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THE NORTH SEA OPERATIONS OF APRIL, 1916

A STUDY IN NAVAL STRATEGY

Lecture by

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A STUDY IN NAVAL STRATEGY

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Jutland has given us our most modern tactical studies. The operation of 25 April, 1916, affords us probably the best opportunity for studying modern naval strategy. For five days the British Admiralty matched wits with Admiral Scheer, and two great fleets, each striving to gain the initiative, maneuvered almost constantly against each other. Every type of ship and every known weapon and device were used. The lack of a fleet action during this period has distracted attention from it, but this in no way detracts from its value as a basis for the study of naval strategy.

The most complete and accurate account of this period is contained in "The War at Sea, North Sea, Volume 5," by Commander O. Groos, I.G.N. On the British side the accounts are much less complete and there are differences between those of Admiral Jellicoe and Sir Julian Corbett. The figures accompanying this paper have been based partly on the British and German charts, but many additional details have been added. In some cases the positions and courses are merely estimated, and the purpose of the figures is to present a moving picture of the two fleets, rather than to show the exact navigational tracks of the various units.

Since 18 January, 1916, when Vice Admiral Scheer hoisted his flag as commander-in-chief, he had been carrying out a systematic plan to exert pressure on the enemy with every means available: submarine warfare, mining operations, raids on commerce, airship attacks, and advances of the High Sea Fleet.

"The ratio of strength," wrote Scheer at the beginning of February, "prevents us from seeking a battle to a decision with the concentrated British fleet. Our leadership must prevent this fight to a decision from being forced upon us."

However, if a decisive victory was hardly to be hoped for, there were some results which offensive action by the High Sea Fleet could be expected to produce:

1. Defeat of detached British forces.
2. Drawing British forces through submarine and mine traps.
3. Creation of favorable moral effects by bombardments of the British coast.
4. Preventing the British from detaching forces from the Grand Fleet to exercise the control of the sea, particularly by anti-submarine operations.

But for Admiral Scheer to accomplish such results without being brought to action was a most difficult task, as events were to prove. He had three grave disadvantages: First, he was inferior in the ratio of 4 to 7; not counting the Harwich Force, the Dover Patrol, 3d Cruiser Squadron and 3d Battle Squadron. Second, the strategic position of his bases was extremely unfavorable to him, because when going to sea and returning he had to pass through a narrow shallow area filled with minefields. Third, his ships were generally slower than British ships of the same type. On the other hand, he had two advantages: First, he had the initiative, but this advantage was rendered null by the effectiveness of the British Intelligence Service, including their deciphering and radio compass stations. Second, he had a number of airships for scouting but these proved to be of little practical value, and were at times

a disadvantage because of the almost complete inaccuracy of their reports. Therefore, Admiral Scheer was more likely to have all or a part of his force cut off by the British than he was to cut off their detachments. He was also more likely to receive injuries from mines and submarines. Both these probabilities were confirmed by actual events. But while Scheer accomplished few material results, he certainly created favorable moral effects and prevented the detachment of forces from the Grand Fleet for anti-submarine operations, and he deserves high praise for this accomplishment.

The British also had decided to initiate more active operations with the Grand Fleet. The Russian Naval Attache had been advocating a move into the Baltic, which, if successful, would have had most favorable results for his nation. It was decided, however, that such a move was impracticable until the High Sea Fleet was beaten. This then concentrated thought on the necessity for a fleet action and it was determined that more active steps should be taken to lead the High Sea Fleet into one. But if Scheer was determined to avoid a fight to a decision, Jellicoe's predetermined tactics of not following a German withdrawal also tended to prevent such a battle. On 30 October, 1914, Jellicoe had said: "If, for instance, the enemy battlefleet were to draw away from an advancing fleet, I should assume that the intention was to lead us over mines and submarines, and should decline to be so drawn." That he still held these ideas in 1916 is shown by the statement in his book describing his intentions at Jutland: "A third consideration that was present in my mind was the necessity for not leaving anything to chance in a Fleet action, because our fleet was the one and only factor that was vital to the existance of

the Empire, as indeed to the Allied cause." (These are Jellicoe's italics).

Until the middle of April, the High Sea Fleet had conducted its offensive operations skillfully, but without important contacts with the enemy. The Grand Fleet's operations had been similarly ineffective. But at this time both commanders commenced a series of large scale operations, which were certain eventually to culminate in a fleet action. This was just missed on 25 April in the maneuvers under consideration and was fought off Jutland on 31 May.

The German General Staff having decided to assist the Irish Revolution, planned for Easter Sunday, 23 April, the Naval Staff was directed to arrange for landing Sir Roger Casement with 10 German machine guns and 20,000 Russian rifles on the southeast Irish coast between 20 and 23 April. This undertaking was planned and executed in the most skillful manner. The merchant vessel Libau was manned by a carefully selected naval crew under Lieutenant of the Reserve Spindler; it was disguised as the Norwegian ship Aud and loaded with the arms and ammunition. The Libau sailed on 10 April from Warnemunde in the Baltic, passed out through the Skagerrak and commenced her adventurous cruise. On the 15th the U19 left Helgoland with Sir Roger Casement and two other Irish leaders on board to meet the Libau off Tralee, Ireland.

Admiral Scheer's last sortie had led him well into the southern part of the North Sea and he next planned a demonstration against the English coast itself. He decided to make this advance coincide with the outbreak of the Irish Revolution.

The British were working on three plans. In order to allow the Russians to relay their minefields after the ice had broken up, the Grand Fleet had planned a demonstration into the Kattegat for the 21st. At Dover, Admiral Bacon was planning to lay on the 24th an extensive barrage of mines and nets off the Flanders coast. The Grand Fleet was also planning a second attack on the airship sheds at Tondern for 4 May.

The German Naval Intelligence had gained certain information of the British preparations which led Admiral Scheer to believe that Tondern would be attacked during the middle of April. On the 13th he commenced making defensive dispositions. His outpost lines were ultimately reinforced to four flotillas of destroyers, while the remainder of the fleet, except the Hamburg, flag of the Leader of Submarines, was disposed in readiness in the outer anchorages. On the 19th, no attack having developed, he ordered the greater part of his battleships and cruisers to return to port to fuel for the attack on the English coast.

On the 20th a British cruiser force proceeded toward the Kattegat to operate against trade, to attack naval vessels and to engage hostile forces drawn out from their North Sea bases. Three submarines were stationed in the exits from the Baltic. While the composition of this cruiser force has not been stated, it probably consisted of light cruisers, destroyers, and battle cruisers, as did the sweep of 26 January into the same area. Possibly the entire Battle Cruiser Fleet was out.

During the 20th the German seaplanes scouting the Helgoland Bight reported no contacts; the lookouts on the island of Baltrum reported a British submarine and the 1st Half Flotilla, the

auxiliary mine-sweeping flotilla and the seaplanes of all stations hunted it. In the evening Flotilla IX advanced from List in a northwesterly direction toward Horn Reef.

