von Spee, commander of Germany's China Squadron, had spent the months since the beginning of hostilities moving his best ships eastward, to raid along the west coast of South America and possibly to round Cape Horn to harass British bases and shipping in the South Atlantic. By the end of October Spee had assembled a force of five vessels at the Juan Fernández Islands, some 400 miles west of the Chilean coast at about the latitude of Santiago. The two most formidable were the cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, both displacing 11,420 tons and built in 1907 with main batteries of eight 8.2-inch guns. Accompanying them were the light cruisers *Nürnberg*, *Leipzig* and *Dresden*, built between 1906 and 1909 with ten 4.1-inch guns apiece. All the ships could move at better than 20 knots, and their crews, after a couple of years together at sea, were superbly efficient.

Spee, a popular and admirable officer, was acting virtually on his own, unsupported by any clear order of record from his superiors, and he knew that his was an ultimately hopeless mission. "I am quite homeless," he noted at one point. "I cannot reach Germany. We possess no other secure harbor. I must plow the seas of the world doing as much mischief as I can, until my ammunition is finished, or a foe far superior in power succeeds in catching me."

The British Admiralty knew roughly where he was, from occasional

sightings reported by agents in the Pacific islands. The British guessed that Spee would round Cape Horn into the Atlantic. But the ships the British had on hand to oppose him were not fit for the job. The Falkland Islands, east of Cape Horn, were part of the Royal Navy's worldwide network of coaling stations, and there Rear Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock was stationed with four vessels: his flagship the *Good Hope*, a 14,100-ton cruiser built in 1902 with a pair of 9.2-inch guns and sixteen 6-inchers; the *Monmouth* and the *Glasgow*, a pair of light cruisers with 6-inch guns; and an armed merchant ship named the *Otranto*, with eight 4.7-inch guns. Coming down the east coast of South America to join him was the battleship *Canopus*, even older than the others: she was laid down in 1897 and completed in 1900. She had four 12-inch guns and was designed for 18½ knots; however, her engines were worn out and at that moment she was limping along at scarcely 12 knots.

Although he was instructed to destroy German cruisers, Cradock had received orders from the Admiralty that were vague and confused. First he was warned that Spee's vessels were just around the Horn, and that "you must meet them in company"; in other words, he must fight. Next he was advised that his ships were "to search and protect trade"—which by British Naval tradition could also mean that he must fight if he spotted enemy warships of whatever strength. He was told that the *Canopus* was a "citadel around which all our cruisers could find absolute security"—which presumably meant that he was expected to wait around for the old bucket. When Cradock protested that the *Canopus* was useless and that he needed additional help from newer fleet units, he was turned down on the grounds that two Allied Japanese warships and one British light cruiser were on the way from the northern Pacific.

Cradock, an impulsive and brave man, angrily decided to go it alone. Handing the governor of the Falklands a sealed envelope to be mailed home "as soon as my death is confirmed," he set out around the Horn with his creaky little squadron, the *Canopus* wallowing 250 miles in his wake. Spee, meanwhile, had upped anchor and was steaming south from the Juan Fernández Islands. The squadrons met on the evening of November 1 off the port of Coronel, 1,400 miles north of Cape Horn, in rising winds and heavy seas.

As soon as Cradock spotted the smoke of the German ships, he made the worst conceivable move, turning southward to run a parallel course with the enemy. The German light cruisers were outgunned and they stayed clear of the action. But the two German heavy cruisers mounted 16 rapid-firing 8.2s, enormously superior to Cradock's one pair of old 9.2s on the *Good Hope*. What is more, the German gunners were superb (the *Gneisenau* had several times won the Kaiser's award for gunnery), while Cradock's men were green reservists. And the British ships were to the west, silhouetted against the sunset's afterglow, while Spee's ships were almost invisible against the darkening coastline.

There followed what one British survivor called "the most rotten show imaginable." At 7:00 p.m. Spee opened fire and with his third salvo destroyed the *Good Hope*'s forward gun. Meanwhile the *Gneisenau* began to chew up the *Monmouth*. Cradock desperately attempted to move the two beleaguered cruisers closer to the enemy to bring their 6-



Before the Battle of Coronel off Chile in November 1914, Admiral Christopher Cradock warned that he would be crushed by German Admiral Maximilian von Spee's cruisers. His pleas were ignored—and Cradock was proved right.



