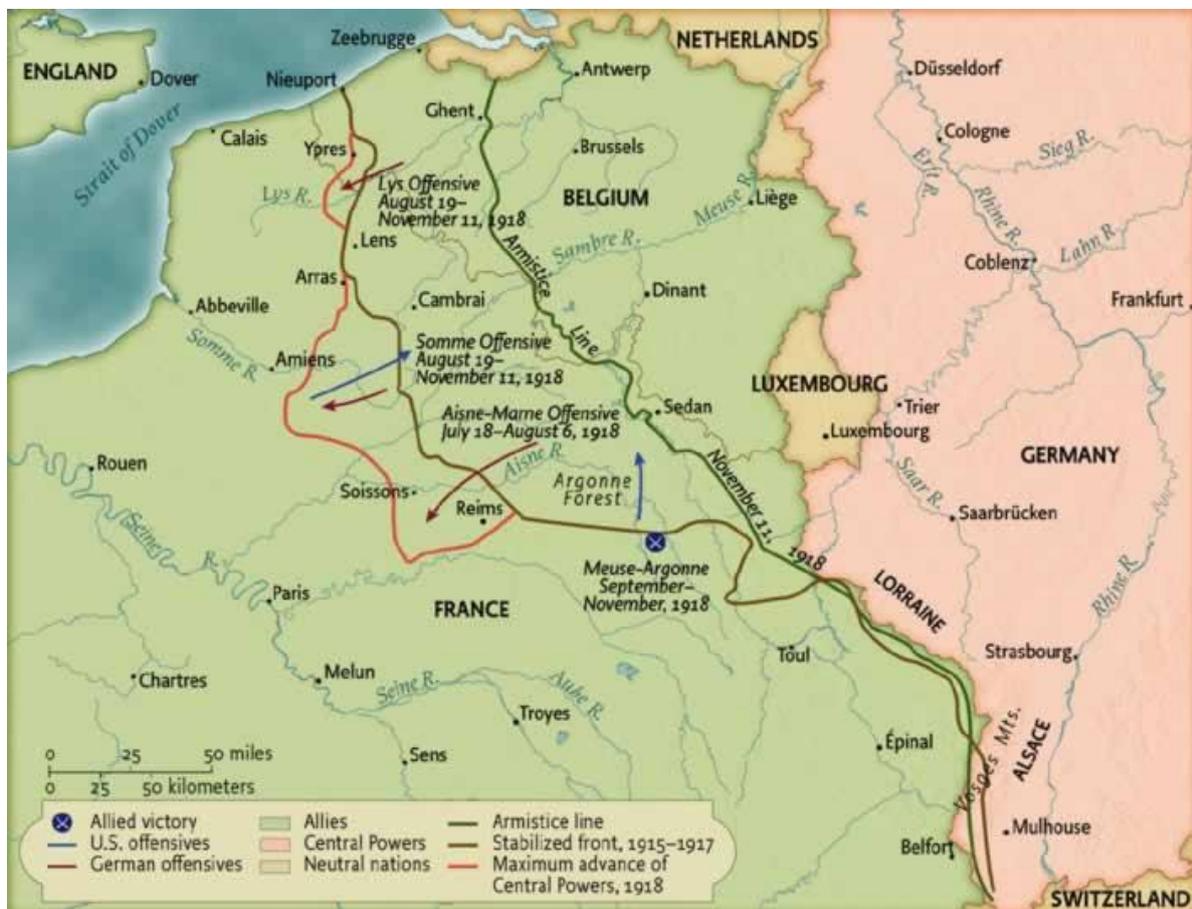




From the Front

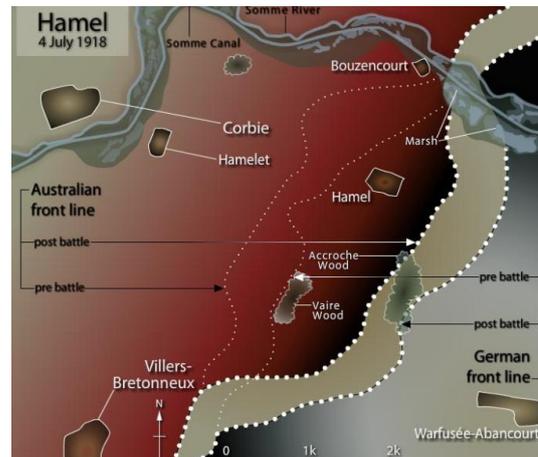
Part 1
July 1918



Another temporary lull followed the collapse of Gneisenau on the 12th June which is again reflected in the casualty figures for the month as 16 men from the Borough lost their lives.