At dawn two battle cruisers and Scouting Division IV, four light cruisers, took station south of Amrum Bank. During the day neither destroyers, seaplanes nor airships reported any enemy vessels. At 1500 G.M.T., however, the deciphering station at Neumunster reported a British radio despatch stating that last night -- the 20th-21st -- British detachments, including battleships and cruisers, had proceeded out of the Firth of Forth and had passed May Island on course ESE Magnetic. This apparently referred to the cruiser force bound for the Kattegat, but the course reported would have taken it toward Horn Reef.

Admiral Scheer assumed that the British were now commencing their long awaited attack against Tondern, particularly as the weather was favorable. He decided to concentrate the High Sea Fleet south of Horn Reef. Accordingly Scouting Divisions I and II with two fast flotillas proceeded to scout toward Horn Reef and at 2200 the Battle Fleet followed. (Figure 1) U20 and U32 left the Ems to take station at the western entrance to the Helgoland Bight. These movements made necessary a large number of radio messages. The Admiralty knew that the High Sea Fleet had been ready for an operation during the last week and late on the 21st determined from the intercepted German messages that it was putting to sea that evening; the purpose of its cruise, however, was not determined. The Kattegat demonstration accordingly was cancelled and the Admiralty ordered out the entire Grand Fleet. The Battle Fleet was directed to be in position 100 miles east of Aberdeen early the next morning

the 22d, with the Battle Cruiser Fleet advanced 40 miles toward the German bases and the 3d Battle Squadron and the 3d Cruiser Squadron in a position from which they could easily join the Battle Fleet in case of necessity.

Meanwhile the German forces were advancing toward Horn Reef to cover Tondern. Towards midnight the light cruiser Graudenz, flagship of Scouting Division II, was mined 15 miles southwest of Amrum Bank Lightship, and returned to port, after the admiral had shifted his flag to the Pillau. Scouting Divisions I and II turned back to the southward for a time and then proceeded again to the northward, leaving the lightship on the port hand.

At 0230 of the 22d L20, L21 and L9 took the air from Tondern, Nordholz and Hage respectively to commence scouting the approaches to the Helgoland Bight at daylight. At 0425 the light cruiser Elbing of Scouting Division II and one of the battle cruisers of Scouting Division I each sighted submarines to the southward of Vyl Lightship. By this time the airships reported that no enemy forces were inside a line from Terschelling to Bovbjerg. Had the British force which left Rosyth on the evening of the 20th been directed toward Tondern its advance would have been located by this time. A further advance of the High Sea Fleet therefore appeared unnecessary and would expose the ships to further submarine attacks. At 0440, therefore, all ships, including the two submarines, were ordered back to the outer roads. While returning the Frankfurt was also attacked by a submarine. At about 0600 the airships also had to be recalled because of unfavorable weather.

During the morning of the 22d the Admiralty informed Admiral Jellicoe that the German battle cruisers had gone beyond Horn Reef

and the battleships as far as Lister Deep, but that now the High Sea Fleet was returning to port. This information possibly was obtained from submarines, but more probably from the deciphering and radio compass stations. The Admiralty suggested that a light cruiser force be sent into the Skagerrak and that the Grand Fleet be kept within supporting distance.

Accordingly at 1430 Admiral Jellicoe ordered the 4th Light Cruiser Squadron with 3 destroyers to proceed into the Skagerrak, arrive at the Skaw at daylight of the 23d, and then sweep to the westward. In the hope that this would draw out German forces he decided to take a position of readiness early the next morning in the vicinity of Horn Reef. While still proceeding to the eastward with the Battle Fleet, he ordered the Battle Cruiser Fleet to proceed toward Horn Reef.

Admiral Beatty found that the visibility began to decrease at about 1500 and at about 1800 in a dense fog the Australia and New Zealand were badly damaged by collision. As they started back for Rosyth Beatty commenced cruising back and forth in a position about 75 miles northwest (magnetic) from Horn Reef, with the intention of closing it at daybreak. (Figure 2).

Shortly before dark, about 2000, the Grand Fleet, proceeded by its cruiser squadrons, steered 162° (magnetic) for Horn Reef. At 2200 dense fog was met and somewhat later the Neptune collided with a merchant vessel. At 0430 of the 23d the Battle Fleet, when to the westward of Little Fisher Bank, turned to the northward, as the admiral did not wish to approach the coast in this weather. Although special signals had been arranged for a reversal of the

fleet's course by squadrons in succession from the rear, the Garland, Ambuscade and Ardent collided, and the latter vessel had to be towed home stern first.

Admiral Jellicoe, hearing that all was quiet in the Helgoland Bight, decided to abandon the operation. Unknown to him, this was an unfortunate decision, for had he carried out the idea he had been considering, a renewal of the advance on the 24th, he would have been able to have cut completely the line of retreat of the High Sea Fleet at Terschelling. The low fuel capacity of his destroyers prevented, in his opinion, remaining out for another day. The Battle Cruiser Fleet must have been authorized to return soon after 0430, because this force arrived at Rosyth at 2030 the same day, and even had the start been made at 0430 18 knots must have been averaged. The Battle Fleet remained cruising to the Westward of Little Fisher Bank to cover the return of the disabled destroyers and probably commenced its return at about 1000, arriving at Scapa at 0600 of the 24th.

About the 17th Admiral Bayly, commanding at Queenstown, had been warned that an Irish revolution would start about Easter and that the Germans would endeavor to land arms. He had stationed armed trawlers on patrol stations; on the 20th he had received the light cruiser Gloucester and 4 destroyers from the Grand Fleet.

Meanwhile on the 12th the Libau had passed between Scotland and Norway, and, keeping well to the northward, had reached the vicinity of Iceland on the 17th; then Spindler had headed south for the Irish coast and at 1600, 20 April reached Tralee Bight, the appointed rendezvous with the U19. That vessel actually ar-

rived during the night, but did not find the Libau. Casement was landed, but conducted himself so carelessly that he was soon captured. The next morning at 0500 the Libau was boarded by the captain and six men of an armed trawler, but Spindler played his part so well as to completely gain the confidence of the British officer, who told him that he had been searching for a German steamer with minitions for the Irish. Casement's discovery, however, aroused the suspicions of the British and the auxiliary cruiser Bluebell ordered the Libau to proceed to Queenstown. Enroute six more patrol craft and a destroyer detachment joined the escort, but did not attempt to board the Libau, probably fearing torpedoes. Lieutenant Spindler ordered his crew to shift into naval uniform, hoisted the man-of-war flag and blew up his ship, which sank in 4 minutes. The handling of this vessel was most creditable, but it would appear that better arrangements should have been made for the reception of the ammunition by the Irish. It would also have been preferable for Casement to have proceeded on the Libau, although, even had this been done, the result would doubtless have been the same.

By a most unusual coincidence three important events occurred on 24 April, the day following Easter Sunday. The Irish revolutionists, with some 12,000 men under arms, seized Dublin. Admiral Bacon with the Dover Patrol, supported by part of the Harwich Force, laid a great barrage of mines and nets off the Flanders coast; Commodore Tyrwhitt made a practice cruise with the remainder of his force. Admiral Scheer commenced his demonstration against the English coast, assisted by the Airship Detachment and the Flanders

submarines.

