

# DANGER!!

## Being the Log of Capt. John Sirius --- BY SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

In this story, written four months before the outbreak of the present European war, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle suggests that England's strength might be shattered in a month; he tells, moreover, how it could be done. Four submarines belonging to a minor Power are described as blowing up grain ships as they near the British Isles, and England is represented as facing starvation. In other words, he forecast nearly a year ago the very situation threatened just now by the operations of German submarines in the Irish Sea and the Channel.

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It is an amazing thing that the English, who have the reputation of being a practical nation, never saw the danger to which they were exposed. For many years they had been spending nearly a hundred millions a year upon their army and their fleet. Squadrons of dreadnoughts costing \$2,000,000 each had been launched. They had spent enormous sums upon cruisers, and both their torpedo and their submarine squadrons were exceptionally strong. They were also by no means weak in their aerial power, especially in the matter of hydroplanes. Besides all this, their army was very efficient in spite of its limited numbers, and it was the most expensive in Europe. Yet when the day of trial came all this imposing force was of no use whatever and might as well have not existed. Their ruin could not have been more complete or more rapid if they had not possessed an ironclad or a regiment. And all this was accomplished by me, Capt. John Sirius, belonging to the navy of one of the smallest Powers in Europe and having under my command a flotilla of eight vessels, the collective cost of which was \$1,800,000. No one has a better right to tell the story than I.

I will not trouble you about the dispute concerning the colonial frontier, embittered, as it was, by the subsequent death of the two missionaries. A naval officer has nothing to do with politics. I only came upon the scene after the ultimatum had been actually received. Admiral Horri had been summoned to the Presence, and he asked that I should be allowed to accompany him, because he happened to know that I had some clear ideas as to the weak points of England and also some scheme as to how to take advantage of them. These were only four of us present at this meeting—the King, the Foreign Secretary, Admiral Horri and myself. The time allowed by the ultimatum expired in forty-eight hours.

I am not breaking any confidence when I say that both the King and the Minister were in favor of a surrender. They saw no possibility of standing up against the colossal power of Great Britain. The Minister had drawn up an acceptance of the British terms, and the King sat with it before him on the table. I saw the tears of anger and humiliation run down his cheeks as he looked at it.

I fear that there is no possible alternative, sire," said the Minister. "Our envoy in London has just sent this report, which shows that the public and the press are more united than he has ever known them. The feeling is intense, especially since the rash act of Malort in desecrating the flag. We must give way."

The King looked sadly at Admiral Horri. "What is your effective fleet, Admiral?" he asked. "Two battleships, four cruisers, twenty torpedo boats and eight submarines," said the Admiral. "The King shook his head. "It would be madness to resist," said he.

"And yet, sire," said the Admiral, "before you come to a decision I should wish you to hear Capt. Sirius, who has a very definite plan of campaign against the English."

"Absurd!" said the King impatiently. "What is the use? Do you imagine that you could defeat their war armada?"

"Sire," I answered, "I will stake my life that if you will follow my advice you will within a month or six weeks at the utmost bring proud England to her knees." There was an assurance in my voice which arrested the attention of the King.

"You seem self-confident, Capt. Sirius."

"I have no doubt at all, sire."

"What then would you advise?"

"I would advise, sire, that the whole fleet be gathered under the forts of Blankenberg and be protected from attack by booms and piles. There they can stay till the war is over. The eight submarines, however, you will leave in my charge to use as I think fit."

"Ah, you would attack the English battleships with submarines?"

"Sire, I would never go near an English battleship."

"And why not?"

"Because they might injure me, sire."

"What, a sailor and afraid?"

"My life belongs to the country, sire. It is nothing. But thinking of eight ships—everything depends upon them—they could not risk them. Nothing would induce me to fight."

"Then, what will you do?"

"I will tell you, sire."

And I did so. For half an hour I spoke. I was clear and strong and definite, for many an hour on a lonely watch I had spent in thinking out every detail. I held them enthralled. The King never took his eyes from my face. The Minister sat as if turned to stone.