The fighting soon resumed as on the 4th July the Australians launched a surprise attack which captured up to 15,000 prisoners. They advanced one and a half

miles on a four mile front, including the capture of the village of Hamel and the trench system which lay beyond it to the South of the Somme. The Germans were so surprised that the whole action only was completed after about an hour. The tanks cooperated closely with the infantry and this was the key to success, supported by the observation of strict secrecy. The attack commenced at 3.10 there was no opening barrage but the attack commenced with drumfire and the Germans were so overwhelmed that by the time they could open fire with their artillery the “Diggers” were well on their way to their last objectives.



The attack was planned by Lieutenant-General John Monash who firmly



believed that the infantry should not be used as cannon fodder. Accordingly the infantry followed the tanks (indeed some sat on the vehicles leaving themselves open to sniper fire).

However the reason for the early start was to ensure secrecy and by dropping a combination of smoke and gas shells he

conditioned the Germans to expect a gas attack, but what followed was a smokescreen which completely deceived

the Germans. The infantry followed in waves and stay close to the barrage unfolding before them. At the call of surrender the German troops, a mixture of Prussians and Rhinelanders caused no trouble but came out with their hands



held high. Above the battlefield many planes flew, swooping low to drop bombs on the enemy positions. This increased the German tendency to yield as their infantrymen were convinced that the Allies had launched a gas attack. The

Australians were joined by divisions from the newly landed U.S. troops who were delighted to find significant success so near to their special day of Independence.



However, despite these setbacks and tactical errors Ludendorff was still convinced that the way to victory lay through Flanders and the Channel Ports. To hide his intentions and draw BEF troops from Flanders he now planned a diversionary attack along the River Marne.

The battle commence on the 15th of July when 23 German divisions of the 1st



and III Armies assaulted the French IV Army under Henri Gouraud to the east of Reims. This French Army had an attachment from the US 42nd Division.

Simultaneously 17 divisions from the VII Army aided by the IX Army attacked the French VI Army to the west of Reims. This was labelled the Battle of the Mountain of Reims and Ludendorff's objective was to split the French in two. German tactics called for surprise but French intelligence based on aerial observation gave clear warning

and from 27 prisoners taken in a trench raid they learned the actual hour of the attack.

The German bombardment was due to start at 12.10 but the French opened fire on the

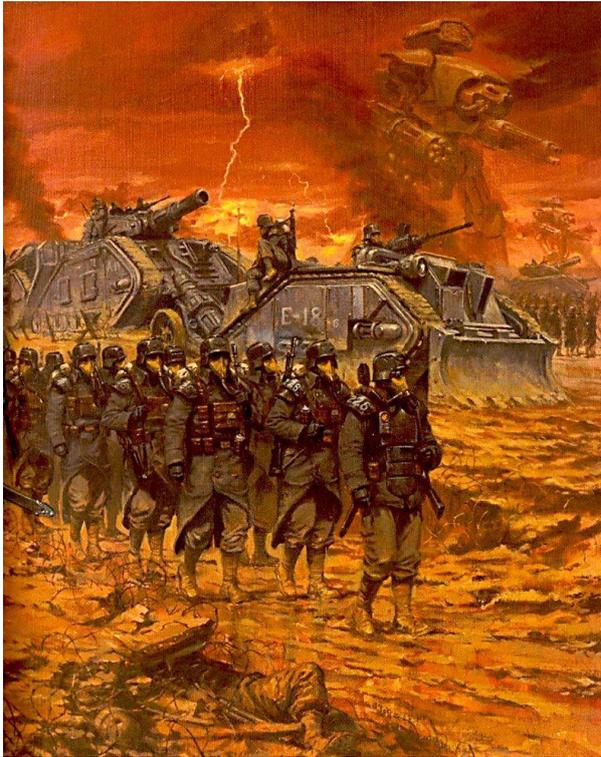
German assault trenches at 11.30 which naturally shook the attackers. When the Germans finally opened



fire they pounded an almost empty French front line and their counter – battery fire struck many vacated gun pits. However, the attackers moved easily through the French front but when they encountered the French mainline they were ordered to rest, regroup and wait until the field guns had been moved into range. The attack was resumed at 8.30 the following morning and halted by accurate fire from the French artillery. A repeated attack at noon also failed and a failed French counter – attack convinced the German commanders that they could not prevail. The IV Army was now able to send reinforcements to the west who had not fared so well.