It may be interesting in our study of the coming fleet operations to consider the Admiralty as corresponding to our Commander-in-chief, U.S.Fleet; the Battle Fleet to our Battle Fleet; the Battle Cruiser Fleet to our Scouting Fleet; and the Harwich Force and Dover Patrol to our Control Force. While the Admiralty exercised direct strategical control over each of these forces, Admiral Jellicoe, in addition to having direct command of the Battle Fleet, exercised tactical control over the Battle Cruiser Fleet. On the German side, Admiral Scheer, in addition to exercising tactical control over both the Battle Fleet and Scouting Forces, had the strategical control of all forces in the North Sea; his duties therefore corresponded to those of our Commander-in-chief, U.S.Fleet and Commander-in-chief, Battle Fleet combined. The Battle Fleet corresponded to our Battle Fleet; the Scouting Forces to our Scouting Fleet; and the High Sea Fleet submarines, the Airship Detachment and the Naval Corps Flanders to our Control Force; when the airships were used for scouting, they were not a part of the Scouting Forces, but apparently were operated directly by Admiral Scheer.

At 1600 of the 23d four large minelayers, escorted by eight Harwich destroyers, of which the Laforey flew the flag, left Sheerness (Figure 3). At about the same time six divisions of drifters and six minelaying trawlers, escorted by four Harwich destroyers and two monitors, left Dover. By 0400 of the 24th this combined force was off the Flanders coast where they were joined by the Dover Patrol. At 0730 the minelayers completed a

double line of mines fifteen miles long and returned toward their base with the Laforey's destroyers. The drifters also had completed a barrage of thirteen miles of mined nets and remained to watch them, supported by the other vessels.

Admiral Schroder, commanding the Flanders Naval Corps, had been directed to send out thirteen submarines to assist in the demonstration against Lowestoft. Seven UC-boats were to lay mine-fields off Harwich and the Thames and four UB-boats were to form a line seventeen miles long at right angles to the coast at Southwold, while two others were to take station south of the German minefields running past Smith's Knoll Light Vessel (Figure 2) to assist the Scouting Forces in avoiding them.

On the 23d the six UB-boats left Zeebrugge, probably late in the evening. Five of them were clear before the arrival of the Dover Patrol the next morning, but UB13 apparently was lost in the newly-laid barrage. The five UC-boats left early on the 24th and ran directly into the British forces. Only UC6 was able to break through the barrage. UC5 ran her battery down and returned to port. UC1 ran into mine-nets and was lucky to break clear after several explosions and return to her base. UC7 after unsuccessful efforts to pierce the barrage lay on the bottom until dark. UC10 ran into a net and was attacked with depth charges; at 2035 she came to the surface, but soon ran into another net, and this time returned to port.

In the meantime an Allied seaplane had dropped two bombs near the Zeebrugge lock-gate and six German seaplanes had bombed the British forces off the coast. No hits were made by either side.

About 1100 German seaplane 503 directed a distant controlled motor boatloaded with explosives against a British monitor, but when 4 miles from its target the motor broke down and the seaplane had to blow it up. A German seaplane was shot down by a British Nieuport Clerget. At 1240 the Tirpitz Battery -- 4 11" guns -- straddled the monitor General Wolfe at 32,000 yards with four salvos - without hitting.

At 1500 three destroyers of the 2-Flotilla, V67, V68 and V47, engaged four British destroyers of the M-class, and, coming under the fire of a monitor, were forced back to the protection of their own batteries. When the British destroyers followed in pursuit all four of them were hit at 16,000 yards range by the accurate fire of the shore batteries. The Melpomene was brought to a stop with a shell in her engine room and another destroyer was put out of action. The drifter Clover Bank was sunk and the French destroyer Obusier severely damaged by mines.

While these operations were taking place off the Belgian coast, the High Sea Fleet was preparing to leave port early on the 24th, when at 0338 the List air station reported that a plane of unknown nationality had landed by the Hoyer lock-gate near the Tondern air-ship sheds. The weather was favorable for an air attack and the same British radio stations were heard as had been during the previous attack on 25 March. At daylight seaplanes commenced scouting from List. At 0515 Army headquarters at Hamburg reported that only propellor noises and explosions had been heard in a fog at Hoyer. Admiral Scheer then ordered the patrol forces to scout to the northwest from Amrum Bank and for the other forces to assemble in the outer roads ready to proceed on short notice.

At 0640 "false alarm" was sent out, the patrol forces recalled and preparations made to commence the attack on Lowestoft. Commander Strasser, chief of the Airship Detachment, reported that he was sending 7 or 8 airships to bomb the English coast during the coming night. Due to the sickness of Vice Admiral Hipper, Rear Admiral Boedicker assumed command of the Scouting Forces.

At 0955 the Scouting Forces, consisting of Scouting Divisions I and II with attached destroyers, left the Jade, just 40 minutes before Admiral Scheer received the first news of the British operation off the Flanders coast. By 1245 Battle Squadrons I, II and III, accompanied by Scouting Division IV and destroyer flotillas, had all left port to follow the Scouting Forces. (Figure 4). At 1300 the latter when off Nordeney turned to the northward to avoid being sighted by observers on the Dutch islands. At first they were escorted by seaplanes and from 1435 by the airship L7, which had left Tondern at 1040. After proceeding 40 miles to the northward the Seydlitz, leading Scouting Division I, changed course to WNW (magnetic) and almost immediately at 1448 ran on a mine, which tore a hole 90 square meters in area at the torpedo room. She had run into a field of 850 mines laid by the Princess Margaret and Angora in November, 1915. The other battle cruisers turned back to the southward, but the Seydlitz believed it safer to keep on to the westward, particularly as two submarines were seen astern. Scouting Division II and the L7 kept with the Seydlitz.

About noon the airships left their hangars for the attack on the British coast; L11, L13 and L18 from Hage; L14, L17 and L21 from Nordholz; L20 and L25 from Tondern. L14 was forced to

return by motor trouble.

Toward 1600 the four remaining battle cruisers, which were returning toward Nordeney on a southerly course, met Admiral Scheer coming to the westward and took station ahead of him on a westerly course along the Dutch coast. Because of the mining of the Seydlitz Admiral Scheer decided that the northerly route was impracticable and accepted the risk of being sighted by observers on the Dutch islands in the unusually clear weather. At 1800 Admiral Boodicker left the Seydlitz with his staff on V28 and at 1930 hoisted his flag on the Lutzow, which had been joined half an hour earlier by Scouting Division II. At 1807 the Seydlitz headed south and at 2052 steered east for the Ems under escort of 2 destroyers. She had lost 11 men and taken aboard 1400 tons of water. At 1930 L7 headed for Hage, landing at 2340.

At 2100 the Scouting Forces went on a southwesterly course at 21 knots, Scouting Division I being screened ahead and on each beam by three groups each composed of 2 light cruisers and 4 destroyers. (Figure 5). At 2030 Admiral Scheer was informed that a British despatch had recalled all patrol vessels; he now received for the first time information that light cruisers had been sighted from the Norwegian coast the day before. At midnight he changed course to southwest with his three battle squadrons and followed the Scouting Forces at 14 knots, screened by the 6 light cruisers of Scouting Division IV and 34 destroyers.