"Are you sure of all this?"

"Perfectly, sire."

The King rose from the table.

"Send no answer to the ultimatum," said he. "Announce in both houses that we stand firm in the face of menace. Admiral Horri, you will in all respects carry out that which Capt. Sirius may demand in furtherance of his plan. Capt. Sirius, the field is clear. Go forth and do as you have said. A grateful King will know how to reward you."

I need not trouble you by telling



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you the measures which were taken at Blankenberg, since, as you are aware, the fortress and the entire fleet were destroyed by the British within a week of the declaration of war. I will confine myself to my own plan, which had so glorious and final a result.

The fame of my eight submarines, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Theta, Delta, Epsilon, Iota and Kappa, has spread through the world to such an extent that people have begun to think that there was something peculiar in their form and capabilities. This is not so. Four of them, the Delta, Epsilon, Iota and Kappa, were, it is true, of the very latest model, but had their equals (though not their superiors) in the navies of all the great Powers. As to Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Theta, they were by no means modern vessels, and found their prototypes in the old F class of British boats, having a submerged displacement of 800 tons, with heavy oil engines of 1,600 horsepower giving them a speed of 18 knots on the surface and 12 knots submerged. Their length was 184 and their breadth 24 feet. They had a radius of action of 4,000 miles and a submerged endurance of 8 hours. These were considered the latest word in 1913, but the four new boats exceeded them in all respects. Without troubling you with precise figures, I may say that they represented, roughly, a 25 per cent. advance upon the older boats and were fitted with several auxiliary engines, which were wanted in the event of a breakdown.

At my suggestion, instead of carrying eight of the very large Bakford torpedoes, which are 19 feet long, weigh half a ton and are charged with 200 pounds of wet gun-cotton, we had tubes designed for eighteen of less than half the size. It was my design to make myself independent of my base.

And yet it was clear that I must have a base, so I made arrangements at once with that object. Blankenberg was the last place I would have chosen. Why should I have a port of any kind? Ports would be watched or occupied. Any place would do for me. I finally chose a small villa standing alone nearly five miles from any village and thirty miles from any port. To this I ordered them to convey, secretly by night, oil, spare parts, extra torpedoes, storage batteries, reserve periscopes and everything that I could need for refitting. The little whitewashed villa of a retired confectioneer—that was the base from which I operated against England.

The boats lay at Blankenberg, and thither I went. They were working frantically at the defenses, and they had only to look seaward to be spurred to fresh exertions. The British fleet was assembling. The ultimatum had not yet expired, but it was evident that a blow would be struck the instant that it did. Four of their aeroplanes, circling at an immense height, were surveying our defenses. From the top of the lighthouse I counted thirty battleships and cruisers in the offing, with a number of the trawlers with which the British service they break through the mine fields. The approaches were actually sown with two hundred mines, half contact and half observation, but the result showed that they were insufficient to hold off the enemy, since

three days later both town and fleet were speedily destroyed.

However, I am not here to tell you the incidents of the war, but to explain my own part in it, which had such a decisive effect upon the result. My first action was to send my four second class boats away instantly to the point which I had chosen for my base. There they were to wait submerged, lying with negative buoyancy upon the sands in twenty feet of water and rising only at night. My strict orders were that they were to attempt nothing upon the enemy, however tempting the opportunity. All they had to do was to remain in place and unseen until they received further orders. Having made this clear to Commander Panza, who had charge of this reserve flotilla, I shook him by the hand and bade him farewell, leaving with him a sheet of note paper upon which I had explained the tactics to be used and given him certain general principles which he could apply as circumstances demanded.

