

CHAPTER CLXXII.

FISHERMEN AND THE WAR (II).

A PREVIOUS CHAPTER—SKIPPERS AND FISHERMEN, R.N.R.—ACTIVITY OF BRITISH FISHING VESSELS—CASUALTIES—HEAVY WAR LOSSES—ADVENTURE ON A GERMAN SUBMARINE—THE FISH SUPPLY—A PRISONER OF WAR—"SUBMARINE BILLY"—THE WORK OF PATROLLERS AND MINE-SWEEPERS—FISHERMEN'S ROLL OF HONOUR—ACTS OF HEROISM—SPORADIC LAWLESSNESS—OUT OF BOUNDS—PROFIT AND LOSS OF FISHING—PRICES OF FISHING VESSELS—LIFE-SAVING—A FISH YARN—SPECIAL FUNDS AND AGENCIES

IN Chapter CXXI. the organization of fishermen as mine-sweepers and patrollers in connexion with the Royal Navy was described, and their wonderful and effective work was dealt with; the system of fishing which existed before the war was explained, and an account was given of the great changes that hostilities necessitated in carrying on this vast enterprise on which such an important part of the supply of the nation's food depended. It was shown how priceless an asset were the men of the deep-sea grounds and the in-shore waters—the fleeters and the single boaters, and to what an enormous extent the *matériel* and *personnel* of the fishing industry had been used by the naval authorities in the successful prosecution of the war at sea. Details were given which showed how extensive and far reaching were the operations of the one-time fishermen; but it was not until the beginning of 1917 that Admiral Jellicoe publicly stated that the number of vessels of all classes comprising the British Navy was nearly 4,000, and that the *personnel* of the mercantile marine had been largely drawn upon for, amongst other things, "the manning of the whole of our patrol and mine-sweeping craft, nearly 2,500 skippers being employed as skippers R.N.R." The public had been previously allowed to know that 100,000 fishermen were serving with the Navy. In addition to these mine-sweepers and patrol-

lers, fishermen were going to sea, taking all the risks of ruthless warfare, enduring all the privations of an exceptionally severe winter, and doing their business of catching fish and sending or taking it to market. In those hard, dangerous gales there were many casualties of various sorts, including the toll of wandering mines; skippers and men suffered acutely from exposure to the piercing wind and freezing sleet and spray; there were many torn and bleeding hands at work on icy trawls and war-like warps and other sinister contrivances—but the skippers and men endured it all heroically and stoically, and were apt curtly and gruffly to belittle their tribulations, and to declare that hardship was only part of the day's work, and that the fisherman was used to it, just as he was used to being drowned.

Two and a half years after the outbreak of war about 75 per cent. of the first-class fishing boats were on Admiralty service, including all the big steamboats; and the majority of the fishermen had joined the Navy. Yet in spite of these immense calls the work of fishing, mostly by single-boating, but also with a modified form of fleetling, went on, and with so much success that the supply of fish had dropped only about 30 per cent. below the normal.

The work of the 2,500 skippers and the 100,000 fishermen was of every sort that can fall to a powerful and well-organized auxiliary in time of war. When first enrolled the fisher-



THAMES SAILING BARGES TAKING EXPLOSIVES TO THE MEDWAY.

On the right is a submarine, and above is a "kite-balloon."

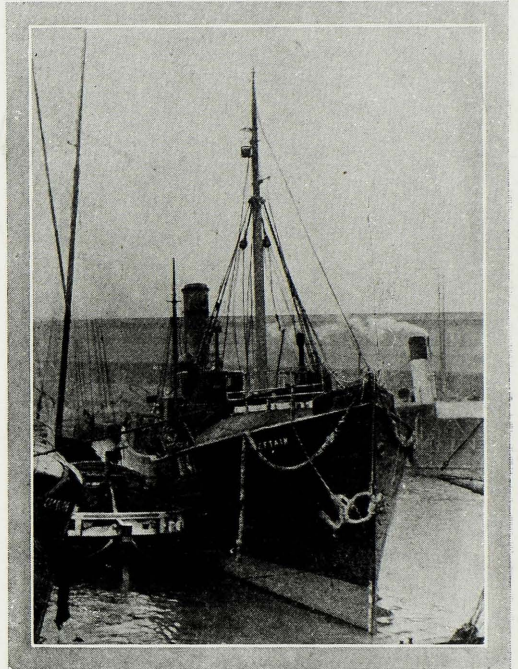
men were soon busily employed as mine-sweepers and patrollers in armed trawlers; they did transport work in distant waters, and they maintained in splendid fashion their fine tradition as some of the most skilful life-savers afloat. There was no disaster of any description, from a mined or torpedoed battleship such as the *Formidable* to a submarined ship like the *Lusitania* or a lost leviathan like the *Britannic*, in connexion with which one or more trawlers, sail or steam, did not do some noble work of saving life.

The North Sea at the outset of the war gave ample scope for the exercise of the skill and energy of the sweepers and patrollers; but later the area of usefulness was enormously extended, and fishermen who had never known a change on the bleak and dangerous banks were operating in the romantic regions of the Mediterranean, the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea; sunny skies in winter replaced the grey gloom of the Dogger, and when notorious bad weather zones were entered they came as a not unwelcome change to the deep-sea men to whom bad weather and peril were inseparable from a hard existence.

While the German fishing vessels were imprisoned in a cramped area by the British blockade, and the fishing port of Altona had its crowded trawlers, the British fishing craft of every sort were at large upon the seas in numerous capacities. Fine big new trawlers were launched and immediately put in commission; as lads at seaports came of age they gravitated to the toilsome calling of their fathers, so keeping up the supply of new and needed blood; while from decaying fishing ports old men once more adventured with fresh life and hope, and wooden smacks that had grown into being in the 'sixties were reaping the sea's great harvest, and fetching fancy prices when put up for sale. Built in 1866, a wooden smack was sold for about £400, although before the war such a craft as she secured no offers, except as firewood.

Old-time crews manned old-time smacks, so that when they were met at sea they might almost have been mistaken for contemporaries of Vanderdecken and his spectral band on board the *Flying Dutchman*. A remarkable case in point was afforded by the drifter *Success* of Lowestoft. She was manned by seven hands and their total ages came to 478 years. The "boy" was 62 years old; but he was a mere juvenile compared with the oldest member

of the crew, whose years were 75. The skipper was 68, and other ages were 72, 69, 68 and 64. That these old smacksmen were capable of sustained and profitable effort was shown by the way in which they handled their nets and did the hard work of their vessel. They proudly boasted that they had had a good season, and expressed regret, tinged with pity, that



A TRAWLER IN PORT.

the authorities considered them too old to bear the "lighter" duties of a man-of-war.

The fisherman went forth to fish literally with his life in his hands, regardless of the region in which he lived—north, south, east or west. In the beginning the danger zone was well defined. It was mostly in the North Sea, but extended until it embraced the whole of the coasts of the British Isles, and submarines and mines became an ever present menace to the fishermen. The enemy appeared in most unlikely places. One winter day, at a sleepy old-world fishing port, brown-sailed smacks which had put to sea were observed to stagger back in very odd ways, taking every course, apparently, except the right one. It was not until the first skipper landed that the explanation was available, and it was that he had seen a submarine laying mines with the object of cutting off the smacks' return to harbour. The mines had been scattered across the mouth of the romantic bay; but the watchful skipper had seen the cowardly act and had promptly

given the alarm and piloted his comrades through the uninfested areas back to port. His sharpness and skill undoubtedly did much to avert loss of life and ship. Submarines and mines were the cause of the posting as missing of many fishing vessels. There were many



CAPTAIN PILLAR

of the Brixham trawler "Provident," decorated by the King with the Distinguished Service Medal.

mute tragedies of the home seas in connexion with the great army of British fishermen who were keeping up the food supply of the country. And what was happening in western waters was taking place far more frequently in the North Sea.

There had been since the outbreak of war very heavy losses of fishing vessels through enemy attacks while peacefully pursuing their calling. These attacks on fishermen and their helpless craft appealed with special force to the "brave German hearts," as their proud compatriots called them; and in the new campaign of ruthlessness they had heavy bags to their discredit.