The British Intelligence had functioned with its usual efficiency. At 1550 the Admiralty informed Jellicoe and Beatty, in Scapa and Rosyth respectively, that Dublin was held by the

Irish insurgents, that the High Sea Fleet seemed to be coming out and that a demonstration against the East Coast was possible. The Harwich Force was recalled from its practice cruise to re-fuel and the Grand Fleet was placed on 2 hours' notice. At 1700 Beatty reported ready on 2 hours notice but Jellicoe stated that he could not reach this condition until 1900 and that a strong southerly gale was blowing.

At 1800 Jellicoe received news, probably from deciphered German messages and radio compass bearings, that Scouting Division I at 1500 had been 40 miles west of Helgoland steering to the northwest. This information was only slightly incorrect as to time, because at 1448 the Seydlitz had been mined and the other vessels of the division had turned to the southward. "Upon receipt of word that the High Sea Fleet was moving", Admiral Jellicoe ordered the Battle Fleet to raise steam for full speed and for the Battle Cruiser Fleet "to proceed at once", on a southeasterly course. The 5th Battle Squadron was to join the latter force, which was not to engage superior forces until the Battle Fleet was within supporting distance. The 3d Battle Squadron and the 3d Cruiser Squadron at Rosyth were to take station off Farn Island to cover the Tyne. While the wording of Corbett's account is indefinite, the only inference which can be drawn is that these orders were issued not later than 1800.

At 1950 the Admiralty, apparently not cognizant of Jellicoe's orders, ordered the Grand Fleet to sea to intercept the enemy. Before this it had already recalled the auxiliary patrols, ordered the local defense flotillas and the submarines to be in readiness, and the aircraft to scout at daybreak and attack enemy forces

sighted. At 2010 the commander-in-chief received news that the Seydlitz had been mined and that the other battle cruisers were 50 miles northwest of Borkum (this was their correct position at 1930) and that Battle Squadron III, which the other two squadrons seemed to be accompanying, was steering along the Dutch islands for a position 35 miles north of Terschelling, from which they were to steer southwest. As Admiral Scheer actually went southwest from this exact position at midnight, it will be seen that the British leader had the unusual advantage of four hours' advance information of the enemy's exact intentions. This placed Admiral Scheer under a grave disadvantage and it was fortunate that he was commencing his stroke at the most favorable time, when the Grand Fleet was fueling. Had it been at sea or even ready to leave its bases immediately, the operation might have resulted differently.

A glance at Figure 3 will show the grave risk which Admiral Scheer was taking in his attack on Lowestoft. From a point north of Terschelling the distance to an attacking position off Lowestoft was about 150 miles by the safest route through the minefields. If we double this distance and add 25 miles steaming for the bombardment we have exactly the distance from this point to Rosyth, 325 miles. Therefore, he had to count upon an almost certain contact with the Battle Cruiser Fleet, which to the best of his knowledge had 10 battle cruisers, 12 light cruisers, and a large number of destroyers. Such a contact, however, would be dangerous only if the Battle Cruiser Fleet interposed between the Scouting Forces and his Battle Fleet, and this could be

avoided by proper scouting; also it offered some chances of bringing superior forces against Beatty, but inferior speed reduced these chances almost to zero. If the Battle Fleet was at Scapa there was little to fear from it unless it could get to sea before the Germans left the Jade. But if the Battle Fleet were at sea then the Germans would probably have to accept a fight to a decision, what Scheer was trying to avoid. Had, for example, the Grand Fleet still been on the 24th near Little Fisher Bank, they would have been only 165 miles from the point off Terschelling and could therefore have intercepted at least the German Scouting Forces.

When the British heard of Scheer's intended movements, they immediately feared not only a bombardment of Lowestoft, but attacks on the shipping in the Downs and on cross-channel routes, blocking operations against Dunkirk, and landing attacks on the French coast. However, the distance to Dover and Dunkirk was 210 miles, and this when doubled and two hours' steaming added for the accomplishment of the mission would give 450 miles, as compared with 410 to Scapa. An operation so far afield would therefore allow the British Battle Fleet at 19 knots to intercept the Scouting Forces at 21 knots even if it were in Scapa when the Germans passed Terschelling. Furthermore, there would be grave danger that the speed of German ships would be reduced by mine hits or torpedoes fired by destroyers or submarines. It must be concluded, therefore, that the attack on Lowestoft was a sufficiently daring operation and that operations further to the southward would have been foolhardy. As no decisive results

could be expected from the actual attack, Lowestoft served Scheer's purpose best.

In view of the unusual opportunity to attack the High Sea Fleet and the probably decisive results of such an encounter, it would appear that the Grand Fleet did not act with its usual alertness. Beatty did not leave Rosyth until 2245; the 5th Battle Squadron left Scapa about 2100; the 1st Battle Squadron and 7th Cruiser Squadron proceeded from Cromarty about 2230, and the rest of the Battle Fleet did not leave Scapa until 2300. British accounts do not state the causes of this delay.

The Admiralty drew up a plan for attacking the High Sea Fleet with the forces immediately available:

1. Six Yarmouth submarines and a destroyer were to take station midway between Southwold and Hoek van Holland.
2. Commodore Tyrwhitt was to take station 20 miles northnorth-east of the submarines.
3. All Harwich destroyers were to rendezvous with the submarines at daylight.
4. Six additional submarines were to take station within gun range of Yarmouth.

That it was most inadvisable to issue such detailed orders from the Admiralty was demonstrated by the fact that they were completely ineffective. They remind us of the long series of ineffective orders issued by the Admiralty in the Trafalgar campaign.

At 2340 it was found that the German battle cruisers were steering for Yarmouth, followed by the Battle Fleet 50 miles in rear. The destroyer Melampus with five submarines had left Harwich just 30 minutes before; their assigned position was changed

to one 33 miles more to the northward. Admiral Bacon was ordered to withdraw all his forces from the Belgian Coast and his seaplanes were to fly up the coast to attack the enemy. These orders meant that his newly-laid barrage was to be left without protection.

Beginning at 2210 seven airships began to cross the English coast. They were frequently picked up by searchlights and brought under heavy gunfire; L13 was hit in the forward gondola by a high explosive shell. A strong southwest wind prevented any ships from reaching London and fog, rain and thick layers of clouds made it so difficult to find targets that only a few ships could launch all their bombs. L13 reported dropping bombs on Norwich and 20 explosive and incendiary bombs on a battery at Winterton; L16 bombed Cambridge and Norwich; L17 made an effective bombing attack, probably on Lincoln; L20 attacked ships off Harwich; the other ships dropped only a few bombs. Corbett states that little damage was done.

Meanwhile three other airships had taken off to scout for the fleet. L6 left Nordholz at 2315 to commence scouting from a position 100 miles northwest of Terschelling. One other ship was to join the main body and a third to scout to the southward, but L7, which had accompanied the Seydlitz and then proceeded to Hage was unable to take the air again until 0230, so L9, which had left Hage at 2035, was ordered to take station between the Battle Fleet and the Scouting Forces.

