

NAZIS' SEA POWER EBBS TO NEW LOW

Loss of Scharnhorst Leaves Hitler Without a Capital Ship Equal to Ours

A COUNT OF WHAT IS LEFT

By DAVID ANDERSON

By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, Jan. 1—British warships opened fire on the enemy in the first light of the Arctic dawn last Sunday. That engagement came to a dramatic close long after darkness had returned to veil the sinking of the powerful German battle cruiser Scharnhorst. Before another day had broken the British Admiralty was sending ships with all haste to a scene of action more than three thousand miles to the south, this time in the Bay of Biscay. The last British shell was sent flying through the dusk on Tuesday—after three Nazi destroyers and a swift blockade runner had gone down to a watery grave.

In those sixty hours was written an epilogue of the German fleet in this war. The destruction of the Scharnhorst was an accomplishment of the highest importance, since it deprived Adolf Hitler of his best weapon in sea warfare, in fact his only one rated on a par with British and American capital ships.

Without a Fleet

The loss of the Scharnhorst leaves Germany without a fleet in the strict sense of the word. True, there are a lot of warships still afloat with the swastika at their jackstaves, but they are helpless in the face of the force that can now be mustered to oppose them.

Naval strategy to be employed by Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz in these circumstances is a subject for wide debate in Britain. He is known to be an aggressive leader and it has even been suggested that he risked the Scharnhorst in the Arctic and eleven destroyers in the Bay of Biscay as part of a new offensive supplementing the fruitless U-boat campaign. Thus far German policy has been to employ heavier warships as raiders or as a threat to convoys, particularly those using the northern route to Russia. To do this, Admiral Doenitz had to have an ace in his hand and, in order to play it successfully, enough destroyers to form a protective screen.

Let us see what has happened to his strength and what that is today. Of the two great battleships at his disposal none now remains in service. The Bismarck was sunk in 1941 and the Tirpitz rests immobile in Alten Fjord, Norway, nursing wounds caused by British torpedoes. The same score stands for the battle cruisers. The Scharnhorst is at the bottom of the sea and the Gneisenau is helpless in the Baltic port of Gdynia. The pocket battleships Luetzow and Von Scheer are believed to be lurking in the Baltic. Their sister ship Graf Spee long has been subsiding in the mud of the River Platte.

Ships That Remain

The Hipper, heavy cruiser, was last reported in Trondheim, Norway; the Prinz Eugen is tied up at Kiel for indefinite repairs considered certain to keep her out of action for the duration, and the third member of this class, the Seydlitz, still is not completed. There is one German aircraft carrier, the Graf Zeppelin, also in the Baltic, where, too, are the cruisers Nuremberg, Leipzig and Emden. The Russians are credited with sinking the Koln more than two years ago.

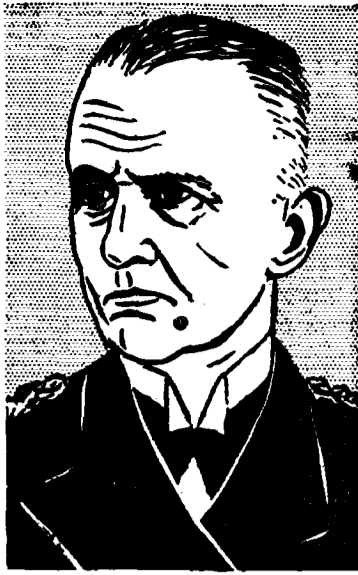
Moving on to smaller warships, it is estimated that the enemy has been reduced to twenty-six destroyers and torpedo boats. Submarines are harder to figure out, for they are being turned out in a steady stream. Nevertheless, conservative experts place the total Nazi strength in the neighborhood of 500, of which 150 are in action, a similar number going to and coming from bases and the remainder in port for repairs, outfitting and so forth. Unofficial observers maintain that as many as 400 U-boats have been destroyed since the war's start, and perhaps half of them in 1943. Effective striking units of the German Navy can be rounded out with mention of between one to two hundred E-boats assigned to coastal convoys.

A recapitulation gives Admiral Doenitz the Hipper, Luetzow, Scheer, Nuremberg, Leipzig and Emden, all of which can be handled by cruisers, as the Battle of the River Platte demonstrated; two dozen destroyers, his submarines and E-boats. It is not enough to fulfill the primary mission of Hitler's navy.

Nazis Outfought

What took place early this week set the seal on Germany's defeat as a sea power. It was the same story in the Arctic and the Bay of Biscay, one of the enemy being outmaneuvered and finally outfought. The Battle of North Cape opened as an engagement between the Scharnhorst and three British cruisers, with a rich convoy inviting the attack which would certainly have meant disaster for it had the Germans persevered. But they did not and in the ensuing

ADMIRAL DOENITZ



Gierson.

How he will employ remainder of Nazi fleet is open question.

action, two-thirds of which was in darkness, the British employed cruisers and destroyers to cut off and cripple the Scharnhorst until the battleship Duke of York could batter it into submission. Aircraft played no part in the battle.

Tales of Panic

They did, however, cooperate with the cruisers Glasgow and Enterprise in the Bay of Biscay against the formidable array of eleven enemy destroyers, including five of the most heavily armed afloat. Tales of panic breaking out on the Scharnhorst before she sank coincide with reports that the destroyer force in the Bay of Biscay displayed weakness in not fighting it out with the inferior British units.

Among the questions raised are the following: Is it not true that the Tirpitz remained in port because she was unable to put to sea? Surely now it will be impossible for the Germans to move the Tirpitz, since they can no longer concentrate adequate protection? What happened to the Scharnhorst's destroyer screen?

Broadening the field of inquiry, it may well be asked whether the British Home Fleet stationed at Scapa Flow since the war began can now be broken up for service in support of the British Eastern Fleet and American units in the southeast Pacific? Also, whether it will now be of any use for Hitler to garrison Norway?

Sea lords in the famous war room of the Admiralty here were intent on maintaining the Home Fleet strong enough to deal decisively with the most that the enemy could put into action at all times. This fleet, built around the most powerful battleships in the world, was held in readiness to intercept enemy concentrations or individual raiders. For as long as Germany had the Scharnhorst Britain had to reply with even greater strength, but today that need no longer exists, for there are a score of ships in home waters qualified to meet any enemy challenge.

Effect on Norway

Norway, no doubt, will be caught in other tides of the war, now turning at last. There can be a case made out that the loss of her ships renders the Arctic ports useless to Germany. Yet the enemy's military entanglements are believed enough to keep the army in occupation until the pressure of invasion is brought to bear.

Germany will start the New Year with her fortunes at sea touching their lowest point since the liquidation of her fleet after World War I. The last week of the old year tells the story of her humble position—on Sunday she lost the Scharnhorst in the Arctic Sea, on Monday she lost an irreplaceable blockade runner bringing a cargo from the Far East, and on Tuesday she lost three destroyers.

Shelled, bombed and torpedoed by one battleship, five cruisers and four destroyers, and the whole host of aircraft at both ends of the European arc, and aware that the strength of Britain and the United States is accumulating while her own has dwindled away, Germany no longer has any fleet worthy of the name nor hope for future triumphs at sea.

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