The commander of a submarine who wrote a letter to his brother, a military officer shortly afterwards captured on the Somme, said: "For four months I have not been able to renew my stock of torpedoes. I am, therefore, obliged to attack traders with my guns—a very risky proceeding now that the British and French boats defend themselves. A single shot well placed might easily send us to the bottom. . . . My submarine is an old crock. I wish I could get command of one of our new submarine-cruisers. As it is known that my boat is not much good I am not given anything very difficult to do. I am generally

after fishermen and sailing boats and run very little risk." A typical raid such as is referred to in this letter was made upon the Brixham fishing fleet on November 28, 1916. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight, a submarine rose to the surface among the trawlers and began her murderous work against the helpless fishermen. She opened fire upon the *Provident*, Skipper William Pillar, who was the gallant seaman to whom so many of the crew of the battleship *Formidable* owed their lives after that ship was torpedoed. The shells from the submarine brought down the jib of the *Provident*, and also parted her topsail halyards. After the first shot, the crew took to their boat, and the submarine then came in close enough to put a bomb in the *Provident*, which sank her. Then the raider opened on the *Amphitrite*, whose skipper, William Norris, declared in an interview that after his crew had taken to their boat they were still shelled from the submarine. The boat was not more than 100 yards astern of the *Amphitrite* when the Germans opened fire. Failing to hit with the two shells directed at the boat, the submarine resumed her shelling of the trawler. The third vessel attacked was the *Lynx*, and her crew, taking promptly to their boat, were likewise shelled from a range



BRIXHAM TRAWLERS.

of not more than 200 yards, but fortunately escaped. This third trawler was not sunk, but was found derelict and brought into Brixham. The men of all three craft declared it was only by good fortune that they were not injured by the hail of shrapnel fired at them.

Great havoc was done amongst fishing boats off the north-east coast on the night of

August 3, 1916. A German submarine suddenly appeared, and as the peaceful craft were quite helpless she had matters pretty much her own way. She set to work at wanton destruction, and in a very short period sank nearly a dozen of the vessels, which were mostly small motor herring drifters. The skipper of one of the boats, a Scotsman, said it was one of the

hour and a quarter—he directed his crew below. Three men were beside him, with large glasses, continuously sweeping the seas, apparently intensely apprehensive of the coming of British war vessels.

When the submarine got under way, her speed being estimated at 17 or 18 knots, the commander persistently questioned the



A GRIMSBY TRAWLER.

calmest nights at sea that he ever remembered. The boats had their nets out, their lights were showing, and a good watch was kept. At about midnight an explosion was heard, and it was instantly suspected that a submarine was at work. A second explosion followed, and a fishing vessel was seen to disappear. A number of the drifters had already cut their nets adrift and were making a rush for port and safety. The skipper himself tried to escape, but a big submarine came up rapidly, and he was ordered to stop. Two tall men boarded him from the submarine, each of them carrying bombs.

The drifter was destroyed, and her crew were taken on board the submarine, on whose deck other fishermen were assembled, making twenty in all. The German commander was in the conning tower, and all the time the skipper was on board the submarine—about an

skipper as to the lights that were seen, and whether any of the fishing vessels carried guns. A stop was made to destroy another drifter, and fishermen were added to the crowd on the submarine's deck, making a total of 30, all of whom realized that their fate was almost certain if a warship appeared. They were satisfied that if such a vessel came up the submarine would dive and leave them in the sea. This, fortunately, did not happen, and the fishermen, to their intense relief, were put on board a small drifter, and left to themselves. Before he disappeared the submarine commander gave precise orders that lights should be kept burning, and that the drifters were not to move till daylight, the punishment for disobedience being instant destruction. Having issued his directions he resumed his work of sinking drifters.

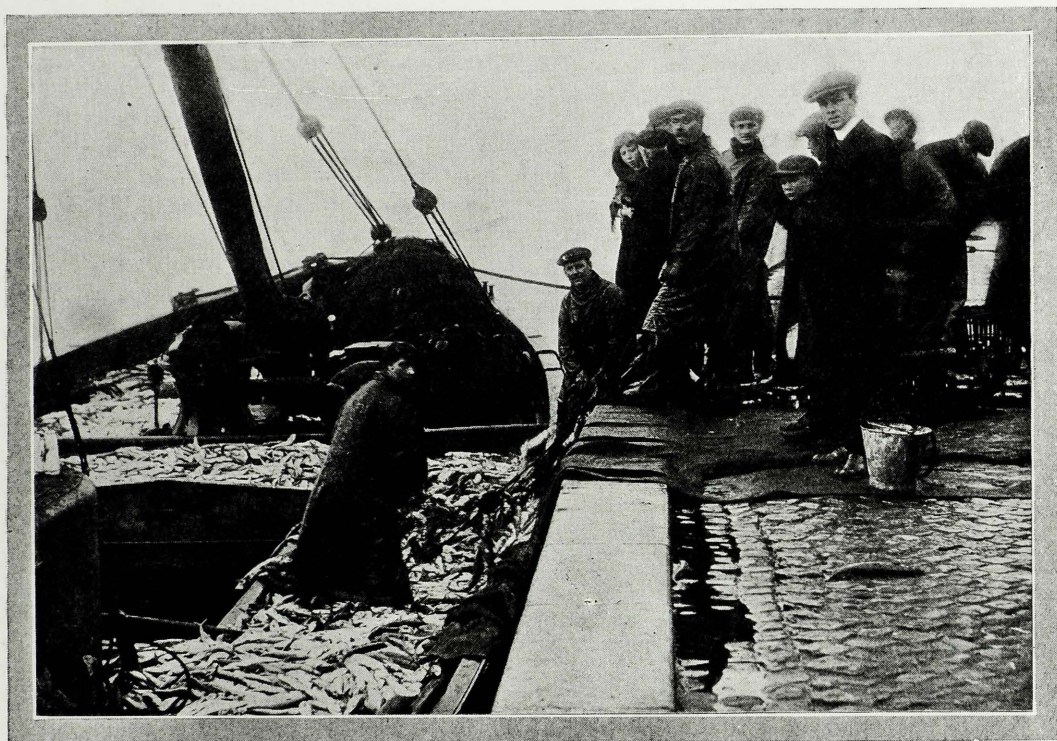
The skipper described the destruction as

very deliberate and well organized, and he calculated that on an average one vessel was sunk every 16 minutes. In some cases crews of destroyed craft were sent adrift in their own little boats; in others refuge was sought on board vessels which escaped destruction. Finally a patrol boat picked up some of the men and took them into port. The time of the year and the calmness of the weather prevented much suffering and loss of life.

This wholesale destruction of fishing vessels

or damaged," he said, "is communicated confidentially to the shipowners concerned and to Lloyd's. If it is stated that they are sunk by submarines it cannot be in consequence of official information from us."

The losses of fishermen and fishing vessels were grievous. Many of them took place during the winter of 1916-17, which was one of exceptional bitterness, and men might well have declared that to go to sea was to court almost sure disaster from submarine, mine, or



A RECORD CATCH OF BETWEEN 60,000 AND 70,000 MACKEREL AT YARMOUTH.

was the forerunner of other similar acts against fishing fleets. Though the losses were heavy, yet they were almost inevitable, in view of the methods which were adopted to cause them, and the vast area of sea which, even under the rigid regulations that were in force, had to be protected by the Navy. It was significant that the fisherman, who suffered most, was the last man to raise the foolish cry, "Where is the Navy—what is it doing?"

While most of the losses amongst fishing vessels were doubtless due to submarine attacks it was not the policy of the Admiralty to announce how or where ships were sunk. Both these facts, Dr. Macnamara stated in the House of Commons, were of use to the enemy. "Information that a vessel is sunk

gale. But the old North Sea spirit triumphed. No danger daunted and no threat deterred. The more the Germans resorted to barbarism the more determined was the British fisherman to reap the harvest of the sea on which he had been a life-long toiler. He went forth and he laboured, under the protection of the all-powerful Navy, and with such success that even in the abnormal state of the weather at the beginning of 1917, when the severest frost prevailed that had been known for 22 years, when ships at sea were filigreed in ice, he was able to send good supplies of fish to market. In January, 1917, the weight of fish landed at Billingsgate Market was 7,348 tons. In the previous January the supplies amounted to 6,741 tons. These quantities were, of

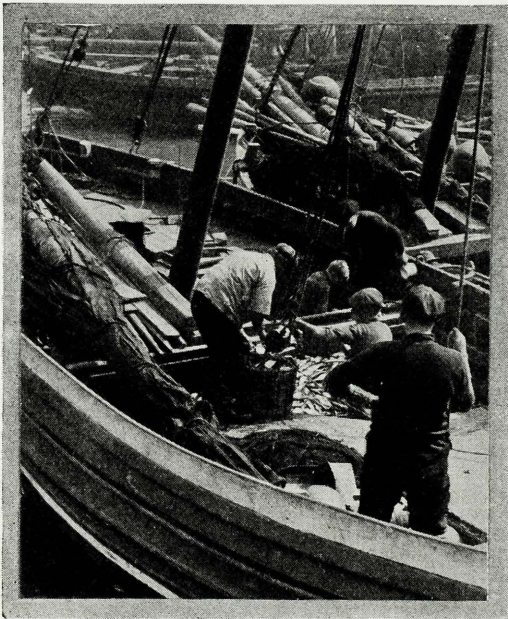
course, far below the pre-war rates; but at that period four large fleets of steam trawlers were at work on the North Sea, maintaining constant communication with Billingsgate by means of carriers. The *Board of Trade Labour Gazette*, in a review of food prices in 1916, stated: "In July, 1916, fish averaged about 80 per cent. above the level of two years earlier, this being the lowest point reached during the year and representing a drop from 105 per cent. at the beginning of February. At the end of 1916 the price of fish was about one-third higher than a year earlier."