About 2300 UB18 and UB29 reached their stations off the mine-fields and showed their prearranged signals for the battle cruisers. UB6 and UB10 were on their appointed line off Southwold,

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but through error UB12 took station off Lowestoft. Of the British submarines to take station within gunrange of Yarmouth only H-5 ever reached its position; three others were from 12 to 20 miles off the city due to faulty interpretation of orders and two more did not reach their positions in time.

About 0030 Commodore Tyrwhitt left Harwich with three light cruisers of the 5th Light Cruiser Squadron and the Lightfoot leading seven destroyers; the Nimrod followed with nine more. Before leaving the commodore had received the Admiralty message giving the position of the German battle cruisers and their course toward Yarmouth. As they would pass the position assigned to the submarines long before the latter could reach it, there was obviously no reason for the light cruisers to take their assigned position north of the submarines, nor was it possible for them to reach it in time. The commodore therefore decided to take station off Lowestoft; he headed in this direction with the destroyers on either beam.

The two divisions of destroyers, which had escorted the minelayers back to the mouth of the Thames, could not get to sea until 0200 and therefore could not reach their appointed rendezvous with the submarines at daylight. Thus every single part of the Admiralty's combination for the southern North Sea had failed. The retirement from the Belgian coast permitted German torpedo boats on the 25th to destroy a part of the newly-laid barrage and to sink one armed trawler, which had not received the order to withdraw.

Meanwhile at 0130 the Scouting Forces had changed course direct for Lowestoft. At 0315 UB18 off the southern edge of the minefields sighted the smoke clouds of the battle cruisers to the eastward,

while in the moonlight to the northward the L21, in which Commander Strasser was flying, was seen guarding their northern flank.

At 0350 Commodore Tyrwhitt sighted the German forces to the northward just as dawn was breaking. He changed course to northwest and at 0403 to south to draw the Germans after him. Just at this time he was sighted by the Rostock and Elbing 6 points on the port bow. These light cruisers were guarding the southern flank of the battle cruisers and the strange vessels were first thought to be the Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, which were stationed ahead of the battle cruisers. As soon as Commodore Michelsen, on the Rostock, made out the ships to be British, he reported the fact to Admiral Boedicker. The Frankfurt sank an armed trawler with gunfire.

At 0407 the Lutzow, leading the Derfflinger, Moltke and von der Tann, turned to the northward off Lowestoft and between 0411 and 0414 fire was opened at ranges of from 10,000 to 13,000 meters. (Figure 6) Fire was ceased after 6 minutes and the battle cruisers kept on toward Yarmouth. Some 200 houses had been destroyed and the shore batteries silenced. At 0424 the battle cruisers opened fire on Yarmouth, but visibility was so poor that only the Derfflinger kept on after the first salvo, using compass bearings for a total of 14 rounds. Fire was ceased after 4 minutes. The Lutzow sank an armed trawler with a 6-inch salvo and led a countermarch to the southward just in time to avoid the H-5 which was approaching to attack. Two other submarines were sighted by their own seaplanes, "which", says Corbett, "knew nothing of the Yarmouth submarines and attacked them with bombs." Three other seaplanes attacked the battle

cruisers, but were driven off by gunfire, Corbett admitting that "their gallant efforts had no success." At 0442 the Lutzow fired eight 12-inch rounds at the Great Yarmouth lighthouse.

In the meantime the Rostock and Elbing at 0412 had turned to the northward to follow the battle cruisers and had lost contact with the British light cruisers, which at 0421 also went to the north. Two minutes later the Rostock turned to the southeast and at 0430 was again sighted by Commodore Tyrwhitt, who opened fire; the shells fell short and the Germans reversed course to lead him into the battle cruisers. At 0437 the two German cruisers, reinforced by four others, turned to the southward, now supported by their battle cruisers. The commodore immediately went ships left about to escape from a dangerous position. After the turn he found that six light cruisers were slightly abaft his port beam at ranges between 11,600 and 18,000 meters, while slightly on his port quarter were four battle cruisers distant between 12,600 and 14,000 meters. The Germans do not seem to have taken full advantage of an opportunity to win a brilliant success. The light cruisers did not converge on their targets quickly enough and they soon fell out of range. The fire of the battle cruisers was extremely accurate, but as they steered a diverging course, instead of following the commodore directly, they could fire for only 7 minutes. One 12-inch salvo landed on the Conquest, the flagship, killed or wounded 40, and reduced her speed to 20 knots. The destroyers covered her with a smoke screen and concealed her loss of speed from the Germans. One hit on the destroyer Laertes injured a boiler and wounded five men. At 0456, several torpedo tracks and submarines having been reported, and two more seaplanes having been driven off, Admiral

Boidicker commenced his return toward his Battle Fleet, then distant 70 miles. While the Germans could probably have gained a greater success over Tyrwhitt, it must be remembered that they were in danger of being intercepted at Terschelling and of being injured by submarines and mines. In all they had fired 198 rounds with their main, 330 with their secondary, and 57 with their anti-aircraft batteries. Scouting Division II covered their retirement on the southern flank. UB6, UB12, and UB10 had observed the various actions off Lowestoft, but, being forced to submerge by seaplanes, their slow speed prevented them from attacking.

At 0438 L9, having reached its position between the Scouting Forces and the Battle Fleet, was attacked by seaplanes; it turned before the wind to the northeast and commenced to zigzag. One plane did not follow; the other was first driven off by machine-gun fire from the upper platform, but in a second attack, it gained a position directly above the ship, which narrowly escaped the five bombs launched at it. During the fight the seaplane sighted the screen of the German Battle Fleet.

When the distance to the returning Scouting Forces was reduced to 50 miles Admiral Scheer reversed his course by squadrons at 0520 and headed at 15 knots for the rearranged position off Terschelling. Scouting Division IV, under the Second Leader of Destroyers in the Regensburg, scouted towards the northwest. L9 also was ordered to scout to the northwest, but could not obey as Commander Strasser recalled all airships due to southeast winds. Meanwhile L6 had been carried far to the northward of its assigned position and at 0320 headed to the southward, but at 0405 it also was forced to turn back

to Tondern by the general recall. This recall lost us some interesting maneuvering because, had the airships continued scouting, they would probably have located the Battle Cruiser Fleet, for which Scheer would have attempted to lay a trap.

At 0553 the Melampus and five submarines, which were just reaching their position, received orders from the Captain(S), who was on the destroyer Lurdher, to extend the submarine line as far north as 53° 15'. But this was all to no purpose as the Germans passed about 4 miles beyond the northernmost submarine, E-55. At 0540 Commodore Tyrwhitt, after having made emergency repairs, proceeded again to the northeast with his three cruisers in line at about 3 miles distance, speed 22, to regain contact. At 0555 the Laforey's 8 destroyers also headed northeast, but from a position about 25 miles south of Tyrwhitt's. The Melampus at 0710 joined these destroyers.