My whole attention was now given to my own flotilla, which I divided into two divisions, keeping Iota and Kappa under my own command, while Capt. Miriam had Delta and Epsilon. He was to operate separately in the British Channel, while my station was the Straits of Dover. I made the whole plan of campaign clear to him. Then I saw that each ship was provided with all it could carry. Each had forty tons of heavy oil for surface propulsion and charging the dynamo which supplied the electric engines under water. Each had also eighteen torpedoes, as explained, and 800 rounds for the collapsible quick firing 12 pounder which we carried on deck, and which, of course, disappeared into a water tank when we were submerged. We carried spare periscopes and a wireless mast, which could be elevated above the conning tower when necessary. There were provisions for sixteen days for the ten men who manned each craft. Such was the equipment of the four boats which were destined to bring to naught all the navies and armies of Britain. At sundown that day—it was April 10—we set forth upon our historic voyage.

Miriam had got away in the afternoon, since he had so much further to go to reach his station. In explanation of the Kappa started with me, but of course we realized that we must work independently, and that from that moment when we shut the sliding hatches of our conning towers on the still waters of Blankenberg harbor it was unlikely that we should ever see each other again, though conspecific in the same waters. I waved to Stephan from the side of my conning tower and he to me. Then I called through the tube to my engineer four water tanks were already filled and all King-ton and vents closed) to put her full speed ahead.

Just as we came abreast of the end of the pier and saw the white-capped waves rolling in upon us I put the horizontal rudder hard down and she slid under water. Through my glass portnoies I saw its light green change to a dark blue, while the manometer in front of me indicated twenty feet. I let her go to forty, because I should then be under the warships of the English, though I took the chance of foul-

ing the moorings of our own floating contact mines. Then I brought her on an even keel, and it was music to my ear to hear the gentle, even ticking of my electric engines and to know that I was speeding at twelve miles an hour on my great task.

At that moment, as I stood controlling the Mapin Sands. With that charming frankness which is one of their characteristics our friends of England had informed us by their press that they had put a cordon of torpedo boats across the Straits of Dover to prevent the passage of submarines, which is about as sensible as to lay a wooden plank across a stream to keep the eels from passing. I knew that Stephan, whose station lay at the western end of the Solent, would have no difficulty in reaching it. My own cruising ground was to be the mouth of the Thames, and here I was at the very spot with my tiny Iota, my eighteen torpedoes, my quick firing gun and, above all, a brain that knew what should be done and how to do it.

When I resumed my place in the conning tower I saw in the periscope (for we had dived) that a lightship was within a few hundred yards of us upon the port bow. Two men were sitting on her bulwarks, but neither of them cast an eye upon the little boat that dove the water so close to them.

It was an ideal day for submarine action, with enough ripples upon the surface to make us difficult to detect, and yet smooth enough to give me a clear view. Each of my three periscopes had an angle of 60 degrees, so that between them I commanded a complete semicircle of the horizon. Two British cruisers were steaming north from the Thames within half a mile of me. I could easily have cut them off and attacked them had I allowed myself to be diverted from my great plan. Further south a destroyer was passing westward to Sheerness. A dozen small steamers were moving about. None of these were worthy of my notice. Great countries are not provisioned by small steamers. I kept the engines running at the lowest pace which would hold our position under water, and moving slowly across the estuary I waited for what must assuredly come. I had not long to wait.

Shortly after 1 o'clock I perceived in the periscope a cloud of smoke to the south. Half an hour later a large steamer raised her hull, making for the mouth of the Thames. I ordered Vornal to stand by the starboard torpedo tube, having the other also ordered in case of a miss. Then I advanced slowly, for though the steamer was going very swiftly we could easily cut her off. Presently I laid the Iota in a position near which she must pass and would very gladly have lain to, but could not for fear of rising to the surface. I therefore steered out in the direction from which she was coming. She was a very large ship, 15,000 tons at the least, painted black above and red below, with two cream colored funnels. She lay so low in the water that it was clear she had a full cargo. At her bows were a cluster of men, some of them looking, I dare say, for the first time at the mother country. How little could they have guessed the welcome that was waiting them!