At a reception in Valparaiso after his victory at Coronel, Admiral von Spee had a premonition of death. Presented with a bouquet of roses by one of his sympathizers, Spee gloomily commented: "Better save them for my funeral."

inchers into play, but this meant going into the weather. The winds were now near hurricane force, and foam and green water swept over the bows so that the deck-mounted 6-inch guns were all but inoperable. Methodically the *Scharnhorst* pumped 35 hits into the *Good Hope*; at last one shot struck the British vessel's magazine. "At 1950," an officer aboard the *Glasgow* wrote of the *Good Hope*, "there was a terrible explosion between her mainmast and her funnel, the flames reaching a height of over 200 feet, after which she lay between the lines, a black hull lighted only by a glow." A moment later the *Good Hope* was gone, carrying with her Admiral Cradock and some 900 officers and men.

Meanwhile the *Gneisenau's* expert gunners were inflicting much the same torture on the *Monmouth*, which the watch aboard the *Glasgow* reported to be "burning furiously, and heeling slightly." The severely damaged vessel turned away from the battle. So did the *Glasgow* and the *Otranto*, both of which fled southward in the darkness toward the battleship *Canopus*. The limping *Monmouth*, however, was overtaken by the Germans in the darkness at about 9 o'clock. She was sinking and could not fire her guns, but her flag was still flying and her engines were running. She turned toward the enemy as if to ram, and the Germans opened up at a range that began at 1,000 yards and mercifully ended at 600, when the *Monmouth* capsized and sank. Not a man among the 1,654 on board the two British cruisers had survived. The Germans suffered two men wounded from six inconsequential hits.

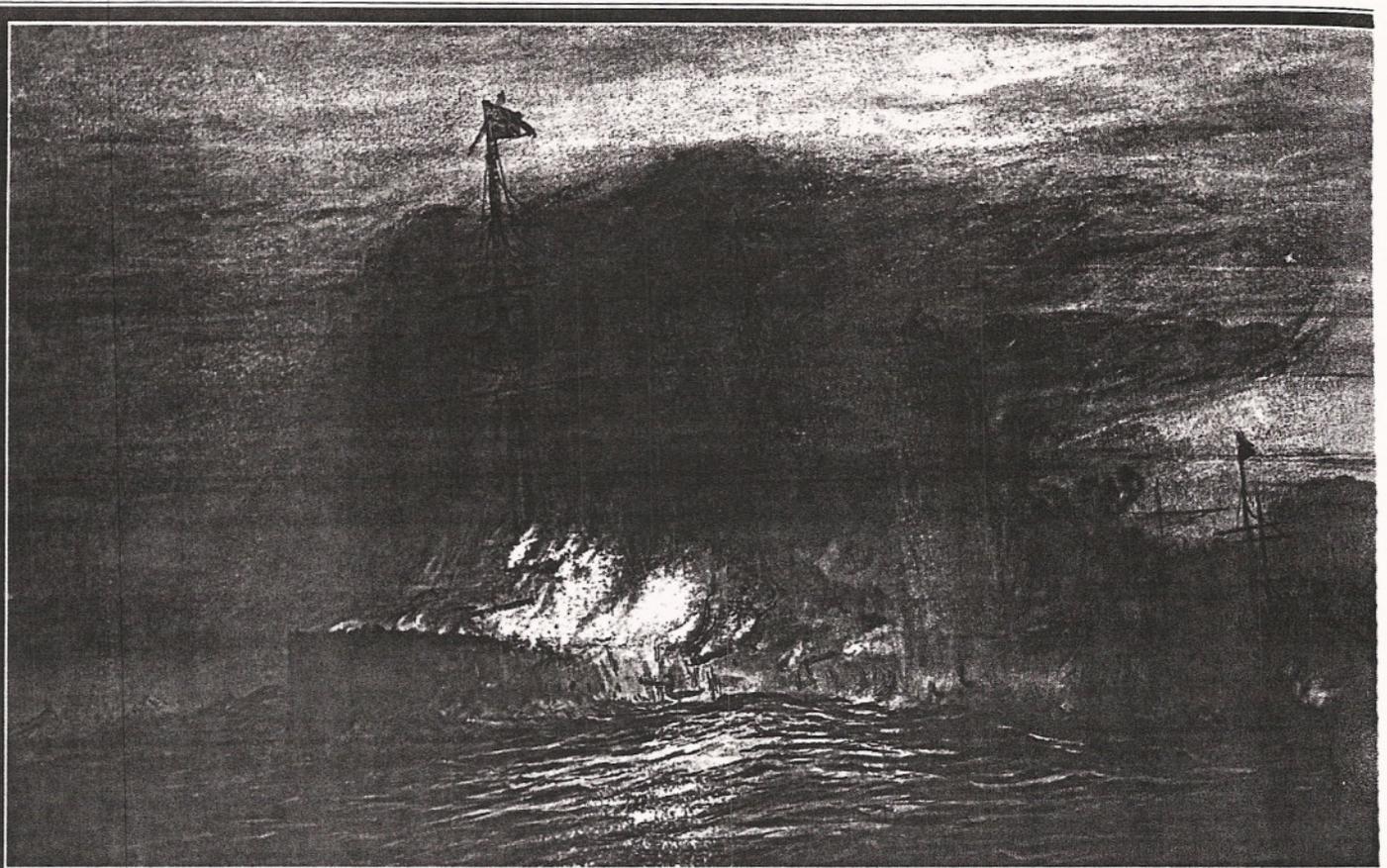
When the news reached Germany, the Kaiser announced the award of 300 Iron Crosses to the victorious crews. His ships and men had inflicted the first loss upon Britain in a high-seas battle between surface vessels in close to a century.