UB18 and UB29 had left their stations off the minefields and proceeded south-east. At 0600 UB29, having been forced to submerge by seaplanes, saw the returning battle cruisers pass; an hour later it was again forced to submerge by a British submarine and was sighted by the Cleopatra as Tyrwhitt passed. At 0825 UB29 sighted the Laforey's destroyers heading directly at her and again submerged.

Commodore Tyrwhitt at 0830 sighted the smoke of the battle cruisers, but 15 minutes later was recalled by the Admiralty, prematurely it would seem. On his return the UB29 at 0925 torpedoed the Penelope, blowing away her rudder and reducing her speed to 20 knots.

During the forenoon UB18 had been having a most interesting time. At 0545 she had seen two German light cruisers and four destroyers pass to the northeast; soon thereafter she sighted the Melampus and two E-boats with radio masts rigged. Her attack on one of these submarines was unsuccessful. At 0800 9 destroyers passed to the northward and then three submarines were seen assembling near a destroyer, probably the Lurdher. At 1020 the boat was nearly rammed by E-26, but escaped by a deep dive. At 1140 UB18 sank the E-22 by a shot at 350 meters and rescued two men of the crew, although other hostile submarines were in sight. After sinking a fishing cutter the submarine returned to port.

During the return of the Scouting Forces G41 sank the "King Stephen", and took her crew of 13 prisoner; it was this vessel which had allowed the crew of the L19 to drown. Five neutral steamers were sent into Cuxhaven.

At 0630 the deciphering station at Brugge reported the reception of British radio messages directing their forces to return from the Belgian coast and for the destroyers to fuel and assemble off Dunkirk. As the Harwich Force had not again been sighted, Admiral Scheer believed there was no further chance of accomplishing anything and at 0920 ordered the High Sea Fleet to return to port. This decision may have been influenced by two submarine attacks on Squadron II off Terschelling. It might appear that this movement of the Battle Fleet placed the Scouting Forces in danger of being intercepted by Admiral Beatty, but probably Scouting Division IV had covered enough distance in its search to the northwest to show that no such danger existed.

Admiral Boedicker, to avoid the submarines which had attacked the Battle Fleet off Terschelling, set his course for a position 40 miles to the northward. From this position he changed course at 1145 to the southeast to skirt the Dutch coast. The Battle Fleet, which was about 45 miles ahead of him, was again attacked by a submarine at noon.

Meanwhile the Grand Fleet had been steaming to the southward trying to cut off the retreat of the enemy. At 0406 the fleet received a report from Tyrwhitt that he had sighted battle and light cruisers off the coast. Full speed was then ordered for the entire Grand Fleet. At 0420 the Admiralty informed the fleet that Lowestoft was being bombarded; at 0540 Aldeburgh radio station reported that the battle cruisers were steaming to the eastward.

At 0807 Beatty rounded the southern edge of the Southwest Shoal of Dogger Bank and headed to the northward of Terschelling. Had he set his course at 0047 toward Terschelling across the part of the Dogger Bank which shows a minimum depth of 12 fathoms, he could have saved 12 miles, but probably this area was considered unsafe because of mines and wrecks. From Corbett's chart it is noted that Beatty's speed from 0047 to 0335 was 22.2; from 0335 to 0807 22.5; and from 0807 to 1230 19.6. This reduction of speed lost another 12 miles. The delay of 2 hours and 45 minutes in leaving Rosyth already had caused a loss of 60 miles. At 1230 Beatty, having missed Boedicker by only 45 miles, reversed course and returned to port. While it might appear that Beatty lost an opportunity to bring his 2 to 1 superiority against Boedicker, it is also possible that, had he been farther advanced, Scouting Division IV would have found him and thus permitted Scheer to have come to Boedicker's assistance

in time or even to have attempted to draw Beatty into a trap.

The material losses in this operation were of no importance. The Germans lost one submarine, one seaplane, had one airship hit and lost the services of the Seydlitz for a month while her damage was being repaired. The British lost one large submarine, had two light cruisers temporarily out of action, five destroyers damaged and five patrol craft sunk. The French had one destroyer mined. Moderate injury to buildings was received from airship and cruiser bombardments.

The moral effect of the operation however was considerable. The bombardment of the east coast was a distinct shock to British pride and lowered the prestige of the British Navy among the people. It had an evil effect upon the Admiralty as shown by its repeated refusal to allow Tyrwhitt to join the Grand Fleet at Jutland despite the approved policy expressed in Jellicoe's letter of 30 October, 1914: "It will, however, be very desirable that all available ships and torpedo craft should be ordered to the position of the fleet action as soon as it is known to be imminent..... I trust that their Lordships will give the necessary orders on the receipt of information from me of an impending fleet action." The bombardment also had its propaganda value for the Germans.

The operation demonstrated to the Admiralty that to secure the east coast naval detachments must be spread more to the southward. The 3rd Battle Squadron and 3rd Cruiser Squadron were shifted to the Thames. The Harwich Force was brought up to 5 light cruisers, 2 flotilla leaders and 17 destroyers. As a temporary measure, the 5th Battle Squadron was attached to the Battle Cruiser Fleet, to replace the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron which was training at Scapa.

In the operations themselves, Admiral Scheer seems to have handled his forces more effectively than the British, except that he revealed his position and even his intentions by too frequent radio messages. While in general the organization of the British forces was along correct lines, their system of command does not seem to have been good and the Admiralty issued too many detailed orders. It would have been better had they turned over to Commodore Tyrwhitt the entire command of the forces in the Southern North Sea. As it was orders were issued which were impracticable to execute and individual forces were in the dark as to what others were doing.

The British intelligence work was little short of miraculous, while the German service also was good. The British commanders not only had accurate knowledge of the German positions and courses at frequent intervals, but knew even Admiral Scheer's intentions for the future. This neutralized the German advantage of the initiative, and in fact to a great extent gave it to the British.