In the west on the opening day of the offensive the defenders of the south bank of the Marne had to endure an intense three hour bombardment including many gas shells. Under this cover stormtroopers swarmed across the river in every kind of transport, including 30 man canvas boats and rafts. They then began to

build skeleton bridges whilst under fire from the Allied units opposing them. By



early evening the Germans had captured a bridgehead on either side of the Dormans 6.4 kilometres deep and 9 kilometres wide. This was achieved despite the aerial intervention by 225 French bombers dropping 44 tons of bombs on the makeshift bridge. Ludendorff regarded this as the very pinnacle of military victory but the French were reinforced by the British XXII Corps and 85,000 Americans and the advance stalled on the 17th July.

This latest German failure to break through or destroy the Allied armies allowed Foch to proceed with the planned major counteroffensive on the 18th July. 24 French Divisions, including the American 92nd and 93 Infantry divisions under French command joined by other Allied troops and 350 tanks attacked the recently formed German salient.

The man who never was: - There is a legend that two British Officers, Grant and Page, devised a deceptive ruse. A briefcase with false plans for a counter attack was handcuffed to a man who had died of pneumonia and placed in a vehicle which appeared to have run off the road at a German controlled bridge. On finding these the Germans had no alternative but to adjust their attack to thwart the false Allied plan. Consequently the combined forces under Foch were able to unleash a different onslaught on exposed parts of the enemy lines leaving the Germans with no choice but to retreat.



In this the Second Battle of the Marne the Allies won an important victory. Marechal Foch was awarded the baton of a Marshal of France; the Allies had



taken 29,367 prisoners 793 guns and 3,000 machine guns. They also inflicted 168,000 casualties. This Marneschutz – Reims/Friedensturm (peace offensive) was to be the last German throw of the dice. It was also labelled as the Second Battle of the Marne and it marked the end of

a series of German victories and heralded a string of Allied victories which would bring Germany to its knees.

During the month of July 30 men from Dewsbury gave their lives in order that others might live theirs

From Russia truly devastating news is beginning to emerge. The Russian



Imperial Romanov family, Tsar Nicholas II, Tsarina Alexandra and their five children Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and the heir apparent Tsarevich Alexei have been assassinated by the Bolsheviks, apparently on the direct orders of Vladimir Lenin who has assumed control of the country following the

recent revolutions.

Apparently they and all those who had chosen to accompany them into imprisonment were apparently shot, bayoneted and clubbed to death in the town of Ekaterinburg, which is situated in the Ural Mountains, on the night of 16th/17th July 1918. The deed was carried out by Bolshevik troops led by



Yakov Yurovsky under the orders of the Ural Regional Soviet and issued by Lenin, Sverdlov and Felix Dzerzhinsky. Their bodies were then stripped, mutilated, burned and disposed of in a field called Porosenkov Log in the Koptyaki forest.

Crowned in 1896, following the premature death of his father Alexander II from kidney failure, like Louis XVI of France he was a somewhat reluctant ruler and would have preferred the quiet life which made him unsuitable for a monarch who was trying to preserve an autocratic system of government surrounded by fanatics who were calling for change. Russia was still a backward country when he came to the throne, serfdom had not been abolished until 1861 and most of its people lived under an oppressive regime which strove to deny democracy. The disastrous Russo-Japanese War of 1905 led to Revolution in 1915 and the subsequent granting of a representative Parliament (Duma) by Nicholas pledged to constitutional reforms. However, there was little consistency as Nicholas would dissolve the Duma every time they opposed him, creating support for the growing opposition which became evermore revolutionary in character. In 1914, due to his commitment to the Triple Alliance Nicholas led his country into a devastating European war which Russia was ill equipped to win. Opposition grew and in March, as we have seen open revolution broke out on the streets of Petrograd, the state capital, and Nicholas was forced to abdicate. In June 1918 Civil War broke out following the rise to power of Lenin. After the withdrawal from the War, at the conference of Brest-Litovsk which was an

absolute capitulation, the Bolsheviks found themselves facing the forces of the right known as the White Army. The fate of the Royal family then became a crucial issue.

