

The Scarborough Raid

Being an AAR from Historicon 2007

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Introduction

“The margin between the British and German fleets in the North Sea was narrower during the last two months of 1914 than at any other time during the war... Three of Beatty’s battle cruisers had been withdrawn to deal with Spee’s East Asia Squadron. Never again, during the whole course of the war was the situation so favorable for a German challenge to the Grand Fleet.” – *Castles of Steel* by Raymond Massie, (p.331.)

Historically, the bombardment of Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool on December 16th 1914 by German battle cruisers killed 105 British civilians and wounded 525, but it did not result in the interception Winston Churchill and Room 40 desired. In vain were the seaside towns, “sacrificed in order to entrap and destroy Hipper,” (p.358) as Massie puts it. But the snare nearly worked; there was a point when the Royal Navy’s 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron was 12 miles distant from Hipper, on a course to intercept. Due to inept signaling and a misjudgment, Beatty abandoned his plan and reversed away. The German 1st Scouting Group thereupon skirted the Dogger Bank and fled across the North Sea. Baseless recrimination between British admirals afterward was the only fighting, but this scenario reflects what could have happened had David Beatty not out thought himself.

Dispositions

The Germans are proceeding northeast at 22 knots in line ahead with flagship *Seydlitz* (Adm. Tim Sawyer) leading *Moltke* (Capt. John Bays,) *Derfflinger* (Capt. Byron Bond,) *Von Der Tann* (Capt. John Knuth,) and *Blucher* (Capt. Mark Lundberg.)

The British column is headed by *HMS Lion* (Capt. Norm Lundie,) with *Queen Mary* (Capt. Paul Dietrich,) *Tiger* (Pastor Keith Hunsinger – aka Adm. Beatty,) and *New Zealand* (Capt. Mark Yoshigawa,) following on course 315 true (southwest) at 23 knots.

Relatively speaking, the lead of the British column (*Lion*) is at right angles to the rearmost element of the German column (*Blucher*) and ~14,500 yards distant.

Smoke can be spotted at 16,500 yards, but it is overcast. Visibility is considered to be 14,500 yards for obtaining an accurate fire control solution.

Battle Log

13:00 Aboard *Seydlitz*, Adm. Hipper leads the German line into a 45 degree turn to starboard. *Lion* and *Blucher* exchange ranging shots at 14,250 yards.

13:02 *Seydlitz* executes a second consecutive 45 degree turn to starboard temporarily bringing the respective lines in parallel on reciprocal courses. *Moltke* and *Von Der Tann* range on *Lion*.

13:04 The British turn 10 degrees to port, the first part of an interesting maneuver. With the range down to 13,500 *Lion* and *Blucher* hit one another for the first time. At 238 pounds, *Blucher's* 8" shells cannot penetrate *Lion's* belt ends whereas the 1250 lbs (13.5") hit she receives in return passes through her radio room without exploding, temporarily obscuring how one sided this fight will become. *Lion* will hit *Blucher* at least once every 2 minutes until the end of the battle. Not one of the five hits scored by *Blucher* find a chink in *Lion's* armor.

13:06 *Seydlitz* wheels 45 degrees back to **port**. Meanwhile, Pastor Keith Beatty has the British ships turn **simultaneously** 30 degrees to starboard, thus creating an echeloned line, a formation that prevents following ships from running afoul of one another's field of fire.

13:08 Four of the five German ships target *Lion*. All miss. In return, *Lion* shows her fangs with a pair of turret hits. One destroys the 'C' wing turret. The other ricochets down through the deck into an engine room touching off multiple fires and reducing *Blucher's* maximum speed by 3 knots.

13:10 *Seydlitz* alters course 10 degrees to starboard. The ships following in her wake begin to resemble a battle cruiser conga line. Undeterred by the contortions, *New Zealand* hits *Seydlitz* but the 12" shell bounces off harmlessly. Despite most of the German line still firing on her, *Lion* slams a shot into *Blucher's* conning tower, severing shipboard communications and starting a fourth fire. At 13,250 yards, *Queen Mary* introduces herself to *Derfflinger*. The first shell skips off a turret top, but the second penetrates the barbette and explodes in the ship's bowels, slaughtering damage control personnel where they stand. The decks run slick and red.

13:12 *Lion* still has *Blucher's* number. A shell glances off a turret top without doing harm but fires spread within her hull. Conflagrations envelop a boiler room, reducing speed further. At this point *Blucher's* damage control teams demonstrate their excellence by rallying to extinguish three of the more threatening blazes—including the one in engineering.

Having found the range, *Queen Mary* punctures *Derfflinger's* belt, temporarily disabling the bow battery, wrecking the plotting room and destroying a boiler which limits the ship's maximum speed to 23 knots.

Tiger enters the fray. Firing for effect at 12,500 yards, her crew of convicts and malcontents immediately knocks out one of *Moltke's* fire control systems. *New Zealand* fires an ineffectual 12" shell off one of *Seydlitz's* turrets.