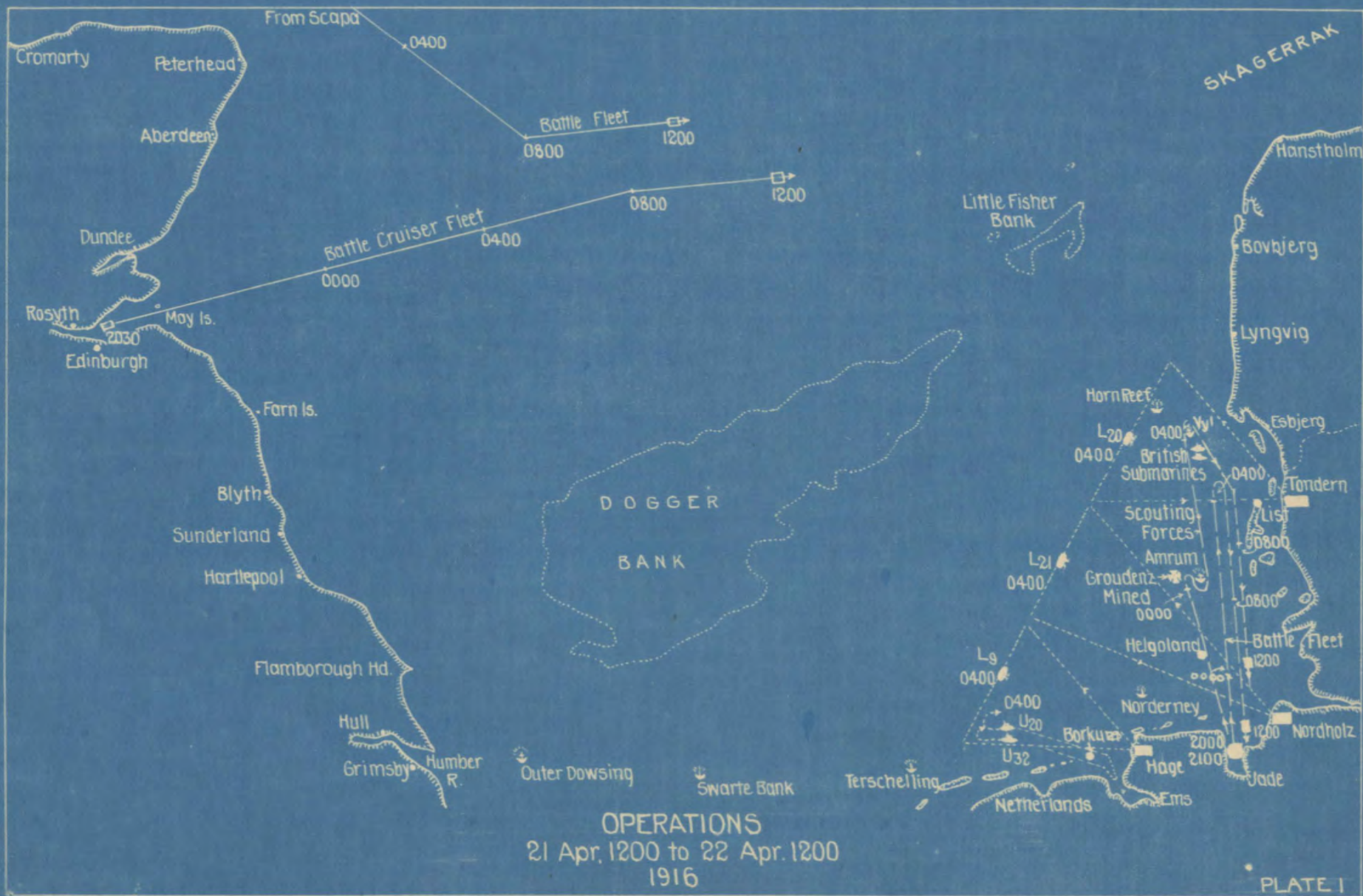
The operations demonstrated in a striking way the complete inability of the German airships to accomplish anything either by bombing or scouting. It is doubtful whether recent improvements in airships would permit them to play a much more important part were the operations reenacted today.

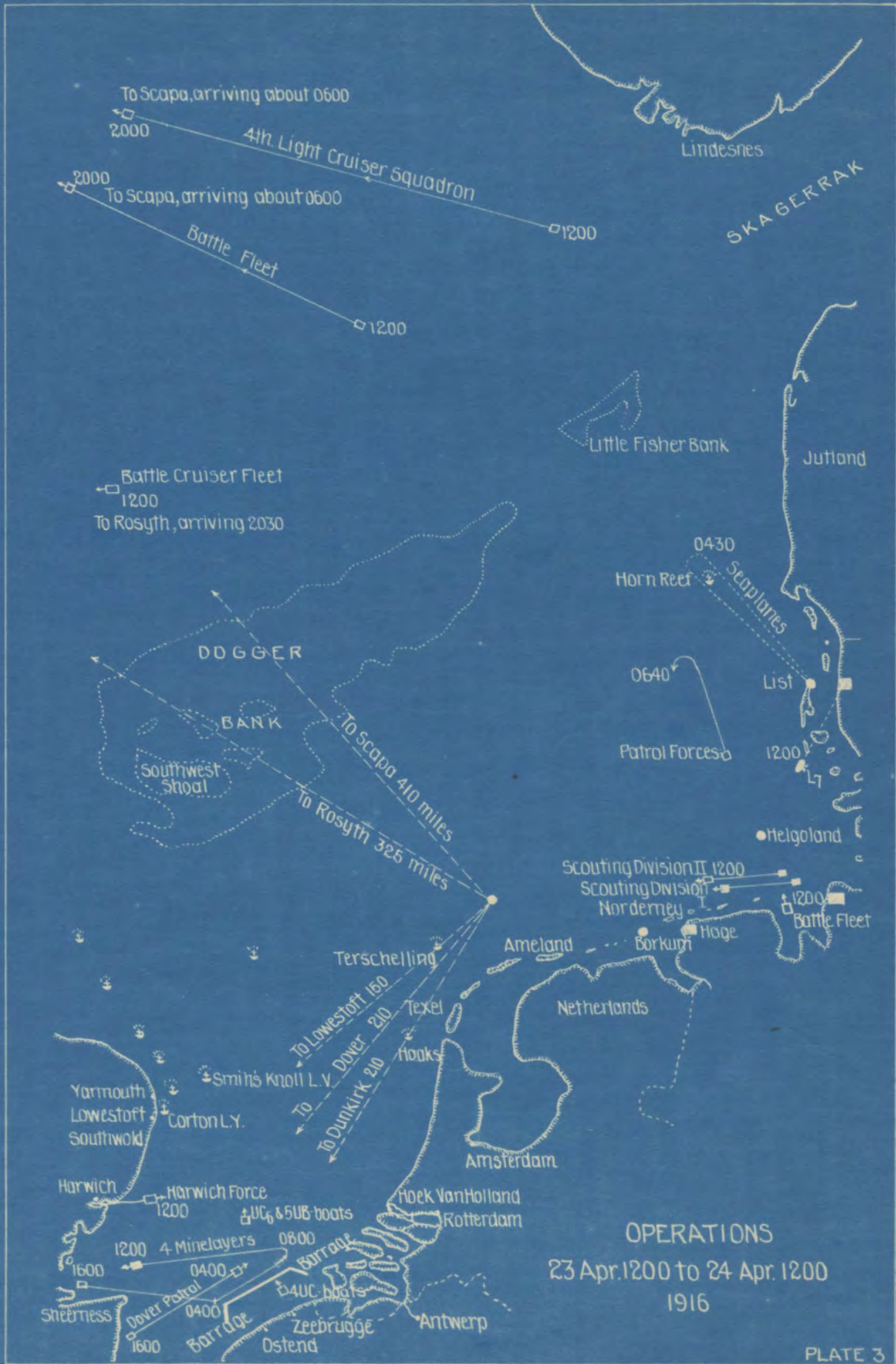
Submarines also played a very disappointing role considering how thickly both British and German boats were massed off the coast. The unusually high speed of the surface craft doubtless increased the difficulty of their attacks. Had battleships been present attacking conditions would have been more favorable. Present day