On she came with the great plumes of smoke floating from her funnels and two white waves foaming from her outwater. She was within a quarter of a mile. My moment had arrived. I signalled full speed ahead and steered straight for her course. My timing was exact. At a hundred yards I gave the signal and heard the clank and swish of the discharge. At the same instant I put the helm hard down and flew off at an angle. There was a terrific lurch, which came from the distant explosion. For a moment we were almost upon our side. Then, after staggering and trembling, the Iota came on an even keel. I stopped the engines, brought her to the surface and opened the conning tower, while all my excited crew came crowding to the hatch to know what had happened.

The ship lay within 200 yards of us, and it was easy to see that she had her deathblow. She was already settling down by the stern. There was a sound of shouting and people running wildly about her decks. Her name was visible, the Adela of London, bound, as we afterward learned, from New Zealand with frozen mutton. Strange as it may seem to you, the notion of a submarine had never even now occurred to her people, and all were convinced that they had struck a floating mine. The starboard quarter had been blown in by the explosion, and the ship was sinking rapidly. Their discipline was admirable. We saw boat after boat slip down crowded with people as swiftly and quietly as if it were part of their daily drill.

And suddenly, as one of the boats lay off waiting for the others, they caught a glimpse for the first time of my conning tower so close to them. I saw them shouting and pointing, while the men in the other boats got up to have a better look at us. For my part, I cared nothing, for I took it for granted that they already knew that a submarine had destroyed them, sinking ship. I was sure that he was about to send a wireless message as to our presence. It mattered nothing, since in any case it must be known, otherwise I could easily have brought him down with a rifle. As it was I waved my hand to them and they waved back at me. War is too big a thing to leave room for personal ill feeling, but it must be remorseless all the same.

I was still looking at the sinking Adela when Vornal, who was beside me, gave a sudden cry of warning and surprise, gripping me by the shoulder and turning my head. There behind us, coming up the fairway, was a huge black vessel with black funnels, flying the well known house flag of the P. & O. Company. She was not a mile distant, and I calculated in an instant that even if she had seen us she would not have time to turn and get away before we could reach her.

We went straight for her therefore, keeping awing just as we were. They saw the sinking vessel in front of them and that little dark speck moving over the surface, and they suddenly understood their danger. I saw a number of men rush to the bows and

there was a rattle of rifle fire. Two bullets were flung from her funnels and two white waves foaming from her outwater. She was within a quarter of a mile. My moment had arrived. I signalled full speed ahead and steered straight for her course. My timing was exact. At a hundred yards I gave the signal and heard the clank and swish of the discharge. At the same instant I put the helm hard down and flew off at an angle. There was a terrific lurch, which came from the distant explosion. For a moment we were almost upon our side. Then, after staggering and trembling, the Iota came on an even keel. I stopped the engines, brought her to the surface and opened the conning tower, while all my excited crew came crowding to the hatch to know what had happened.

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agrees and trim your pumps and compressors and rotators, that the human machine needs some tending also.

I had put up the wireless mast above the conning tower, and had no difficulty in calling up Capt. Stephan. He was lying, he said, off Ventnor and had been unable to reach his station, account of engine trouble, which he had now set right. Next morning he proposed to block the Southampton approach. He had destroyed one large Indian boat on his way down channel. We exchanged good wishes. Like myself, he needed rest.

I was up at 4 in the morning, however, and called all hands to overhaul the boat. She was somewhat up by the head owing to the forward torpedoes having been used, so we trimmed her by opening the forward compensating tank, admitting sea water as the torpedoes had weighed. We also overhauled the starboard air compressor and one of the periscopes motors which had been jarred by the shock of the first explosion. We had hardly got on our feet when the morning dawned.