Nicholas had been reunited with his family on the 22nd March 1917 and although he was no longer a monarch he and his family were sent to live at the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoe Selo, albeit under house arrest, with the group closely guarded by members of his former army, the family were confined to their quarters. In August Kerensky's Provisional Government evacuated the Romanovs to Tobolsk, allegedly to offer them greater protection from the rising tide of revolution. There they lived in the former governor's palace in a fair amount of comfort. However, when the Bolshevik's came to power in October 1917 their conditions of imprisonment became gradually harsher, as talk of putting Nicholas on trial grew more frequent.

On the 1st March 1918 the family were placed on soldier's rations which meant the departure of their 10 devoted servants and the giving up of certain luxury items such as butter and coffee. In April the Bolsheviks the former Tsar and Tsarina and their daughter to Ekaterinburg, the Tsarevich, who was a severe haemophiliac was too ill to travel remained with his three sisters, in Tobolsk. The family were reunited in May 1918 and imprisoned in the Ekaterinburg Ipatiev House which was designated the House of Special Purpose.

Prior to this the family had many of the imperial Palace treasures with them, including leather-bound volumes of photographs and vintage wines. Even their Kodak "Brownie" camera was confiscated. With the move to Ekaterinburg the new revolutionary high command decreed that such privileges could no longer be justified in an emerging communist state. Therefore the House of Special Purpose was specially prepared. Stepping from the train after a bone rattling five day journey and exhausted Nicholas and his wife were received into the hands of the local soviets along with their doctor, maid, valet and footman. As the car drew up outside the House of Special Purpose the family had their last

look at the outside world, the Tsar was then told “Citizen Romanov you may now enter.” There was to be no more acknowledgment of their status and titles. The house itself was hidden by a high wooden fence and the windows were blacked out, the family were confined to a suite of five rooms in what was now a gloomy prison. The spirited girls aged between 17 and 22 ignored warning not to peek out of an unsecured top-floor window, until a sentry fired a warning shot over Anastasia’s head. The family were forbidden to speak any language except Russian, the Tsarina liked to address the children in English, she was after all the granddaughter of Queen Victoria; the servants could only address them by their names and patronymics. They were subject to regular searches, confiscation of their money and had to ring a bell each time they wished to visit the toilet facilities and the water supply was strictly rationed. Despite the fact that the Cathedral was only across the street they were forbidden to attend mass.

The health of the family suffered, Alexei had, since April, been suffering from recurring haemorrhaging of the knee causing him agonising pain, he was now 13 years of age and doctor’s had advised he would not survive much longer than his sixteenth birthday, the family were becoming exhausted by a relentless round of all night vigils at his bedside. From Childhood when his debilitating condition was first diagnosed he had been looked after by a sailor who had served aboard the Royal Yacht, “the Standart”. His name was Klementy Nagorny and his main duties as Alexei’s “dyadka” (uncle) were to accompany the Tsarevich during public appearance, entertain him and guard his life and well being. He could not endure the abuse thrown at the Tsarevich by his new guards and this caused frequent tension with the new custodians of the Royal family. He even scrubbed off the offensive rhymes and indecent drawings made by the guards as he did not want the children to be exposed to them. The family relied more and more upon him as Alexei continued to suffer and had to be carried everywhere, especially after the splint was removed and he was allowed into the garden, however, it was plain that he would never walk again. On the

6th July this noble and faithful man was taken away and brutally shot by the representatives of the Urals Soviet.

The Tsar was now a sorry shadow of the man who had once ruled 8.5 million square miles of empire, and it has been speculated that he had been cushioned, since his troubles began, by narcotics and it was alleged that his almost childlike indifference to losing the throne was a result of smoking a mixture of hashish and the psychoactive herb henbane, administered by a Tibetan doctor who had been recommended by Rasputin.

The Tsarina was a physical and emotional wreck, plagued by migraines, heart palpitations, insomnia and sciatica she became hopelessly addicted to a whole range of drugs. She had long admitted being saturated with Veronal, a barbiturate she also had recourse to morphine and cocaine for menstrual pain.