In keeping the markets supplied fishermen ran the gravest risks of death or capture. A skipper who was fishing in the very early days of the war was made prisoner with many other fishermen, their vessels, steam trawlers which were single-boating, being sunk by Germans. For fifteen months he was a prisoner, then he

marines. The second time he was shot through the thigh, while in the little boat to which the men had been ordered. Helpless on the water though they were—and there was a little lad amongst them—they were deliberately fired upon by the Germans. With each little brown-sailed smack the procedure was precisely the same—five minutes' notice to quit and take to the boat, then annihilation by bomb.



HAULING "KITS" ON TO THE WHARF.



FILLING BASKETS ON BOARD.

was sent home, being too old to fight; and even if he had been young enough the brutal treatment of his captors would have put him utterly beyond the power of combat. The war had ruined him; he had lost all in adventurously harvesting the Dogger.

Many fishermen went to sea in spite of the fact that they had been submarined or bombed once or more. A very remarkable case was that of a man who won the name "Submarine Billy," because on three different occasions on the North Sea he had sailed in smacks which had been blown up by crews of German sub-

"About a quarter of an hour after we left the smack there was a terrific explosion," said "Submarine Billy." "The deck split up, there was a lot of fire and smoke, she began to sink, and in about eight minutes she had gone altogether. Our floating home and everything in it went to the bottom." The Germans lost no time over their task, the narrator added. They did not mind unarmed fishermen, but they dreaded the appearance of British destroyers and armed trawlers and patrols. "Submarine Billy" had his woes crowned by being "gassed" by the fumes of a bomb dropped from a Zeppelin which was hovering low in a thick haze. He was asked what happened to the boy. "He was a splendid little chap," he answered. "He had been badly scared, but he pulled up, and in two or three days went to sea again."

"Went to sea again." That summed up the ordinary fisherman's achievement. And all the time he maintained his indomitable optimism, and his resolution never faltered. He was furnished with efficient tools, and knew precisely how to use them; he had faith in his superiors and a childlike trust in the genius that controlled the Navy—and he was incor-



WHITE FISH MARKET, NORTH SHIELDS.

Inset: Scottish Fisher Lasses.



rigibly contemptuous of the German. He was still disposed to look upon the Teuton as the fat, somewhat simple fellow he had so often met near Heligoland and on the Dutch and German coasts, and to whom he had, in hours of relaxation, sung a doggerel composition



PACKING HERRINGS.

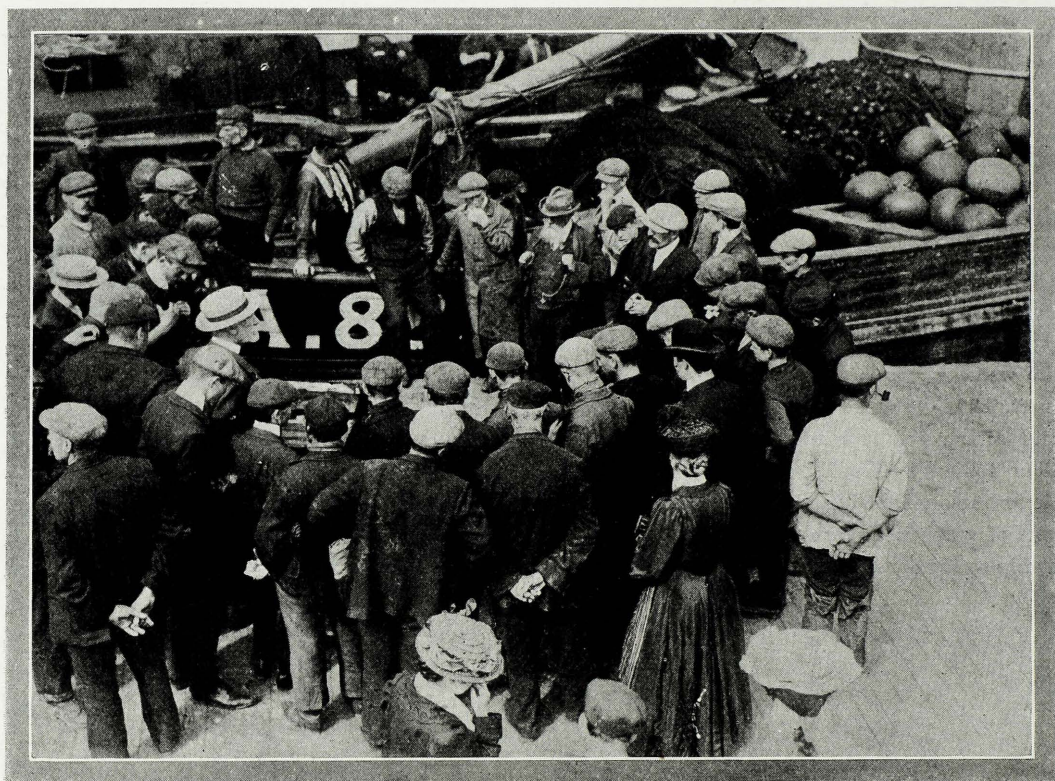
of obscure humour which ended with the encouraging refrain :—

“Copenhagen shall be tagen—

Ja, ja, ja !”

But he had solid reason for the faith and comfort that were in him, because he knew what was being done ; there was not for him the impenetrable veil which hid the doings of the Navy from the anxious public. Except amongst his own kind he seldom spoke of what he did and saw ; letters from sea were rigidly censored, and rightly so, but it was known that not a few Germans, especially in the North

he said, “anyway every two months, then I get four days. I am not mine-sweeping, but doing escort work and patrol, and it's very trying at times. There's something more than haddocks to play about with now, but I think we can manage them all right. . . . I have just arrived in port, having been waiting for an escort for three days, only to hear that she is sunk. So here I am at my base for 24 hours' rest, after eight days at sea. It's a warm place here, on this East Coast. We had our Christmas at sea, but under fairly comfortable circumstances.



MOCK AUCTION OF FISH AT YARMOUTH.

Sea, had paid the final price as the result of meeting one or more armed trawlers or patrol-boats. Strenuous and successful work was done by the fishermen auxiliaries. One skipper, a fine, steady, reliable example of his class, who had distinguished himself and received a well-merited honour, said that two German submarines in a certain area had suddenly shown themselves to two armed trawlers—and very soon after the meeting there was “a tough job.”

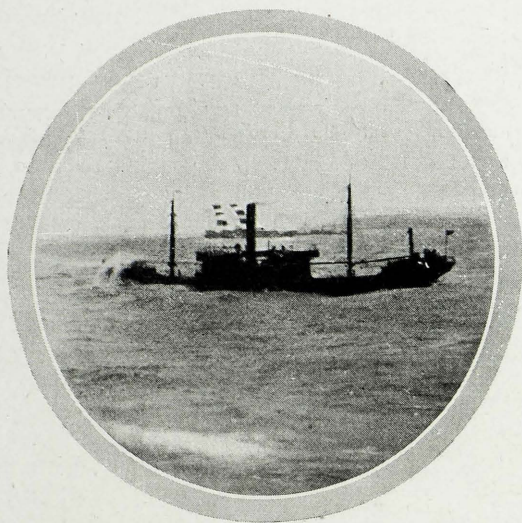
The winter work of the patrollers was well described by the skipper of a craft on his return to his base. “I get home fairly often,”

The weather was not so bad—plenty of rain, but that don't hurt the old North Sea boys.”

A sweeper who was busy in submarine-infested areas wrote : “Our men were out and sighted a submarine, but it came on to blow and they had a rough time of it. One drifter was almost lost through a heavy sea coming on board. We have been very busy with the submarines. We have been at it night and day—and so bitter cold, too. One young man coming aboard his ship—it was very dark at the time—fell overboard and was drowned. The glass is well down ; the sky looks very bad. It has been bad times with us lately—no rest

while these submarines are about. We are on deck in all weathers, cold and wet through."

