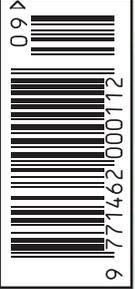


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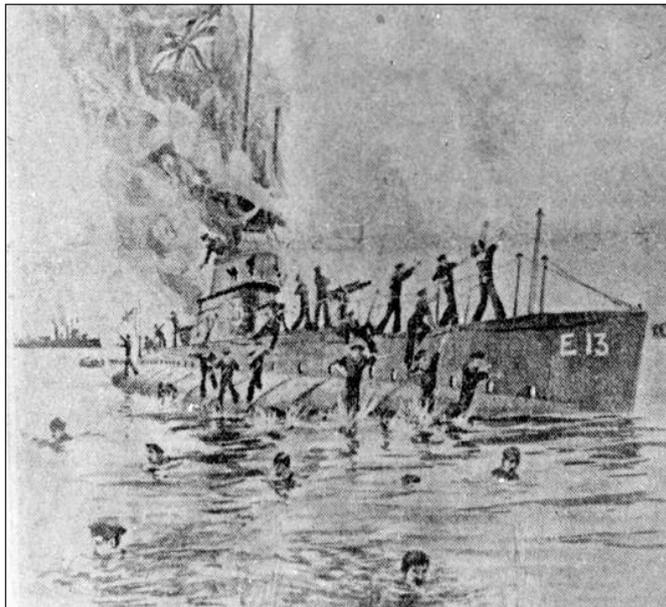
**THE RN
& WHY
IT STILL
MATTERS**

**BALTIC
STORM**



During WW1 Denmark was neutral and for most of the time the conflict was only a distant thunder south of the Danish border. In order to remain neutral, however, the government had to show both the Germans and the Allied powers that it was prepared to fight in order to keep the war from Danish land and territorial waters. To this end a sizeable army and almost all the navy's ships were on active duty during the four years of war. Most Danes sympathised with the Allied fight against Germany, but ever since its defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1864 it had been recognised that Denmark would not win if it ever went to war against its powerful neighbour. Thanks to its position as the so-called 'gatekeeper to the Baltic', Denmark and Danish waters were important to the warring parties. A number of times during the conflict Danish neutrality was put to the test. The rule was that if a foreign warship entered Danish territorial waters, it was allowed to stay for a maximum of 24 hours before having to leave again. If it was not able to leave, the vessel and its crew were interned until the end of hostilities. It was the duty of the Danish armed forces to protect the detained ship and crew from attack from the other side.

The most serious violation of Danish neutrality took place in August 1915 when a British submarine, HMS E13, ran aground in the Sound (Oresund). Two German torpedo boats attacked it and 15 men of the submarine's crew lost their lives before nearby Danish forces could react. HMS E13 had departed Harwich with sister vessel HMS E8 on a mission to attempt a passage undetected into the Baltic Sea, an important hunting ground for British submarines. They would enter waters used by a large amount of civilian maritime traffic and as a training area for the German Navy. To reach the Baltic Sea the submarines needed to pass through the Danish Straits, either via the Great Belt or the Sound, the latter being easiest to navigate. On the night of August 18/19 the two British submarines tried to make it through the Sound. Both were sail-



An artist's impression of the British submarine E13 under attack by German torpedo boats. Below: E13 aground at Saltholm. Images: Danish Naval Museum.

GRIM FATE OF UNLUCKY STRANDED SUBMARINE E13

SOREN NORBY OF THE ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE TELLS THE STORY OF A BRITISH SUBMARINE THAT SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF THE GERMANS AFTER RUNNING AGROUND IN AUGUST 1915.

