

TAC NEWS

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The Scarborough Raid, December 16 1914

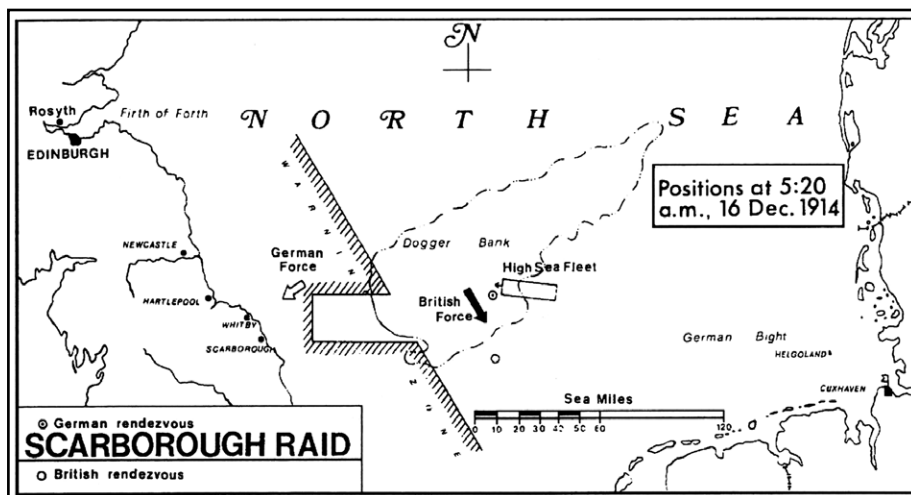
This article originally appeared in the September-October 1997 Tac News

The name “Jutland” evokes dramatic visions of the classic naval battle of 1916: long lines of battleships belching clouds of funnel smoke, naval guns roaring, and columns of sea spray thrown up by a hail of projectiles. The Falkland Islands, Heligoland Eight, and Dogger Bank are other historical naval battles that recall scenes similar to Jutland. However, throughout World War One, encounters between British and German battleships were the exception rather than the rule and Jutland was the only battle that involved battleships of both fleets. Battleships usually came out to support lighter warships sent on raiding and mine laying missions or convoy-escort duties. The Scarborough Raid was the first deliberate attempt to bring a portion of Britain’s Grand Fleet into battle with the German Navy’s High Seas Fleet. No battle like Jutland or Dogger Bank resulted, but the entire operation has interesting wargaming possibilities.

The Bombardment

Rear Admiral Hipper’s Scouting Fleet targeted the English coastal towns of Scarborough, Hartlepool, and Whitby for bombardment. Hipper’s ships attacked in two groups. The bombardment began shortly after 8 a.m. December 16, 1914. At 8:03, Hartlepool received attention from the battlecruisers *Seydlitz* and *Moltke*, and the armoured cruiser *Blücher*. A few minutes later, Scarborough was bombarded by battlecruisers *Von der Tann* and *Derfflinger*. Shortly after 9 a.m. it was Whitby’s turn. More than 100 civilians were killed and more than 500 were wounded. The light cruiser *Kolberg* laid one hundred mines offshore south of Scarborough, opposite the town of Filey.

The High Seas Fleet went out to support Hipper and was to wait about 150 miles east of Scarborough and cover his return to base. Coincidentally, British forces were sent to the same area. Vice Admiral Beatty’s First Battlecruiser Squadron of four battlecruisers, with four light cruisers and Vice Admiral Warrender’s Second Battle Squadron of six modern battleships, with four cruisers and a flotilla of destroyers, were to meet about thirty miles south of the German rendezvous. Between midnight