"We have been very busy with the submarines lately" another sweeper said, "and



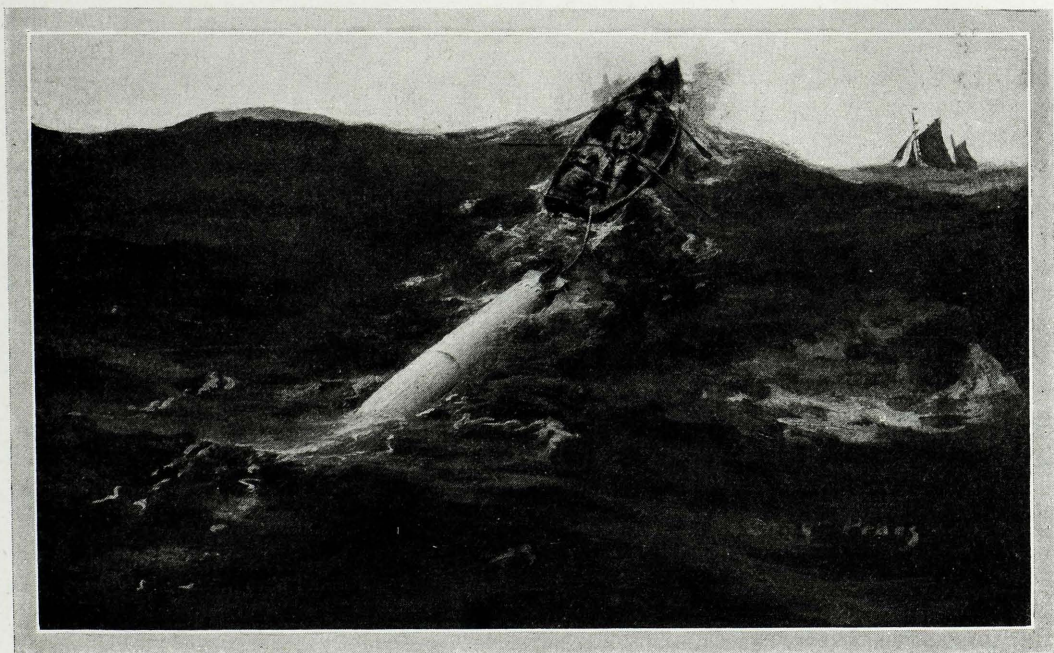
MINE SWEEPERS.

The trawlers work in pairs: the second vessel can be seen behind the funnel of the foremost; a strong cable is stretched between the two.

the weather has been awful bad for our small craft. They sunk three steamers close here, and afterwards it blew very hard and cold. Poor fellows! We managed to pick up the three boats full of the crews. It blew a heavy gale of wind at the time. One hardly expects a ship to stand it, let alone a small boat."

Another mine-sweeper said that during four sweeps he brought 12 mines to the surface and exploded them. "I have been out sweeping continually up to yesterday," he went on, "but did not get anything. I believe I have cleared them away, but there might be a few missed; anyhow, the next time we shall sweep east and west, to make certain—have done before the sweeping north and south. I have been at it every morning at 3, finishing at 5 p.m. Last month, when nearly completing the sweeping, I swept up five mines and came across five full petrol tanks, each holding about 51 gallons or more, which appeared as if they had been moored. I therefore set to work by destroying and sinking them."

The fishermen were not good correspondents; to some of them reading and writing were unknown, but there were many, especially of the younger generation, who were able to put on record stories of quiet heroism and resourcefulness. From the English Channel, in the spring of 1916, a sweeper wrote saying: "We have helped to do a little good since we have been patrolling this part of the coast. There are four ships in our division, and we have sunk four mines this last month. . . . We picked up 29 hands off the steamship—belonging to—. The crew had just time to get into the boats before the steamer sunk. When we took them on board they found out



SALVING A DERELICT TORPEDO.



MINE-SWEEPING TRAWLERS AT LOWESTOFT.

that the captain and the second mate were not there, so we launched our small boat. Two of our crew and myself went to look for the captain and mate. We had not pulled far before we could hear them in the water, shouting for help. Pleased to let you know that we got them all right. They were swimming away from the ship, or else if they had not she would have taken them down. I heard the explosion. I had just turned in my bunk. As soon as I got on the deck the vessel had begun to sink. She was torpedoed by a German submarine. It was about 9 p.m., and getting dark. I was glad they were all saved and not one injured. I should think their poor wives and children would be pleased when they got the news that all hands were saved."

The fishermen's roll of honour grew to an extent which could be appreciated only by a close study of the lists issued by the Admiralty and published *in extenso* in *The Times*. On December 6, 1916, the Admiralty lists showed that 27 fishermen, second hands, deck-hands, enginemen, trimmers, etc., had been killed; 21 were missing, believed killed; and 11 were missing. There were also announced, three

days later, the names of no fewer than seven skippers amongst 34 naval officers reported killed. An official publication contained in January, 1917, the names of 80 skippers who had been killed in action.

Many of the acts of heroism were not recorded, and it was only occasionally that the public, through the newspapers, became aware of the consistently courageous conduct of the fishermen. There was a Grimsby fishing vessel—her name was not given—under whose keel a mine exploded. A hole was made in the vessel's hull, and the little cramped engine-room was filled with scalding steam from the damaged boiler, while the sea rushed in and almost overwhelmed her. The situation was extremely perilous, and called for promptest action and the highest courage. Both were instantly at hand. The chief engineer, F. P. Wilson, and the second engineer, C. E. East, set to work to save both ship and life. Wilson, reckless of the scalding steam and rush of sea, forced his way into the engine-room and plugged, as best he could, the hole caused by the explosion; while East, although violently thrown against the boiler by the motion of the vessel, "made his way to the bunker to save his fireman."

That is to say, he struggled in the blinding, scalding, darkening atmosphere of what was nothing more than a large steel box, crawled and dragged himself to the appalling little hole

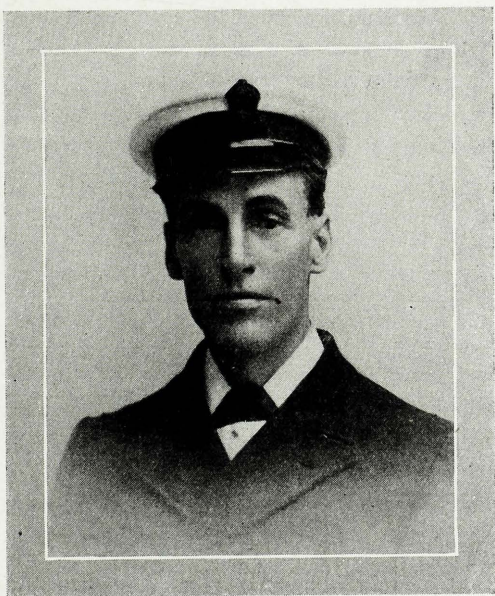


CHIEF ENGINEER F. P. WILSON, D.S.M.

which was called a bunker, and saved the imprisoned stoker whose chance of salvation seemed hopeless. While this was going on another trawler near at hand, which had been mined also, was sinking, and her crew of seven were in imminent peril. It might well have been that the men on the other ship thought they had their own hands full, and could do no more; but that was not the North Sea way, it was not the fighting, conquering spirit of the Dogger. In the old days, in the deadly gales which fishers called "smart breezes," when a smack was hove down or a boat capsized in boarding fish, the smacksmen paid no thought to danger and they went about the work of rescue. So now the second hand—the mate—on Wilson's vessel took in charge the launching of the little boat. E. R. Gooderham they called him. He got the boat overboard and took it to the other mined trawler, which by this time was capsizing. Gooderham fought his way into the very vortex, and though the sinking vessel was almost turning completely over on to his boat yet he saved the seven members of her crew; then he strenuously pulled out of the death-embracing area. For these acts of true heroism the engineers were awarded Distinguished Service Medals, while the second hand was "highly commended for

exceptional bravery in emergencies." The Victoria Cross had been given for less. This case was merely typical—there were very many like it, all around the British coasts and far afield. Many of the acts were put on record and officially acknowledged; but there were many others, just as splendid, of which no word of praise could be spoken or written, for the doers had perished in the time of their achievement.