By now the anti – Bolshevik forces were advancing up Ekaterinburg. The local Soviet had been ordered to prevent a rescue of the Romanovs accordingly the guards were changed on the 4th July but this was more than a precautionary measure. On June 27th Maria, the most flirtatious of the Grand Duchesses had been discovered in a compromising situation with one of the guards, Ivan Skorokhodov. He had smuggled in a cake for her 19th birthday and their liaison had developed quickly from there. Skorokhodov was sent to the city's prison whilst Maria was reprimanded by her family. Tragically in their final weeks together her eldest sister, Olga and her mother froze her out, refusing to speak to her as punishment for bringing disgrace upon them.

The anti Bolshevik forces were now augmented by Czech deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army and were rapidly approaching the city. Cholera and typhus had broken out and food was strictly rationed. The mood grew increasingly ugly, forty five members of the local Orthodox diocese were murdered, their eyes gouged out tongues and ears cut off and the mangled bodies were then dumped in the river.

The outside world also added to their troubles. The Washington Post had published rumours that they had already been executed. In England George V had withdrawn his earlier offer of asylum, due to a possible backlash from the left wing elements now growing steadily in the country. Three days before the final act was played out he was watching the cricket at Lord's.

The Bolshevik leader Lenin was aware that the demise of the family would anger the Kaiser because of the Romanov links with the German Royal family. Meanwhile his advisers were telling him that Ekaterinburg would soon fall to the Czechs and that the Royal family could prove to be a rallying point against his new regime.

In a secret meeting the Urals Soviet passed the death sentence on the family and had identified a mineshaft as a suitable burial and a doctor had been ordered to procure 400lbs of sulphuric acid to destroy the bodies. Tuesday 16th July began uneventfully for the Romanovs but their guards were putting the finishing touches to their plans by assembling an armoury of guns to execute their orders and even ordered 50 eggs from the local nunnery to give them strength to resolve. Two of the guards got cold feet and had to be sent away. At 3.00pm the family walked around the strip of unkempt garden for the last time and after evening prayers went to bed only to be wakened in the early hours and told that the Whit Army was approaching and might launch an artillery attack on the house.

They were ordered to go downstairs and the female members of the family put on their undergarments which had been sewn with jewels which they had secreted to ease their new life once they had escaped. At 2.15 on the 17th July they were led down into the basement, which was lit by a single electric bulb, the windows had been nailed shut and Tsarina Alexandra complained that there were no chairs. The family and servants were lined up for a last official photograph. Then they were left alone which their assassins drank shots of

vodka to give them the necessary Dutch courage for the deed. Re-entering the room a guard read out the statement sentencing them to death.

He was met by faces registering complete incomprehension, the family made the sign of the cross and a man walked towards the Tsar and shot him point blank in the chest. Other guards fired as his body fell to the floor; half drunken guards shot clumsily hitting the Tsarina in the left side of the skull. Poor Alexei, too crippled to move, sat transfixed with terror his face splattered with his father's blood. None of the girls died quickly or painlessly, Maria was felled by a bullet in the thigh lay bleeding until repeated stabbing in her torso extinguished all the life from her. Her sisters were eventually finished off with an 8 inch bayonet, Olga having been shot in the jaw and Tatiana in the back of the head as she tried to flee.

The scene turned into an orgy of killing with only gunpowder smoke to soften the horrific scene, the last of the women to die was Anastasia who received an atavistic lunge from a drunken guard who attempted to penetrate her chest with his bayonet. Eventually the head of the hit squad Yakov Yurovsky took his gun to her head. Alexei alone was alive; he was wearing a garment sewn with jewels which acted as a flak jacket. Yurovsky put his gun to the boy's head and he slumped back resting on his father's body.

The whole incident had taken a frenzied 20 minutes but the Romanov dynasty had been wiped out. On the afternoon of the 19th July Filipp Goloshchyokin announced at the Opera House on Glavny Prospect that "Nicholas the Bloody" had been shot and his family taken to another place. Sverdlov granted permission for the local newspaper in Ekaterinburg to publish the "execution of Nicholas, the Bloody Crowned Murderer" An official announcement appeared in the national press two days later that the monarch had been executed on orders from the Ural Soviet under pressure posed by the approach of the Czechoslovaks. The propaganda generated by the Bolsheviks was directed towards diverting attention from Lenin and fixing it at a local level.