I have no doubt that a good many ships have taken refuge in the French ports at the first alarm had run across and got safely up the river in the night. Of course I could have attacked them, but I do not care to take risks—and there are always risks for a submarine at night. Stephan had miscalculated his time, and that she was, just abreast of Warden Point when the daylight disclosed her to us. In an instant we were after her. It was a near thing, for she was a fine and could do her business to our own but we just reached her as she was being swamped by. She saw us at the last moment, for I attacked her bow, since otherwise we could not have had the pace to reach her.

She swung away and the first torpedo missed, but the second took her full under the bows. It was a very close smash! The whole stern seemed to go aloft. I drew off and watched her sink. She went down in seven minutes, leaving her masts and funnels over the water and a cluster of her people holding onto them. She was the Virginia of the British Line—twelve thousand tons and laden with the others, with foodstuffs from the East. The whole surface of the sea was covered with the floating grain.

"John Bull will have to take up a hole or two of his belt if this goes on," said Vornal, as we watched the scene. And it was at that moment that the very worst danger occurred that could befall us. I tremble now when I think how our glorious voyage might have been nipped in the bud. I had freed the hatch of my tower and was looking at the boats of the Virginia with Vornal beside me when there was a swish and a terrific splash in the water beside us, which covered us both with spray. We looked up and you can imagine our feelings when we saw an aeroplane hovering a few hundred feet above us like a hawk. With its silence it was perfectly noiseless until it had its bomb not fallen into the sea we should never have known what had destroyed us.

She was circling around in the hope of dropping a second one, but we showed on all speed ahead, crammed down the engines and veered round the side of a roller. I kept the deflection indicator falling until I had put fifty good feet of water between the aeroplane and ourselves, for I knew well how deep they can see under the surface. However, we soon threw her off our track. She was flying over the surface near Margate there was no sign of her, unless she was one of several which we saw hovering over Herne Bay.

There was not a ship in the offing save a few small coasters and little about the coast. It was a very different scene, I lay submerged with a blank periscope. Then I had an inspiration. Orders had been Marooned to every foodship to lie in French waters and dash across after dark. I was as sure of it as if they had been recorded in our wireless messages. I knew where there, that was where I should be also.

I blew out the tanks and rose, for there was no sign of any warship near. They had some good system of signaling from the shore, however, for I had not got to the North Foreland before three steamers were foaming after me, all converging from different directions. They had about as good a chance of catching me as three spaniels would of overtaking a porpoise. Out of pure bravado—I know it was very wrong—I waited until they were actually within gunshot. Then I sank and we saw each other no more.

It is, as I have said, a shallow and coast, and submarine navigation is very difficult. The worst mishap that can befall a boat is to bury its nose in the side of a sand drift and be held there. Such an accident might have been the end of our boat, though with our Fluess cylinders and electric lamps we should have found no difficulty in getting out at the air lock and in walking ashore across the bed of the ocean. As it was, however, I was able, thanks to our excellent charts, to keep the channel and so to gain the open straits. There we rose about midday, but, observing a hydroplane at half past one, we sank again for half an hour. When we came up for the second time, all was peaceful around us and the English coast was lining the whole western horizon. We kept outside the Goodwins and straight down channel until we saw a line of black dots in front of us, which I know to be the Dover-Chalais torpedo boat cordon. When two miles distant we dived and came up again seven miles to the southwest, without one of them dreaming that we had been within thirty feet of their keels.

When we rose a large steamer flying the German flag was within half a mile of us. It was the Nassau, the German Lloyd Alaska, from New York to Bremen. I raised our whole hull and dipped our flag to her. It was amusing to see the amazement of her people at what they must have regarded as our unparalleled impudence in these English swept waters. They cheered us as we passed. The British flag was dipped in greeting as they went rearing past us. Then I stood to the French coast.

It was exactly as I had expected. There were three great British steamers lying at anchor in Boulogne, cut off from the sea. They were the Nassau, the King of the East, and the Pathfinder, none less than ten thousand tons. I suppose they thought they were safe in French waters, but what did I care about three mile limits and international law? The view of my destroyer meant was that England was not a safe place, and I was not a safe vessel.

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