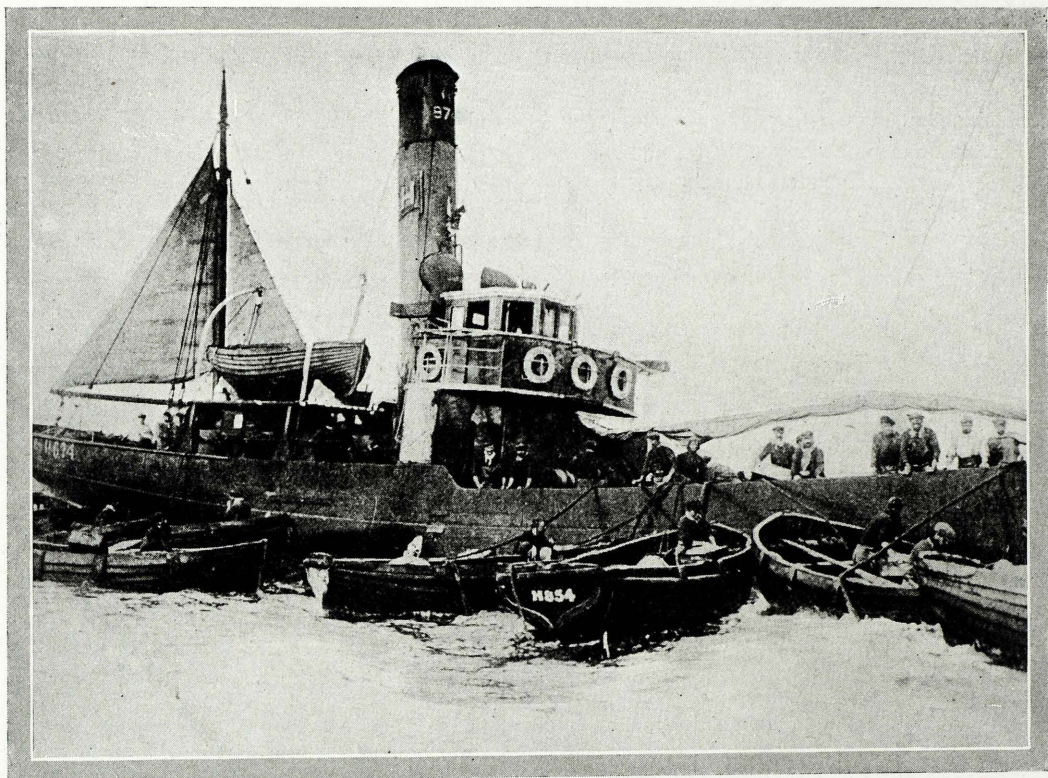
A trawler was attacked and sunk by a submarine. A few months later the skipper went off in a drifter for the night, to take the place of a man who was forced to remain ashore. The drifter was blown up; but again the skipper had the good fortune to escape. He was asked what he thought of the matter, and he answered, "There's one good thing about it—you take it calmer the second time!" That was the spirit which, with rare exceptions, was shown by the fishermen; and the exceptions were mostly cases in which men's nervous systems had been seriously weakened by incessant strain. The fisherman had no complaint to make about the inevitable hazards of war; he bore them philosophically, and whenever he could do so he spoke a good word for the enemy. There were rare and precious occasions on



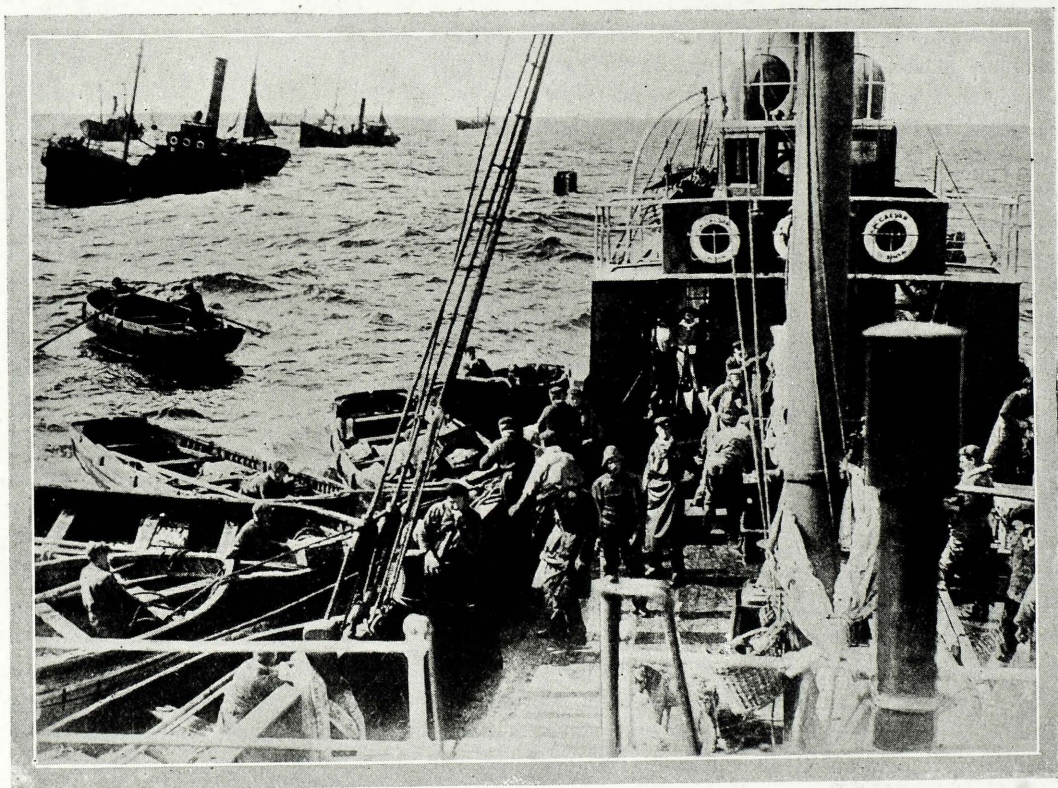
SECOND ENGINEER C. E. EAST, D.S.M.

which he was able to say that the German had acted like a gentleman.

The new and heavy dangers which the war had added to his life had but little effect upon the fisherman, except to make him even more

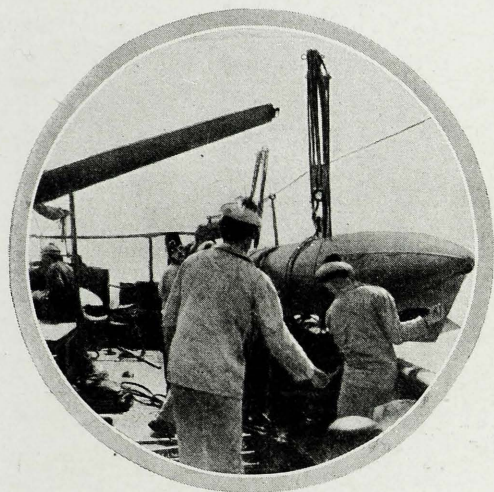


BOARDING FISH: A BROADSIDE VIEW.



BOARDING FISH: THE SCENE ON BOARD THE CARRIER.

enduring than of old. His courage sustained him in the darkest hours, his resourcefulness enabled him to conquer apparently hopeless difficulties, and his old-time ways were not to be amended except at heavy cost. His habit of closely examining and somewhat carelessly handling oddments that his trawl brought up



A CAPTURED TORPEDO.

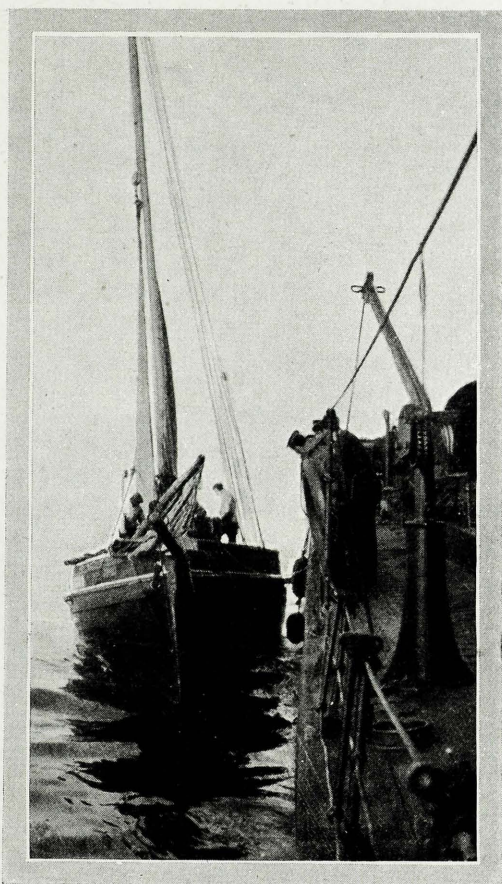
from the deep sea clung to him when extreme caution was essential; hence such tales as that of a crew who hauled on board a mysterious object which was believed to be a mine, but was so heavily barnaced as to make identity doubtful. A scraping of the barnacles to solve the mystery resulted in the posting of the vessel and the crew as missing. That, at any rate, was a tale of the sea; and there were many like it.