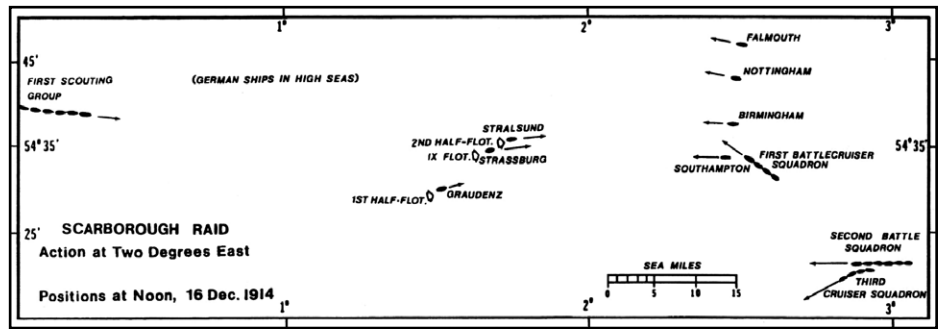
December 15 and 3 p.m. December 16, the paths of British and German warships crossed no less than nine times. No gun battle between large combatant ships occurred, however, due to bad weather and poor visibility. Conditions in the North Sea that night included darkness, heavy seas, and driving rain squalls west of the third degree meridian and scattered mist to the east. On the British side, the problem was not just the weather, but also delayed or incomplete reports of enemy warships, poorly worded radio messages from the flagship, the absence of initiative, and lack of orders to open fire.

Early War Strategy

When war started in August 1914, the German Admiralty Staff (*Admiralstab*) expected that the British Navy would take the offensive and institute a close blockade of the German Fleet. The role of the German High Seas Fleet would be defensive. German light forces—torpedo boats, submarines and mine layers—would conduct a war of attrition against the blockading forces. As of December, the British had an overwhelming superiority in battleships of 23:14 over the High Seas Fleet, plus six battlecruisers to the German’s four. The *Admiralstab* hoped to wear down the strength of the British Fleet sufficiently to achieve an equality of forces so the High Seas Fleet could challenge the Grand Fleet and win.

Unfortunately for the Germans, the expected British close blockade did not materialize. Instead, British orders called for a

distant blockade to close the North Sea. The bulk of the Grand Fleet was stationed at Scapa Flow in the North. The Channel Fleet of older battleships blocked the English Channel in the south. Cruisers patrolled between the Shetlands and Norway. The Grand Fleet made frequent sweeps into the North Sea, ready to challenge the High Seas Fleet should it come out.



The German Plan

As early as December 1914, the High Seas Fleet had a chance to cut the Grand Fleet down to size. The fleet commander, Admiral Ingenohl, ordered another raid on the east coast of England like the Yarmouth bombardment of November. In the new operation, Rear Admiral Hipper's battlecruisers were to bombard Scarborough and Hartlepool, and the cruiser *Kolberg* would lay mines. The Germans wanted to lure the Grand Fleet or a part of it into the minefield. Another incentive for the Germans was the need to counteract the loss of Spee's squadron in the Battle of the Falklands, December 8. Further, Ingenohl now knew that the battlecruisers *Inflexible* and *Invincible* were in the south Atlantic, weakening the Grand Fleet. unknown to Ingenohl, the BC *Princess Royal* was also absent, in the West Indies. The High Seas fleet would go to sea in a supporting position to cover Hipper's retirement. The pre-arranged rendezvous was at 54° 41' N, 20° 58' E.

The British Plan

Unknown to the Germans, the British cryptanalysis of Room 40 were able to intercept and decode German radio traffic. Decrypted German messages mentioned Hipper's forces for an impending, but unspecified, operation. They did not know that the entire High Seas Fleet would be supporting him. The Admiralty passed this information to the British commander-in-

chief, Admiral Jellicoe, who wanted to send the entire Grand Fleet to intercept, but the Admiralty authorized only one battle squadron for the operation with cruisers and destroyers. Beatty's four battlecruisers and four light cruisers supported by the Second Battle Squadron, a cruiser squadron, and a destroyer flotilla from the Harwich Force would approach from the south to trap the Germans. The Third Battle Squadron of old pre-dreadnought battleships would remain near the coast to trap the Germans if they went north. Jellicoe ordered Warrender and Beatty to rendezvous at 7:30 a.m. (just before dawn) at 54° 10' N, 30° 00' E and wait for Hipper.