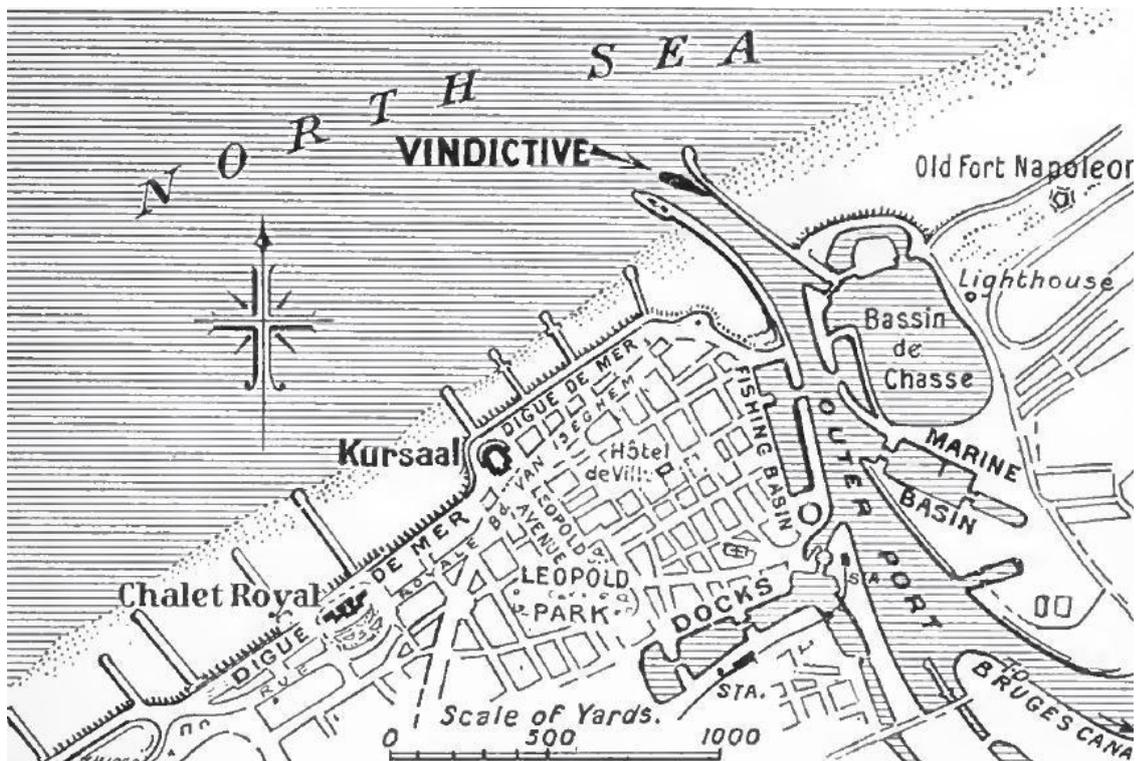
Rumours spread in Ekaterinburg about the disposal site and it was believed that when the vehicle carrying the bodies broke down on the way to the chosen site Yurovsky made new arrangement and buried most of the acid covered bodies in a pit sealed and concealed with rubble and railroad ties then earth.

It became official Soviet policy the Whites should not be provided with a live banner to rally around especially in the present difficult circumstances.

Glorious End of HMS Vindictive

Another brilliant Naval Feat

In early May the Secretary of the Admiralty issued the following statement: -
“The operation designed to close the ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge was



successfully completed last night when the obsolete cruiser H.M.S Vindictive was sunk between the piers and across the entrance of Ostend Harbour.”

Since the conclusion of the attack on Zeebrugge ended Vindictive has been



filled with concrete and fitted out for this very purpose. Our light forces have now

returned to their base with the loss of one motor launch, which had been damaged and was sunk by the orders of the Vice Admiral to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy, our casualties are reported as light.

The raid (officially designated “Operation VS” was the second of two attempts to nullify the effect of the submarines from Ostend upon Allied shipping in the Channel.

After the German Army captured much of Belgium following the Battle of the Frontiers in 1914, the Allied forces were left holding a thin strip of coastline to the west of the Yser. The remainder of the Belgian coast came under the occupation of German Marine Divisions, including the important strategic ports of Antwerp and Bruges.

As British forces on the southeast coast of Britain regrouped, remanned and



repaired following heavy losses at Zeebrugge, a return to Ostend was launched with the intention of blocking the canal and consequently severing Bruges from the sea, closing the harbour and trapping the 18 U-boats and 25 destroyers present for months to come. Vice Admiral Keyes and Commodore Lynes devised an operational plan to attack the canal mouth at

Ostend once again.