The entire German line misses...again. Halfway through the battle, they have yet to land a telling blow. In contrast, *Blucher*, *Derfflinger* and *Moltke* have all been bloodied. *New Zealand* commences sending disrespectful signals to the impotent German line. There is wild talk of divine intervention, (too little) money under the table and shaved dice.

13:14 *Lion* perforates *Blucher*'s hull which is fast becoming a charnel house. Moving between the fighting tower and the bridge Captain Lundgren is killed by a stray fragment. *Tiger* bounces a shell off *Moltke*'s bridge rendering Captain Bays *hors de combat*. The real fireworks are provided by *Queen Mary* which pummels *Derfflinger* again. The first shell passes through the belt end without exploding, but the second knocks 'A' turret out of commission and ignites fires. With most of the damage personnel dead, they spread. *Derfflinger*'s 'B' turret has to be abandoned within minutes due to the heat.

Lion deflects a pair of 8" hits from *Blucher* and an 11" from *Von Der Tann*, all of which do only cursory damage. Then, in an amazing turn of events, *Moltke* smites *Tiger*. The British ship's barrette is pierced, starting a magazine fire, although flooding through the shell hole quickly douses the flames. Like a bolt from the blue, a second shell pierces the conning tower and explodes, killing Admiral Beatty and his staff instantly. The stunned British battle line is forced to fall back on independent action. It's every ship for itself.

13:16 As if avenging her deceased commander, the British flagship *Tiger* punches through *Moltke*'s hull flooding a boiler room. *Queen Mary* skips a shell off *Derfflinger*'s inert turret top. Capt. Bond signals that he is having difficulty keeping station as *Seydlitz*'s turn to starboard is too tight for *Derfflinger* to follow. At 10,500 yards, *Lion* hits *Blucher* 5 times smashing the hapless ship from stem to stern. The carnage wreaked on her decks is immense with most secondaries out of order and the chief gunnery officer killed. Prior damage is also taking a toll as more power is lost, reducing the ship's speed to 15 knots. Exhausted, the decimated damage control teams begin to waver.

But *Blucher*'s turrets continue the unequal contest bouncing another 8" shell off *Lion*'s hull plate. *Seydlitz* (which hasn't managed a hit the entire battle,) finally finds the mark at 9000 yards, firing nearly an entire salvo into *New Zealand*. The destruction of her 'B' turret starts a magazine fire but it's important to note this 'I' class does not explode. Suffering 6 nearly simultaneous primary hits, the ship simply cannot withstand the trauma of that much catastrophic damage and suffers structural failure. Massive flooding extinguishes the flames but with so many steam lines severed the ship begins gliding to a halt. Lacking power the damage control teams below decks are virtually helpless. Many drown. Unable to counter flood quickly enough, *New Zealand* capsizes.

13:18 German sea keeping grows ragged as undamaged *Von Der Tann* mistakenly follows *Derfflinger* out of line on a wide turn to starboard. *Blucher* has fallen far behind both. Ever the gamecock however, she bounces another shell off *Lion*'s barrette. *Lion* responds by taking out another of *Blucher*'s boiler rooms, slaughtering the damage control team working in it. The stricken ship is now listing to port so severely her weapons cannot train. Gunnery personnel leave their stations to help fight the fires and floods.

Tiger holes *Moltke* below the water line at 8,750 yards causing heavy flooding, loss of speed and a list to port. The bridge and primary fire control are also hit silencing a second German warship, though the outage will prove short lived. With the range down to 8,000

yards, *Tiger* brings her unique 6” secondary armament to bear on one of *Seydlitz*’s turrets which shrugs off the undersized shell.

13:20 *Lion* hits *Blucher*’s at the end of her belt; the benighted ship wallows on. Luckily, for her surviving crew inclement weather is closing in faster than the British.

Queen Mary bounces another shell off of *Derfflinger*’s deck as this utterly one sided duel continues. With *New Zealand* turned turtle, *Seydlitz* ranges her 11” rifles on *Tiger*.

13:22 The British line recovers from Beatty’s death. Smelling blood, it turns 30 degrees to starboard no doubt intending to close the range before dirty weather foreshortens the battle and prevents them from finishing their victory. Likewise, *Seydlitz* turns 20 degrees starboard to protect the rear of the German line. The German flagship’s salvos tear into the British flagship’s superstructure and barbette causing secondary explosions that take out *Tiger*’s 6” fire control system.

Queen Mary straddles *Derfflinger* twice in succession scoring four verified hits. Some of the 13.5” shells seem to have entered the engine spaces. Witnesses claim to have seen flames licking through the shell holes. There is no doubt the ship was rapidly losing way when a chain of linked explosions ultimately blew the battle cruiser in half, taking all but a handful of her 1000 man crew to the bottom of the North Sea.