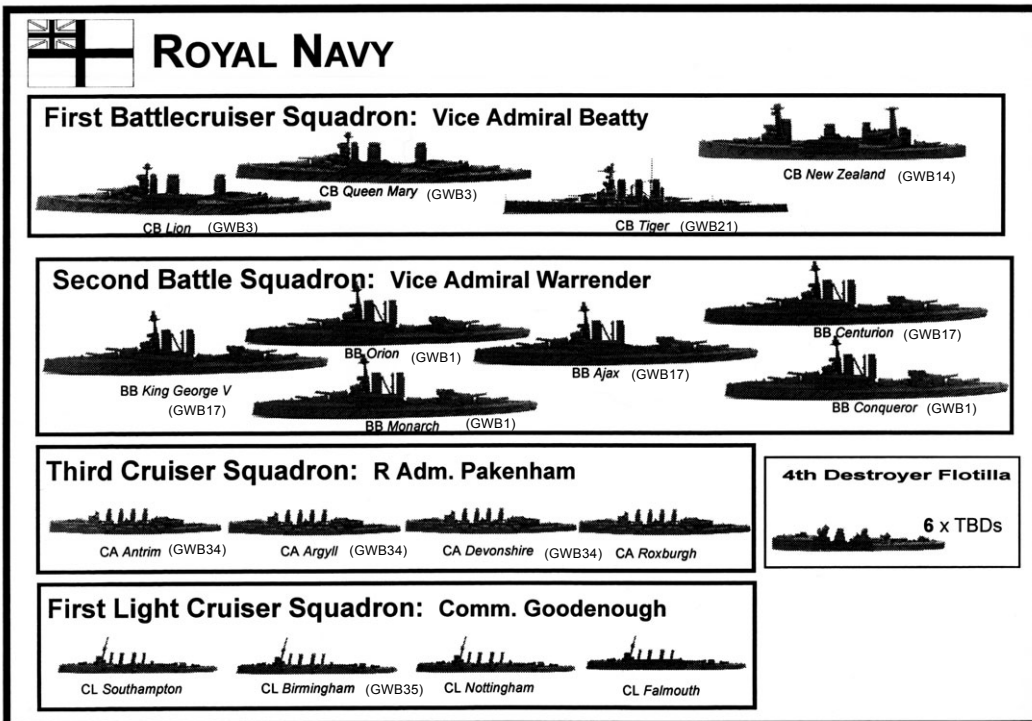
Hipper's Close Encounter with the British Fleet

The British and German Fleets first crossed paths shortly before midnight December 15. Hipper, on course west-southwest, passed ahead of Beatty and Warrender, who were on course south-southeast. At the closest point, the ships were about ten miles apart. Visibility was only about four miles on this dark and cloudy night and neither force sighted the enemy.

Had visibility been better, first contact probably would have been between the British Fourth Destroyer Flotilla, steaming to Beatty's left, and the German cruiser *Graudenz* and torpedo boats, two miles to Hipper's right. Ideally, the British destroyers would have reported the enemy to Warrender within minutes after initial contact. However, perhaps this is an overly optimistic assumption, since it was the very same destroyers that failed to report contact with the cruiser *Hamburg* and torpedo boats later that morning.

A Missed Opportunity

The British force met the advance scouts of the German High Seas Fleet at 5:15 a.m. December 15. Seven "K" class destroyers of the Fourth Flotilla were in action with the cruiser *Hamburg* and five torpedo boats. Ingenohl was informed of the encounter and thought that he had run into the destroyer screen of the Grand Fleet. It should be mentioned here that Ingenohl