The old spirit of freedom which was little less than lawlessness occasionally reasserted itself in individuals. Such instances usually came to light by way of the police courts, but one special case was made public through the unexpected medium of an Honours List, in the section "Police Medals: Service at Home and Abroad." Various members of the police forces and fire brigades of the United Kingdom were honoured, and amongst them was the following: "Albert Edward Bell, constable, Isle of Man Constabulary. A drunken skipper of a patrol boat came ashore at Ramsey Harbour with two revolvers, and landed four of his crew as armed sentries. He threatened various people, fired two shots, and then aimed at one of his crew. The revolver missed fire, and while he was raising it again Bell rushed at him and took the revolver away."

This was an unusual instance of drunken

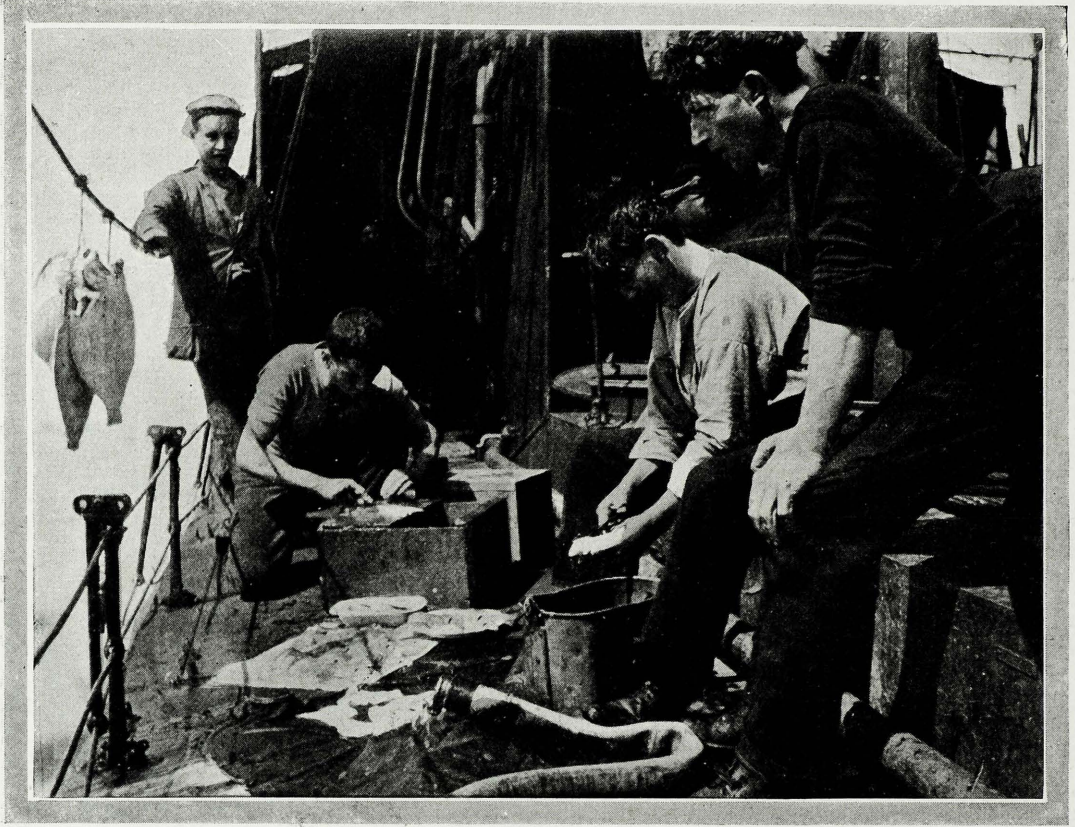
folly; it was reminiscent of the wild deeds of "Paraffin Jack" in the days of the old sailing fleets; but there were many regrettable cases of insubordination and other wrongdoing due to drink, as anyone saw who came into contact with the sweepers and fishermen on the vast stretch of coast-line that provided bases. On the other hand the various religious and philanthropic agencies, working with the efficient Naval Chaplains' Department, did much to ameliorate the evil and to raise the tone of the large bodies of men who were assembled at the bases.

At one important base a naval officer who wished to make a special effort to accommodate



DRIFTER BRINGING FRESH FISH
ALONGSIDE A WARSHIP.

trawler ratings saw the military officer who was in charge of certain buildings which might be available as temporary quarters. "They shall not come here if I can help it," the military officer declared, and on being pressed for the reason of his objection he replied that he had been given to understand that the trawlermen were the refuse of the community,



CLEANING FISH FOR BREAKFAST.

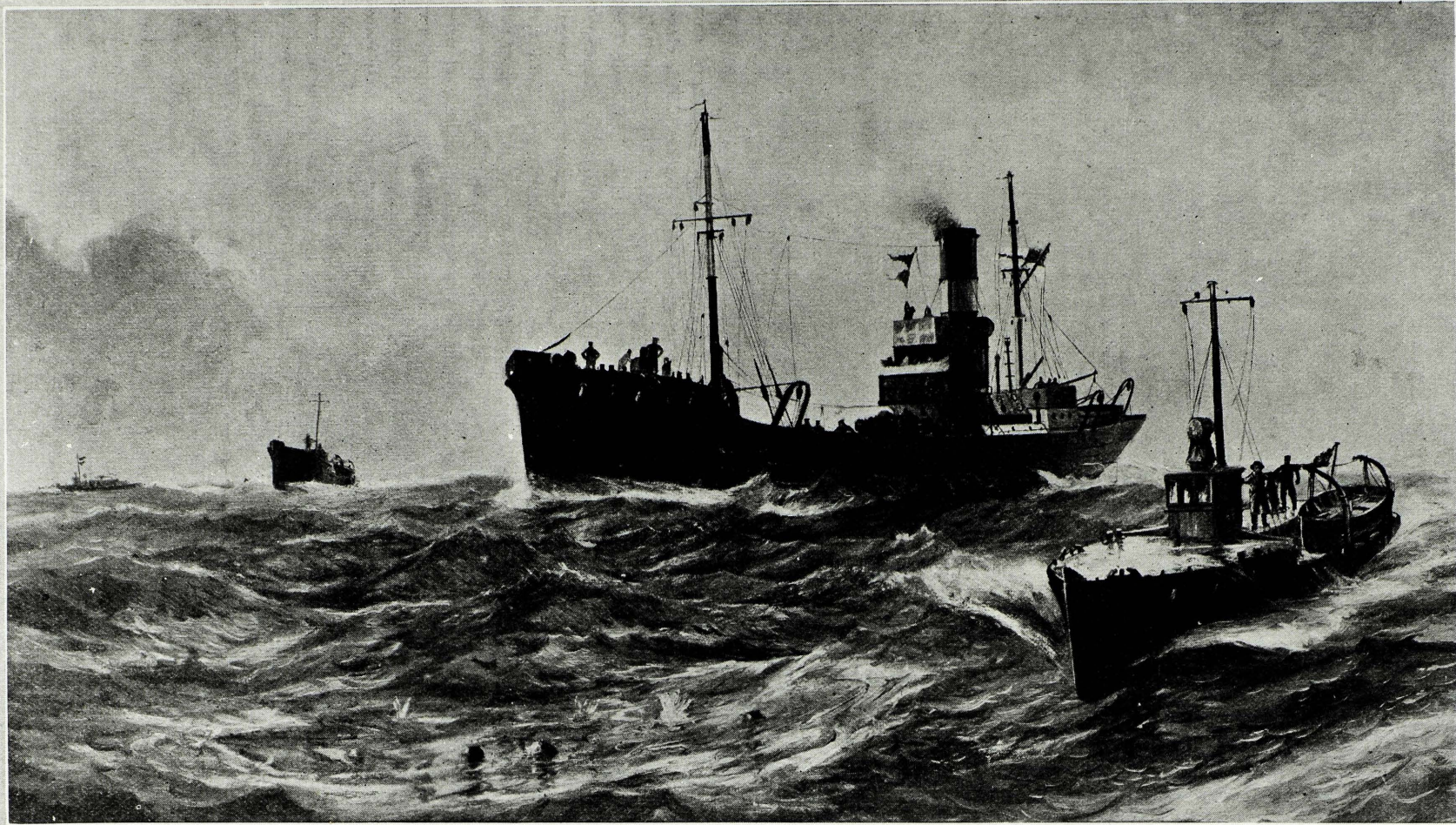
and were lost to all sense of discipline. This was in the earlier period of the war, the base was in a region greatly frequented by fishermen in normal times, and near a port which had become notorious by reason of its fishing population's doings; yet this port gave lavishly of its toilers of the deep and showed that they merely needed help and guidance to prove themselves as amenable to discipline as any members of the Royal Navy.