Two obsolete cruisers—the aged HMS Sappho and the battered veteran of Zeebrugge, HMS Vindictive—were fitted out for the operation by having their non-essential equipment stripped out, their essential equipment reinforced and picked crews selected from volunteers. The ships' forward ballast tanks were filled with concrete to both protect their bows during the attack, and act as a more lasting obstacle once sunk. *Vindictive* was commanded by Sub Lieutenant Alfred Edmund Godsal; her six officers and crew of 48 were all volunteer veterans of the previous failed attempt by *Brilliant*. The two sacrificial cruisers were, as with the previous attack, accompanied by four heavy monitors under



Keyes' command, eight destroyers under Commodore Hubert Lynes in HMS Faulknor and five motor launches. Like the blockships, the launches were all crewed by volunteers; mostly veterans of previous operations against the Belgian ports.

All preparations for the operation were completed by the first week of May and on 9 May the weather was nearly perfect for the attack. The British armada had collected at Dunkirk in Allied-held France and departed port shortly after dark. Two minutes after midnight, the force suffered a setback when *Sappho* suffered a minor boiler explosion and had to return to Dunkirk, unable to complete the journey. Although this accident halved the ability of the force to block Ostend, Lynes decided to continue the operation, and at 01:30, the force closed on the port, making the final preparations for the assault. Torpedoes fired from motor launches demolished machine gun posts on the ends of the piers marking the canal, beginning the



attack. Ten heavy bombers of the newly formed Royal Air Force then dropped incendiary bombs on German positions, but did not cause significant damage. In spite of the fog, air operations continued as planned under the overall direction of Brigadier-General Charles Lambe. At the same time as the aerial bombardment began, the long range artillery of the Royal Marine Artillery opened fire on Ostend from Allied positions around the Belgian town of Ypres.

In preparation for the attack, Godsall and Lynes had carefully consulted



available charts of Ostend following the previous operation's failure caused by German repositioning of navigation. This careful study was, however, rendered worthless by a sudden fog which

obliterated all sight of the shore. Steaming back and forth across the harbour entrance in the fog as the monitors (ships with disproportionately large guns designed for work on offshore Britain) and German shore batteries engaged in a long range artillery duel over the lost cruiser, Godsall looked for the piers marking the entrance to the canal. As he searched, two German torpedo boats sailed from Ostend to intercept the cruiser, but in the heavy fog they

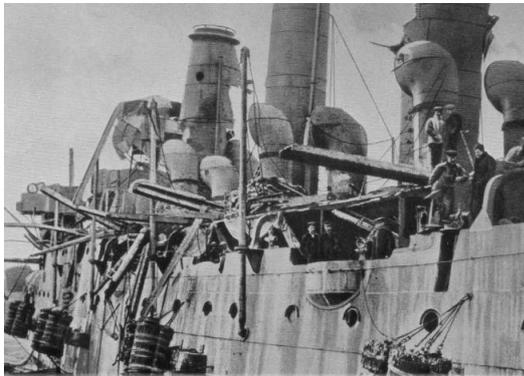


collided and, disabled, limped back to shore. During this period, Godsall's motor launches lost track of the cruiser in the murk, and it was not until the third pass that *Vindictive* found the entrance, accompanied by only one of the launches. Heading straight into the mouth of the canal, guided by a flare dropped by the launch, *Vindictive* became an instant target of the German batteries and was

badly damaged, the shellfire exacerbating the damage suffered in the earlier Zeebrugge Raid and seriously damaging *Vindictive's* port propeller.

Alfred Godsal intended to swing *Vindictive* broadside on into the channel mouth, but as he ordered the turn, the right screw broke down completely, preventing the cruiser from fully turning. Before this was realised on the cruiser's bridge, a shell fired from a gun battery on shore struck Commander Godsal directly, killing him instantly and shattering the bridge. Most of the bridge crew were killed or wounded by the blast, including First Lieutenant Victor Crutchley, who staggered to the wheel and attempted to force the ship to make the full turn into the channel. The damaged propeller made this maneuver impossible and the drifting cruiser floated out of the channel and became stuck on a sandbank outside, only partially obscuring the entranceway.

Realising that further maneuvering would be pointless, Crutchley ordered the



charges to be blown and the ship evacuated.