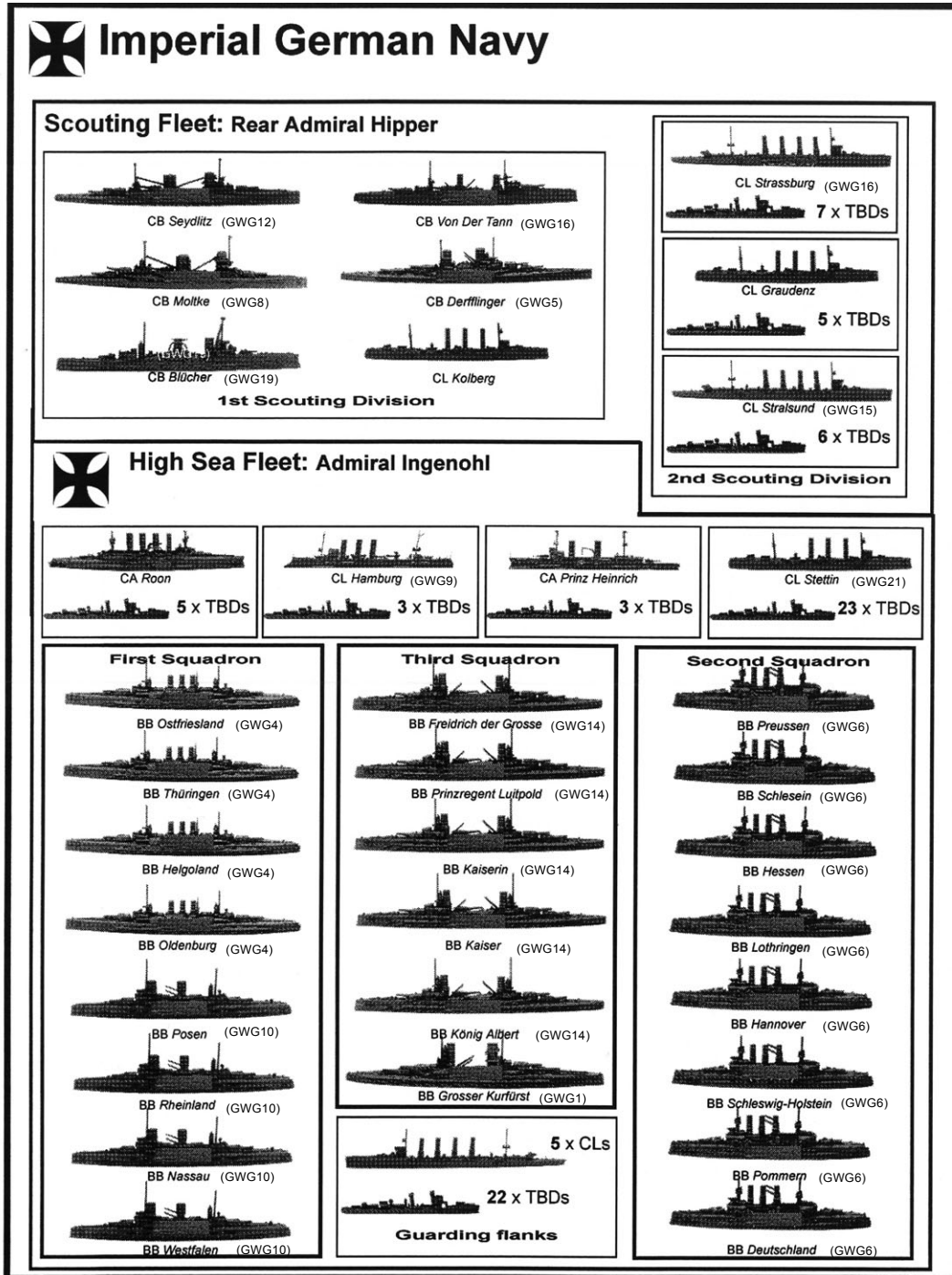


was operating under severe restrictions. He was risking the High Seas Fleet outside the German Bight without the Kaiser's permission. Instead of waiting for Hipper at the rendezvous, at 5:30, Ingenohl signaled his fleet to turn to port on a southerly course. This change of course was carried out at 5:42 and for forty minutes the British and German fleets were steaming on nearly parallel courses, barely twenty miles apart. At 6:20 Ingenohl turned again, this time directly for home. If Ingenohl had remained in the area he might have engaged the British soon after dawn in calm seas and good weather. The resultant battle could have meant the destruction of Warrender's Second Battle Squadron and Beatty's battlecruisers. As it turned out, this was the last opportunity in the war that the High Seas Fleet would have to engage an isolated part of the Grand Fleet.