One of the most striking features of the affiliation of the fishermen with the Navy was the improvement that took place in directions in which advance seemed hopeless. The rigid restrictions of the drink traffic undoubtedly had much to do with this satisfactory result.

Nothing that the Germans could do deterred the vast body of fishermen from going to sea and trying their luck, and it was obvious that but for the Naval Regulations there would have been skippers daring enough to go over to the German coast itself. Not even the heavy penalties that were imposed for infringement of them kept fishermen away from prohibited areas; and even after severe losses on craft had been inflicted by enemy submarines they persisted on getting out of bounds. In

connexion with the actual sinking of some Grimsby trawlers in September, 1916, eleven skippers were charged at the Grimsby Police Court with fishing in prohibited waters. They pleaded guilty, but urged that the offence was unintentional. They were, however, severely punished, for fines amounting to £325 were imposed. One great temptation to enter prohibited areas was undoubtedly the eagerness to get fish, in view of the exceptional prices which ruled on the markets and the enormous incomes which it was possible for skippers and other share-hands to make. It was freely stated at the end of 1916 that there were skippers who were making from £5,000 to £6,000 a year; but this was doubtless an exaggeration, although skippers were certainly earning incomes which went well into four figures sterling.

The prosperity of some of the fishing companies was shown by the fact that one of them was able to subscribe £100,000 to the great War Loan in February, 1917; and skippers who had become affluent invested large sums in the Loan. During the war, as in time of peace, there existed the good and ill luck that are inseparable from fishing, for while some men



THE GRAVE OF A "U" BOAT.

The tell-tale patch of oil on the surface which marks the spot where a submarine was destroyed

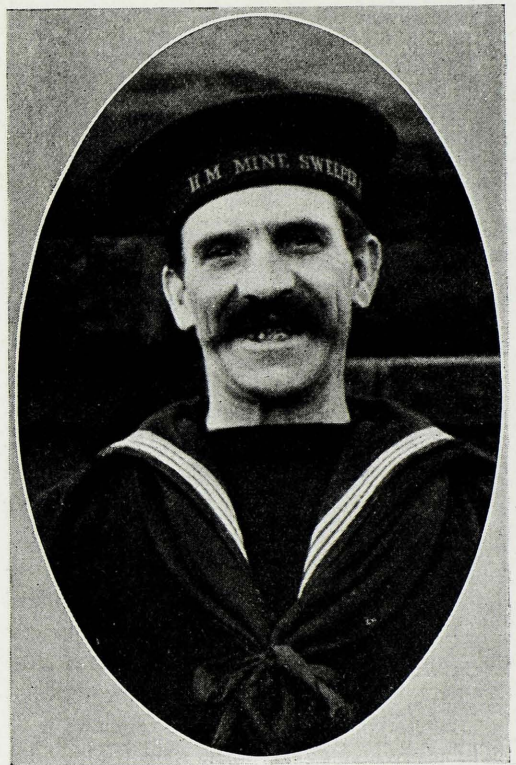
reaped fortunes there were others to whom the enterprise meant heavy or complete loss.

In spite of the losses which had been sustained there was not that advance in the price of fishing vessels which had been anticipated, though the increase both in cost of production and in the value of second-hand craft was very considerable. The sum of £6,500 was asked for an iron trawler nearly 27 years old; a small vessel, a 20-year old trawler, changed hands at the reported price of £10,700, a remarkable sum in view of the fact that even at that time a first-class North Sea trawler had been launched at a cost of £10,000, and vessels which had been previously contracted for were only about 35 per cent. above pre-war quotations. Yet with high prices like these to pay it was possible to operate with great success. Allied nations were in the same position as the British, and heavy prices had to be paid for fishing craft. The Japanese-owned steel screw trawler *Kaiko Maru*, built at Osaka in 1911, was sold to French buyers for £13,000.

No official details were given as to the number of lives which had been saved in various ways by fishermen who were serving in sweepers and patrollers; but reports showed that the number was very great and embraced rescues from ships of every sort and nationality. The Mediterranean was frequently mentioned as the sphere of much of this quiet heroism, a display for which the fisherman's training peculiarly well fitted him, for he was accustomed to prompt action in boat work, and heavy seas in small craft had no terrors for him. Most of his existence had been spent in a vessel over the low rail of which the sea could almost be touched with the hand; he had been in the habit of "throwing" his boat overboard, tumbling into it and hurrying off in North Sea fashion, standing to his rowing, one man facing forward, one man facing aft, the better to meet the uncertain seas; and it was this readiness for emergencies, this celerity in action, that enabled him to say, as one skipper, writing from a Mediterranean base, did say, that within a comparatively brief period the trawlers had saved many lives. Many of these were soldiers; many were women and children.

One of the finest achievements of the trawlers in the Mediterranean was in connexion with the cowardly torpedoing of the *Arabia*, referred to in the preceding chapter. According to the Admiralty account all the passengers were saved by various vessels which were diverted

to the scene of the disaster. Amongst those vessels were several trawlers, whose crews set instantly to work to save the *Arabia*'s people, especially the women and children. A correspondent of *The Times* telegraphed on November 13 from Marseilles a story which had been told to him by Mr. Prentice, of the Indian Civil Service. That little narrative revealed something of the rescuing trawlers' fine work: "Ultimately I was put aboard a trawler on which were about 166 rescued. We set off in a calm sea for Malta, 270 miles away. The first few hours were by no means unpleasant,



H.M. MINE SWEEPERS' RIBBON
Of which the men are justifiably proud.

but after nightfall the sea grew rough. Every wave swept the trawler from stem to stern. We had few wraps, and most of us lay with drenched clothes till we reached Malta. They were 37 hours of utter misery. On the first afternoon the crew of the trawler gave us a good meal of stew, but that exhausted their supplies, and from that moment we subsisted on ship's biscuits. More than half the survivors on the trawlers were women and children."

Wondrous fish yarns were related in connexion with the war at sea, and even more astonishing than some of the wildest works of fiction



SCENE IN THE FISH DOCK AT HULL.

were devices with which the enemy were credited. The story of a remarkable incident found its way across the North Sea from Sulen, near the entrance to the Trondhjem Fjord. Some fishermen secured a wooden box, which they saw floating on the sea, and on opening it they found a tin box containing a fish. The fish suddenly began to burn and emit a sulphurous smell, whereupon the men, unnerved by the astounding performance of the occupant of this rival to Pandora's box, hurled it back into the water. When this was done the unfriendly fish exploded and flames shot up from it to a tremendous height. The fishing-boat was nearly capsized, her boat was smashed to atoms and her lanterns were destroyed, while one man was nearly killed. The narrator added that the region where this occurred was infested with mines, so that fishermen were almost afraid to go to sea.