On November 4 Churchill proposed to Fisher that a battle cruiser with 12-inch guns should be sent to the Falkland Islands to avenge Cradock. "But I found Lord Fisher in bolder mood," wrote Churchill. "He would take two." The signal went to Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, Commander in Chief of the Grand Fleet: the *Invincible* and the *Inflexible* were to depart their North Sea base and "proceed to Plymouth with all dispatch." The two battle cruisers reached Plymouth on the 8th, and were put under the command of Vice Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee.

A competent but overbearing and opinionated man, Sturdee was appointed for an unusual reason. Years before, he had been a supporter and protégé of Lord Charles Beresford, with whom Fisher had fought a vicious feud over the redeployment of the fleet. Fisher hated Sturdee, and he refused to keep that "damn fool" and "pedantic ass" at the Admiralty. With his usual finesse, Churchill eased Sturdee out of Fisher's way by proposing that he be appointed Commander in Chief, South Atlantic and South Pacific, with the important task of catching Spee.

Fisher agreed and ordered Sturdee and the battle cruisers to be ready to sail on the 11th—in three days' time. The *Invincible* needed new firebricks in her furnaces, and Plymouth dockyard reported that she could not be ready until the 13th. Fisher blew up: they must sail on the 11th. Besides, the 13th was a Friday: "What a day to choose!" Churchill supported him, signaling the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard, "Ships are to sail on Wednesday 11th. Dockyard arrangements must be

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Roll of Honour.

H.M.S. Good Hope
 All Saints' Day, November 1st, 1914.
Ernest G. Harris
 "Greater love hath no man than
 this; that he lay down his life
 for his friends."
 With deepest sympathy in our
 common loss.
 From *Ernest G. Harris*
 Hampton Court Palace



Blazing from stem to stern, the British cruiser *Good Hope* sinks with all hands after a battle off Chile with the mighty *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. The loss of 900 men occasioned an outpouring of sympathy: the family of each crewman, including that of engine-room technician Ernest Harris (bottom center), received a condolence card (bottom left) from the widow of the *Good Hope*'s captain, as well as a plaque and medals (bottom right) as testimony that, in the words of an Admiralty official, "theirs is an immortal place."

made to conform. You are responsible." The admiral superintendent took a train to London to protest in person that it was impossible. Fisher ordered him back to his post, saying the ships would have sailed before he reached Plymouth. And so they had—taking with them, on Fisher's command, a number of extremely unhappy civilian bricklayers to fix the furnaces en route. The two battle cruisers picked up six lighter cruisers plus an armed merchantman, the *Macedonia*, on the way and reached the Falklands, where the *Canopus* was already moored, on December 7. Spee arrived off the islands at dawn next morning.

The German admiral had intended to destroy the coaling station and whatever ships he found nearby, and then start on the long and probably hopeless voyage up the Atlantic to Germany. He sent the *Gneisenau* and the *Nürnberg* ahead to reconnoiter. Their lookouts first saw black smoke that made them think the coal stocks were being burned in anticipation of surrender. Then they saw the masts and funnels of warships. The Germans held their approach course until, at 13,500 yards, two salvos of very heavy shells hurtled out of the harbor. One shell struck the *Gneisenau*'s afterfunnel, blowing a large hole in it but not disabling her. At this, the *Gneisenau* and the *Nürnberg* turned sharply away, as did Spee astern in the *Scharnhorst*, trailed by the *Leipzig* and the *Dresden*.