If a battle had occurred at this time, the formation of the High Seas Fleet would have been as follows: the II and VII torpedo boat flotillas would have reversed courses; formed two lines abreast; and would have lead the entire fleet with only the light cruiser *Stettin* ahead of them. Behind the torpedo boat screen, the three battleship squadrons would be lined up in order of the Second; Third; and First. Each battleship squadron would turn in succession, so the individual ships of each squadron would be in the same order as before. The light cruisers *Frauenlob* and *Danzig* would be on the left and right sides of the torpedo boats, respectively. The light cruisers *München* and *Stuttgart* would be to the left of the battleship squadrons, and light cruiser *Rostock* and armored cruiser *Prinz Heinrich* on the right. The remaining torpedo boats would line up on either side of the battle ships.

The VI Flotilla and 10th Half-Flotilla one mile to the right and the VII Flotilla to the right. Armored cruiser *Roon* would follow astern of the First Squadron. Light cruiser *Hamburg* would be about twenty miles behind the fleet.

Meanwhile, Warrender received no report from his destroyers and he steamed on towards the 7:30 a.m. rendezvous without knowing how close he had come to disaster. He reached the British rendezvous at 7:17 a.m. At about 7:50, Warrender received reports from the destroyers and belatedly passed the information to Beatty, who received it at 8:05. Beatty immediately turned eastward with his battlecruisers and light cruisers to pursue, followed by Warrender's Second Battle Squadron and Third Cruiser Squadron. However, the reports did not say just what Beatty and Warrender were chasing and all they saw were German cruisers. Neither Beatty nor Warrender concluded that they might be in contact with with the High Seas Fleet. Just before 9 a.m. they received reports of the Scarborough bombardment. Now the British knew what the Germans were up to, and Beatty and Warrender turned again, this time northwest to intercept Hipper.



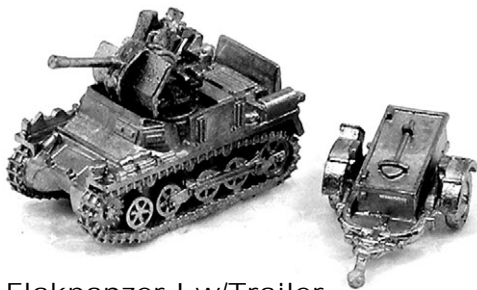
Another Missed Opportunity

The first encounter between the British and Ingenohl's advance screen, described in the previous section, could have been a disaster for the British. However, the second possible encounter could have been a disaster for the Germans. The occurrence of the second encounter also depends on the first never happening. had the British been in action with the High Seas Fleet, it probably would not have been possible to break off and steam away to intercept Hipper. If Hipper had maintained his planned easterly course to rendezvous with the High Seas Fleet, then the second encounter could have occurred about 1 p.m. The British force was on a heading west-northwest. Historically, Hipper received reports (from his light cruisers steaming on an easterly course about fifty miles ahead) that the British were blocking his escape, so he turned north at 12:45 p.m., only about twelve miles from Beatty. Earlier, Hipper's light cruisers and torpedo boats passed within less than five miles of the British Second Battle Squadron. The German ships were struggling in rough seas on their eastward course, but escaped destruction because the British battleships, which had the Germans in their sights, failed to fire. Far to the north, Jellicoe was finally allowed to leave Scapa Flow, but never approached the area of operations and the Germans were back in port long before the Grand Fleet got very far into the North Sea.

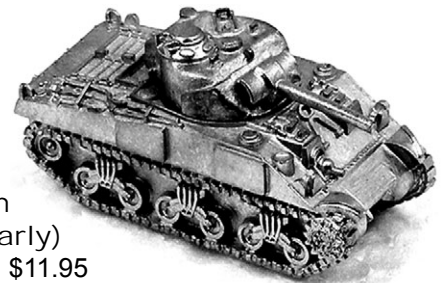
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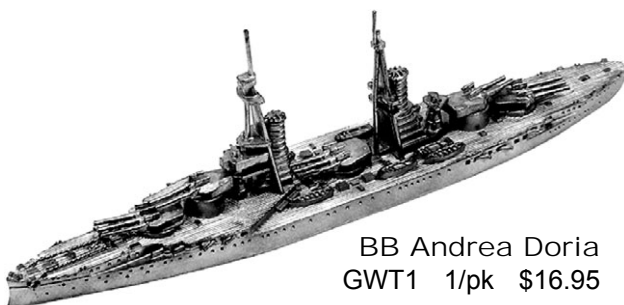


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