13:24 *Moltke* and *Tiger* trade salvos at 7500 yards with the former getting the better of the bargain. *Seydlitz* supplements the barrage, hitting *Tiger* twice more for a total of five. The hull, superstructure, turret and barbette of the British flagship are impacted. She slows, trailing an oil slick behind. Complete power loss could render her incapable of countering the severe flooding she is experiencing.

As a squall obliterates visibility the battle ends much as it began with *Lion* firing a shot though one of *Blucher*’s abandoned turrets which careens out the other side without exploding. This is the fifteenth 13.5” shell she had inflicted on the cruiser which, although a complete wreck, remains afloat due to the heroic efforts of her crew. [At tier 10, *Blucher* must make four consecutive die rolls to stay afloat—and she succeeds!]

Analysis

Pastor Keith Beatty had a puncher’s chance and landed a knock out blow. Although his echelon formation was elegant, it wasn’t maneuver that brought about his posthumous victory. Nor did Hipper’s gyrations contribute to defeat. Rotating in a clockwise direction as they closed, both lines threw whatever they had at one other until the weather ended the knock down, drag out, brawl.

The key to the battle was a breathtaking disparity in gunnery that favored the British. The fight broke down into dueling pairs. As well she should, *Lion* ravaged *Blucher* hitting her on every turn, three through twelve. Although *Blucher*’s return fire was occasionally accurate, it was also predictably ineffective. *Lion* scored 3 hits for every one inflicted by

Blucher, and her 13.5" shells were five times as heavy. This raises the question of whether her turrets could have targeted a more worthwhile adversary after the first few hammer blows. In effect, *Blucher* did a masterful job of keeping *Lion* occupied the entire battle when she might better have been left to the tender mercies of *New Zealand*.

Amazingly, the duel between *Queen Mary* and *Derfflinger* was even more one-sided. Before exploding on the penultimate turn of the game, *Derfflinger* never landed a hit. *Queen Mary* registered her on turn four, hit her on turn five, and every turn thereafter save one, until the knockout straddles on turn eleven. To be sure, *Derfflinger* lost her fire control when her plotting room was shot away on turn six and was afflicted with a sub par (0) crew, but Captain Bond suffered an epic of bad dice rolling.

Von Der Tann suffered from a sub par crew and bad fire control. Targeting *Lion* for the entire game, she was almost as ineffective as *Derfflinger*. She did manage to skip a single shell off *Lion*'s deck registering 145 points of damage. Likewise, she suffered a single 4" hit to her belt absorbing 15 points. It would be difficult to prove back in port that *Von Der Tann* had been in battle, but then again survival has a glory all its own.

Thus, three of the five German ships inflicted virtually no pain whatsoever on their opponents. That leaves *Moltke* and *Seydlitz*, neither of which scored until after the half way point. *Moltke* spent most of the game dueling *Tiger*. She landed multiple hits on turns seven (killing Beatty) and eleven (causing massive flooding) which is a good day's work. Despite her poor crew rating or maybe because of her state of the art FCS, *Tiger* managed to land five single hits on *Moltke* during turns six through eleven. Her powerful 13.5" shells penetrated and exploded but they achieved no additional damage. The game would have been more one-sided without this anomaly. As it was, *Moltke* took only two tiers of damage (745 pts or 27%) while *Tiger* limped home with five tiers (1555 pts or 50%.) Of course, during the end of the battle *Tiger* had also absorbed 5 hits from *Seydlitz*.

Seydlitz did Hipper proud but it was a question of feast or famine. After missing the ocean for the first eight turns, the German flagship eviscerated poor *New Zealand* on turn nine, scoring 1 secondary and 6 primary hits. I'd never seen a Great War capital ship sunk in a single turn playing *Seekrieg 5* before, unless it exploded like *Derfflinger* did. It's not a coincidence the range had fallen into the 'short' band where the rate of fire of the 11" guns makes a real difference. Before her untimely demise, *New Zealand* hit *Seydlitz* with three 12" inch shells, none of which penetrated anything. *Seydlitz* returned home without having crossed a damage tier (at 270 pts or 9.4%.)

Summary

This was a notable British victory. Although hardly of the same magnitude, one can't avoid the image of Nelson lying in the orlop of *HMS Victory* while his forces finish crushing the enemy. Beatty's likeness may have been hoisted on a pillar after a funeral in 1914 that rivaled Nelson's. For losing two of the Kaiser's precious battlekreuzers Hipper might well have been dismissed. (*Blucher* had to be scuttled because the seas were too heavy for her to cross the North Sea without foundering.)

Had *Seydlitz* and *Moltke* not saved their hot dice for the end of the battle things could have gone differently. Constant over concentration may have hurt Germans in the early going. That said, the short to medium ranges dictated by visibility during this engagement seemed to favor the British 13.5" guns firing on a flat trajectory over the extra protection afforded by the German battle cruiser's heavier vertical armor. A signal that sums up the battle would be, "*Derfflinger*--aim, then fire."