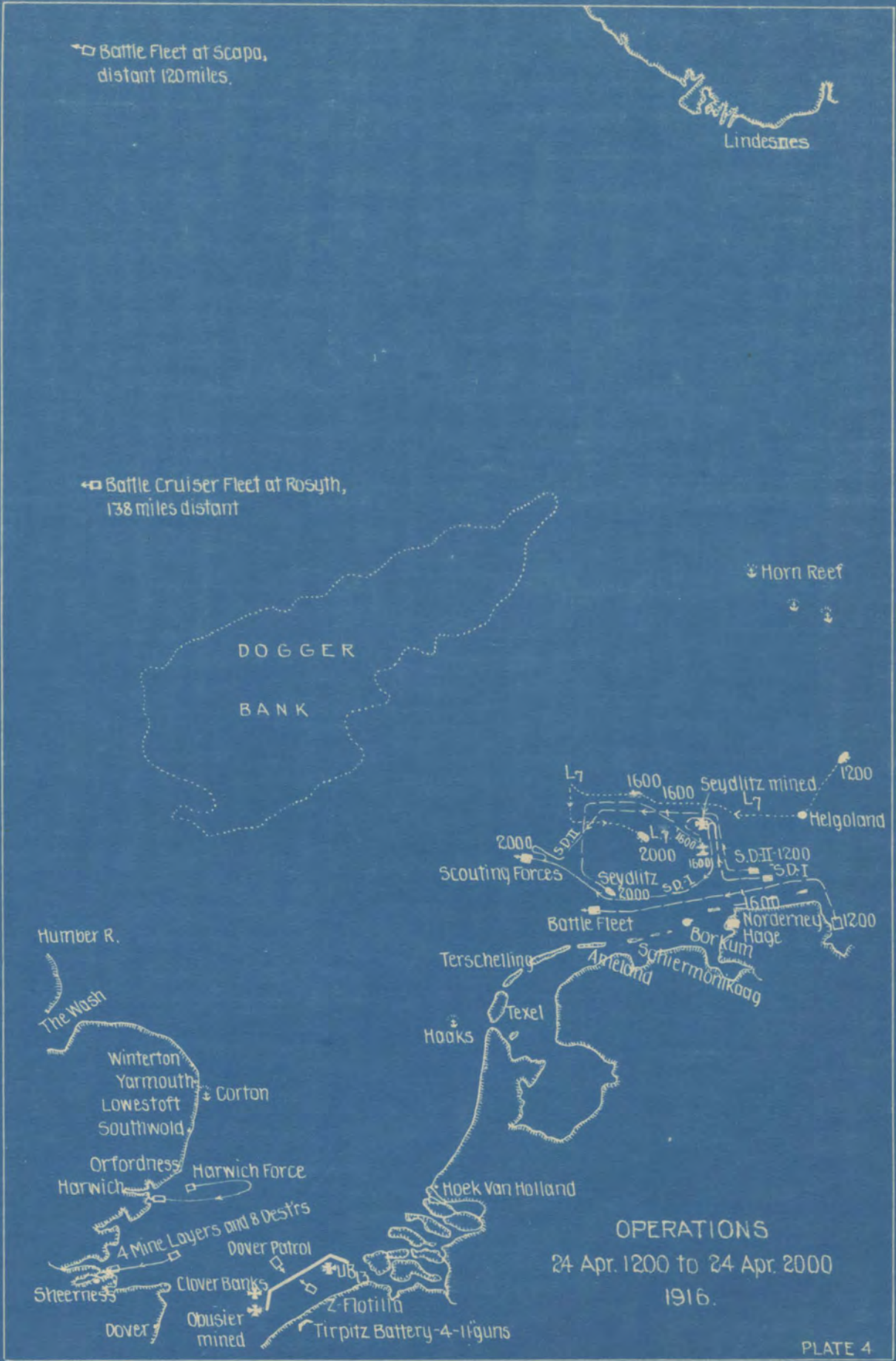
submarines certainly would accomplish far more under similar conditions.

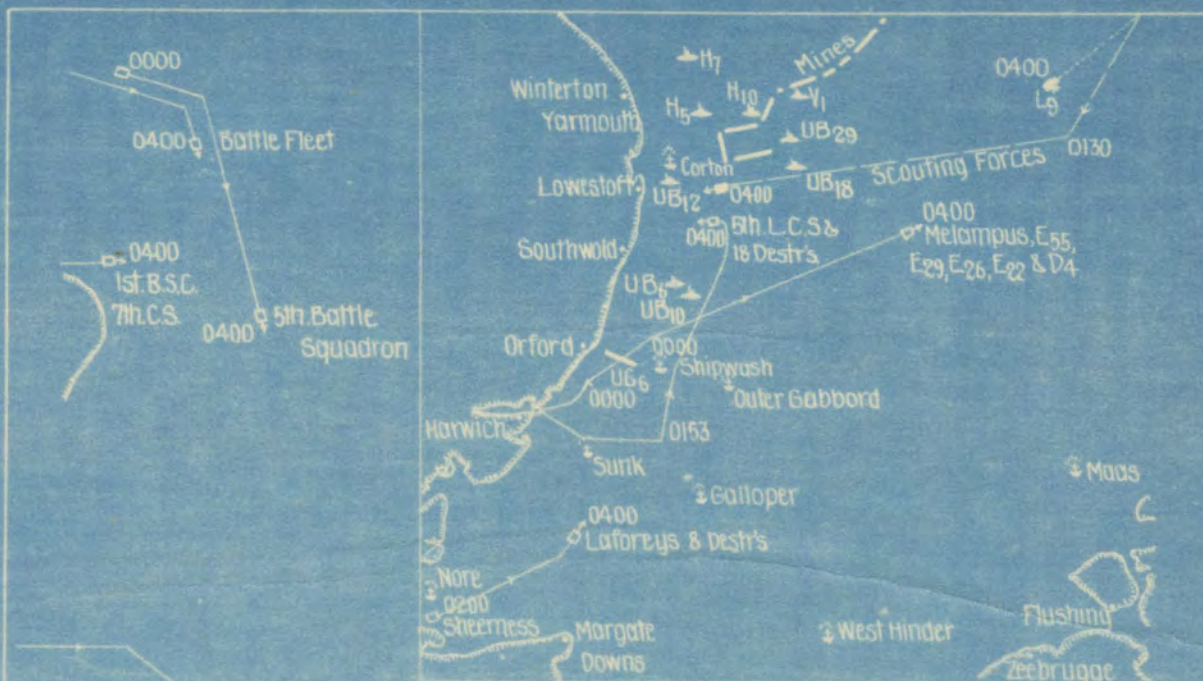
While the use of seaplanes for bombing naval vessels was a complete failure, this art was then in its infancy, and were a similar operation repeated today, it is probable that well trained bombing planes would have scored hits.

Due to improvements in submarines and planes, a bombardment such as that of Lowestoft by the German battle cruisers would be attended with risks out of proportion to the results it could gain, unless the attacking force had some important ulterior object in view.









OPERATIONS
24 Apr. 2000 to 25 Apr. 0400
1916