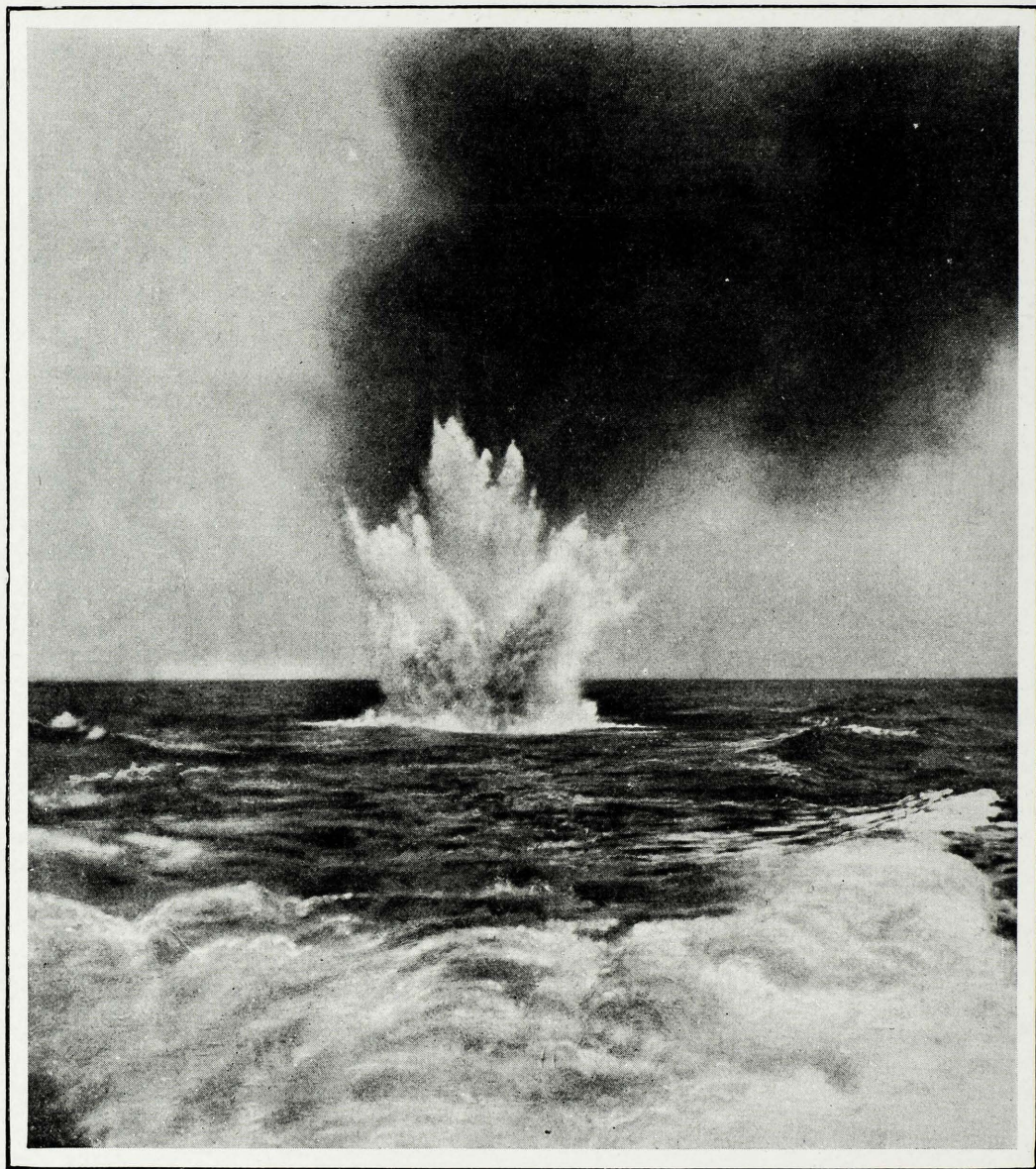
Such was the story, and, striking though it was, yet it was not improbable in view of the avowed determination of the "brave German hearts" to sweep the fishers from the seas, and the "frightfulness" of German chemists who, in connexion with the war, had gained a notoriety which was as unsavoury as some of their scientific products.

The special efforts which had been made to alleviate the hardships of fishermen prisoners of war in Germany were continued with un-

abated energy. As time went on it became necessary to take steps to avoid overlapping in work relating to these captives, and accordingly the Government decided that as from December 1, 1916, all parcels of food must be transmitted to prisoners in Germany through a recognized association. The Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen was the society recognized by the Government for ministering to the needs of fishermen prisoners of war, and no other association or private individual was permitted to send parcels of food except through the Mission. That society had for a considerable period paid close attention to the needs of these unfortunate men and lads, to each of whom, weekly, was dispatched a parcel of food from the Grimsby Institute, under the direction of Miss Newnham. The parcel was of the value of 5s., and was often accompanied by boots and clothing and gifts of tobacco. During 1916 no fewer than 10,075 parcels were sent to prisoners, and so great became the calls upon this special fund that a preliminary expenditure of £40 a week rose, at the end of the year, to nearly £100 a week, and was steadily growing. It spoke well for the interest of the public in the imprisoned fishermen that this special fund was maintained entirely irrespective of the ordinary support which was given to religious and philanthropic work amongst fishermen. It was undoubtedly these parcels

of food and clothing which kept the fishermen prisoners of war healthy and contributed to their comfort and happiness; and there was abundant evidence from the men that without them they would have suffered severely or starved altogether. While these special efforts

contact with sweepers and patrollers. Abroad, as well as at home, many voluntary workers interested themselves in fishermen who had joined the Navy, many of whom were absent for long periods without leave. In Rome ladies took in hand the cases of North Sea and other



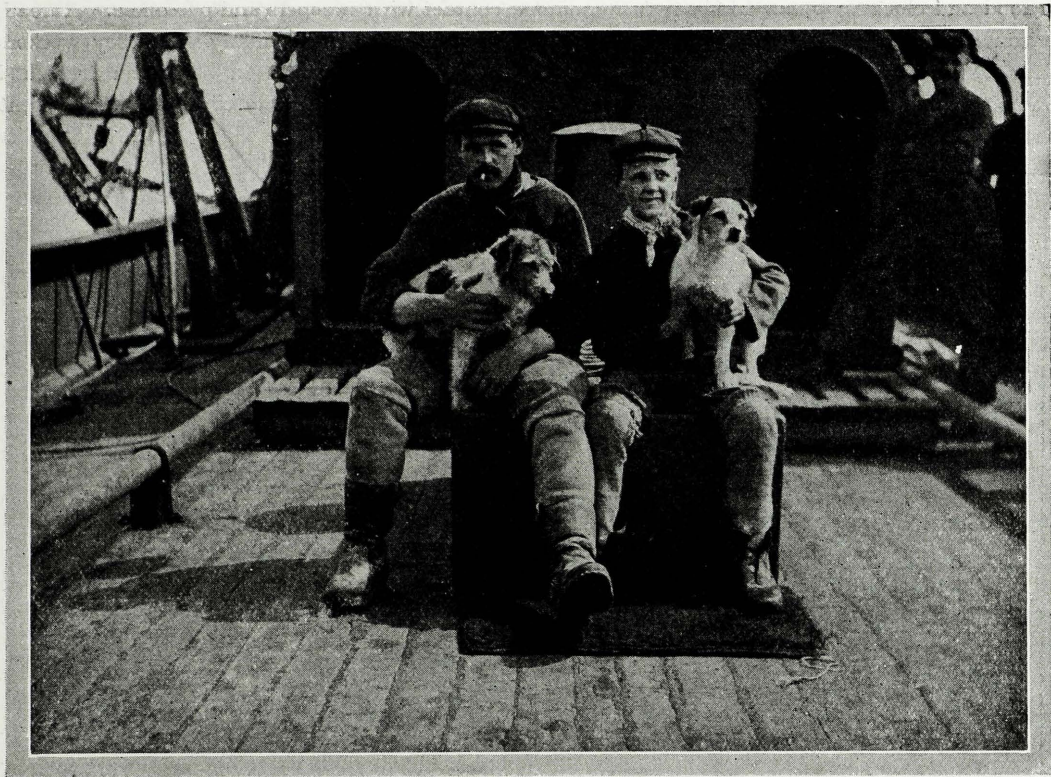
EXPLODING A BOMB DROPPED ON A SUBMARINE.

The bomb has been dropped from a fast patrol vessel which has chased and overtaken the submarine. It explodes beneath the water at a depth which can be regulated. The photograph shows the wake of the patrol vessel in the foreground.

on behalf of prisoners were being made, a very fine work amongst fishermen ashore was being done, great voluntary help being given on the West Coast by Miss Elizabeth Cooper, who had the support and encouragement of prominent naval officers who were brought much into

fishermen who had been absent from their homes for 18 months

At the many bases around the coasts there came into existence various social organizations promoted by sweepers and patrollers and their friends, which were the direct outcome of the



A QUIET MOMENT ON BOARD A TRAWLER.

war, and were in keeping with the new and improved position in which the deep sea toiler found himself. There were skippers' clubs and clubs for lower ratings, and the establishment of these rendezvous, when they were of the right and helpful sort, was officially encouraged, and many of them proved beneficial to men who were far from their families for long periods. In numerous instances prosperous skippers who were employed in fishing, and skippers and other men who were sweeping and patrolling, moved with their wives and families to their bases, and in this way helped to make the conditions of war more tolerable.

Great, almost incredible, social changes in the fishing community and in fishing methods had been brought about by the war, and it was obvious to students of the fishing enterprise that some of these changes were merely fore-runners of far-reaching alterations that would be inevitable when the war was over. Men had developed a wider and more comprehending outlook, and it was improbable that they would ever return to the old conditions which governed the conduct of the industry, especially in the fleets. The war had severely penalized the fisherman but it had brought him into his own in the way of public recognition and reward.