As Engineer-Lieutenant William Bury prepared to detonate the scuttling charges, Crutchley took a survey of the ship and ordered all survivors to take to the boats on the seaward side of the wreck. As men

scrambled down the ship's flank away from the shells and machine-gun bullets spitting from the harbour entrance, Crutchley made a final survey with an electric torch looking for wounded men among the dead on the decks. Satisfied that none alive remained aboard, he too leapt onto the deck of a motor launch bobbing below. The rescue mission itself, however, was not going as planned. Of the five motor launches attached to the expedition, only one had remained with the cruiser in the fog; *ML254* commanded by Lieutenant Geoffrey Drummond. The launch—like the cruiser—was riddled with bullets; her commander was wounded and her executive officer dead. Drummond was

awarded the Victoria Cross. Despite her sheltered position behind the cruiser, fire from shore continued to enfilade the launch and a number of those aboard, including Lieutenant Bury, suffered broken ankles as they jumped onto the heaving deck.



ML254 then began slowly to leave the harbour mouth, carrying 38 survivors of *Vindictive's* 55 crewmen huddled on deck, where they remained exposed to machine gun fire from the shore. As Drummond turned his



boat seawards and proceeded back to the offshore squadron that was still engaged in an artillery duel with the German defenders, one of the missing launches, *ML276* passed her, having caught up with the lost cruiser at this late stage.

Drummond called to *ML276's* commander—Lieutenant Rowley Bourke—that he believed there were still men in the water and Bourke immediately entered the harbour to search for them.

Drummond's launch proceeded to the rendezvous with the destroyer

HMS Warwick, overweighted and sinking, so severe was the damage she had suffered. Hearing cries,

Bourke entered the harbour but could not identify the lost men. Despite heavy machine gun and artillery fire, Bourke returned to the scene of the wreck four times before they discovered two sailors and

Vindictive's badly wounded navigation officer Sir John



Alleyne clinging to an upturned boat. Hauling the men aboard, Bourke turned for the safety of the open sea, but as he did, two 6 in (150 mm) shells struck the launch, smashing the lifeboat and destroying the compressed air tanks. This stalled the engines and caused a wave of highly corrosive acid to wash over the deck, causing severe damage to the launch's hull and almost suffocating the

unconscious Alleyne. Under heavy fire, the boat staggered out of the harbour and was taken under tow by another late-arriving motor launch. After the operation, Bourke's launch was discovered to have 55 bullet and shrapnel holes.

Offshore, as *Warwick's* officers, Keyes' staff and the survivors of *Vindictive* gathered on the destroyer's deck to discuss the operation, an enormous explosion rocked the ship causing her to list severely. *Warwick* had struck one of the defensive mines off Ostend and was now in danger of sinking herself. The destroyer HMS *Velox* was lashed alongside and survivors from *Warwick*, *Vindictive* and *ML254* transferred across to the sound ship. This ragged ensemble did not reach Dover until early the following morning, with *Warwick* still afloat. British casualties were reported in the immediate aftermath as being eight dead, ten missing and 29 wounded. German losses were three killed and eight wounded.

Despite German claims that the blockage did not impede their operations, the operation to close the Ostend canal seemed to have been at least partially successful. The channel was largely blocked and so Bruges was ostensibly closed off from the open sea, even if the position of the blockship meant that smaller ships could get through. In fact, the entire operation had been rendered moot before it even began, due to events at the wider canal in Zeebrugge. British assessments of that operation had proven optimistic and the channel there had not been properly closed. Small coastal submarines of the UC class had been able to pass through the channel as early as the morning after the Zeebrugge Raid and German naval engineers were able to dredge channels around the blockages at both ports over the coming weeks.

At Ostend, *Vindictive* did prevent larger warships passing through the channel, although smaller craft could still come and go at will. The larger warships in Bruges were trapped there for the remaining months of the war; the town was

captured by the Allies in October 1918. The blockages at Ostend and Zeebrugge took several years to clear completely, not being totally removed until 1921. On



a strategic scale the effects of the raids at Ostend and Zeebrugge on the battle of the Atlantic were negligible. Despite this, in Britain the Ostend Raid was feted as a success. Three Victoria Crosses and a host of lesser awards

were given to the men involved. The Admiralty presented it as a fine example of daring and careful planning from the Royal Navy, providing a valuable morale boost at one of the most critical moments of the war.

ASK 16 May 2018