The salvos had come from the 12-inchers of the old *Canopus*, which Fisher, in one of his inspirations, had grounded in the harbor mud to serve as a fort. And there were more surprises for the Germans. Just after the turnaway from the *Canopus*' salvos, German crewmen spotted tripod masts—a scarcely credible sight, because the only British ships with tripod masts were dreadnoughts and battle cruisers, and Spee had had no warning from usually reliable German intelligence that any such British vessels were about. Refusing to believe the evidence, Spee did not flee. Since he thought he was faster than any major British ship in the area, he could wait for a final assessment of enemy strength, then run if necessary. When the *Invincible* and the *Inflexible* appeared at the harbor mouth, with their engines winding up to a flank speed of some 28 knots and their main batteries of eight 12-inch guns apiece swinging to the ready, Spee knew he was doomed. Now the Germans fled.

The chase, in bright, clear weather, was almost leisurely. Sturdee, certain of his superior speed and armament, signaled his fleet to have the midday meal before battle was joined. By 12:45 p.m. he was in range of the rearmost German cruiser, and he signaled, "Engage the enemy." Thereupon, Spee ordered his three light cruisers to try to escape, while the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* engaged the battle cruisers.

Within three hours, Spee's flagship, the *Scharnhorst*, outranged and overwhelmed by the British 12-inchers, had absorbed so many hits that she was listing badly and on fire. Sturdee signaled Spee to surrender but there was no reply. At about 4:15 the *Scharnhorst* rolled over and sank, taking the entire crew of 765 men, including the gallant Spee, with her.

For nearly three hours more, while the German light cruisers tried desperately to run to the safety of the South American coast, the *Gneisenau* fought on alone. It was an extraordinarily brave and hopeless struggle. The *Gneisenau* was hit by at least 50 British 12-inch shells. Still her captain refused to surrender. At last, at 5:40, she had fired all her

ammunition, lost pressure in all her boilers, and some 600 of her crew of 850 were dead or wounded. Her captain now gave orders to hasten her end by scuttling, and hauled down her flags. "He called for three cheers for His Majesty," a surviving officer wrote, "and the *Gneisenau* was then abandoned. I fell into the water as she capsized."

The British picked up 190 survivors, floating in the chilly, oil-covered water "like a great patch of brown seaweed," as one rescuer recalled. Sturdee expressed admiration to the surviving Germans, especially for their gunnery. "We sympathise with you in the loss of your Admiral and so many officers and men," he said in a formal announcement. "Unfortunately the two countries are at war; the officers of both navies, who can count friends in the other, have to carry out their country's duties which your Admiral, Captains and officers worthily maintained to the end."

Yet the German sacrifice was useless. The British cruisers caught the *Nürnberg* and sank her at 7:27, saving only five among some 320 men (of whom a few were attacked by giant albatrosses as they died in the frigid water). An hour later the *Leipzig* went under, with all but 18 of 290 men. The *Dresden* got away but was hounded for months and was finally sunk in March by a British cruiser at the Juan Fernández Islands, where Spee had weighed anchor to start the fateful southern ocean action.

The tactical moral of the two battles was obvious. At Coronel the aging and obsolescent British ships had been no match for the newer Germans, and at the Falklands the Germans had been no match for the battle cruisers. On the high seas the fast, big-gun ship was supreme—as Jacky Fisher had always known it would be.

In terms of naval strategy, the Falklands action marked the end of fighting on distant seas. The last of the scattered German ships had been defeated, including a daring raider in the Indian Ocean named the *Emden*, which had been sunk a month earlier (pages 75-78); most British ships were called home, and the big-ship war was now concentrated entirely in the North Sea.

In that forbidding stretch of water, full of prowling U-boats and hidden mines, backed by the beetling armament of Germany's High Seas Fleet, even Fisher had been growing cautious. There would be no quick Armageddon to follow up the Falklands triumph: "No big ship of the Fighting Fleet should go into the North Sea," he had decided, and had written in his usual hyperbolic style, "WHEN the German Big Fleet comes out, THEN our Big Fleet will come out! WHEN the German battle cruisers come out, THEN our battle cruisers will also come out!"

Thus the initiative rested with Germany, if she chose to seize it. And so she did, through the efforts of Admiral Franz von Hipper, commander of the High Seas Fleet's battle-cruiser squadron and an officer who disliked the Kaiser's timorous doctrines.

Hipper had been born the son of a tradesman in Bavaria, far from the ocean, but when he was a child he had decided to go to sea. He had entered the Naval Academy at 17, and he became a cheerful but strong-willed officer. He detested paper work and avoided shore appointments—but this seems not to have damaged his career. When he made admiral at 49, he had little experience in administrative work. His flag