ing on the surface, since this was the fastest and the easiest way of passing patrolling Danish and Swedish warships and minefields placed around Copenhagen. In addition to these obstacles, the waters themselves also posed a challenge with their islands, banks and grounds. While E8 chose to sail west of Saltholm and escaped unseen into the Baltic Sea, the captain of the E13, Lieutenant Commander Geoffrey Layton, elected to sail east of the island. Unfortunately, Commander Layton was not aware of the fact that the submarine's compass had a 15 degree declination. This was enough to see the submarine run aground at 23.30 on the southwest corner of Saltholm inside Danish territorial waters. Attempts at refloating the E13 were made during the remaining hours of dark-

ness. Among other things thrown away, almost all of the submarine's fuel was pumped overboard, but it was all in vain. Also, the crew failed to get a response from London on the radio. Soon Layton gave the order to burn all codebooks and charts. When dawn broke the submarine was discovered by Danish naval vessels. A signal was sent to the Danish Naval High Command, and at 05.00 the Danish torpedo boat Narhvalen came close in order to determine the submarine's identity. Even before this piece of information had been acquired, the Navy High Command had issued the following guidelines for the Danish ships in the Sound: 'If it's a German submarine and other German vessels try to assist it, the nearby Danish vessels are to protest, but no other means are to be used. If it is an English submarine, the task is

to prevent German vessels from seizing it or attacking it. If the Germans move towards the submarine, the Danish forces are first to protest, and if this does not stop the Germans, use of force is allowed.' When the captain of Narhvalen determined the submarine was British, he informed Lt Cdr Layton that he had 24 hours to refloat his vessel and leave Danish territory. If he could not do this within that time-frame, the submarine and her crew would be interned. The torpedo boat then left the E13 and took position a few hundred metres away, while informing the Danish Naval High Command of the vessel's identity. As soon as the Naval High Command received this message, the entire Danish task force guarding the Sound was ordered to sail for Saltholm at highest possible speed. The Danish Navy was usually split into two task forces, one

guarding the minefields in the Great Belt and the other guarding the minefields in the Sound. The latter consisted of, among others, the coastal defence ship

Peder Skram, cruiser Gejser and a number of torpedo boats. The ships were, however, at anchor near Taarbæk, north of Copenhagen, and it would therefore take hours before they could assume station at Saltholm. Two fast torpedo boats, the Soulvén and Tumleren, were ordered to sail for the E13 at highest possible speed, and arrived at the grounded submarine at approximately 08.45. Here, they met another Danish torpedo boat, the Støren, coming from Copenhagen, and the Narhvalen, which was still lying close to the E13. Captain Eduard Haack on board the Soulvén assumed overall command of the four torpedo boats. Three of them anchored about three quarters of a mile from the stranded British submarine while the Narhvalen approached her and took on board E13's second-in-command, Lieutenant Paul Eddis. He was to report how the submarine had run aground in Danish waters and to make preparations for its salvage. A tug was requested from Copenhagen. Almost as soon as the Danes had

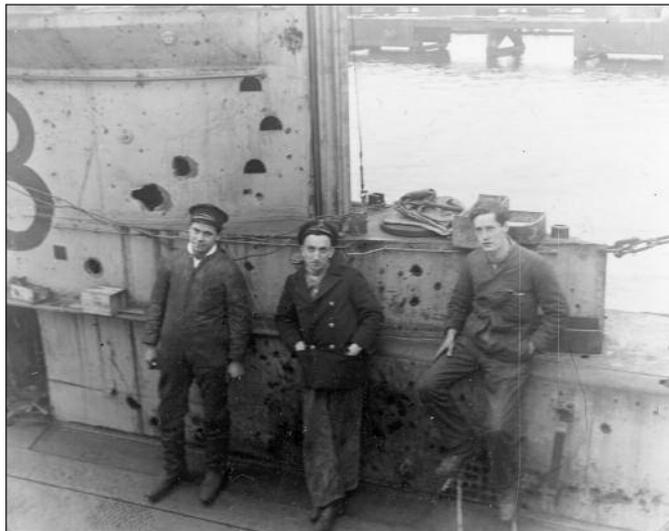
**WW1
100**



discovered the grounded sub, two German torpedo boats lying near one of the minefields in the Sound also spotted the British boat. Soon, a German torpedo boat passed E13 - just outside Danish territorial waters but close enough to make a visual ID of the British boat. This vessel passed close enough for the German commander's bellowed insults to be heard by British sailors on the outside of E13. For the next couple of hours nothing happened. The sun rose while the crews from the Danish torpedo boats watched the British submarine and her crew, who were mainly resting on the hull, enjoying the freedom of being outside the cramped interior.

THAT same morning an episode took place more than 600 kilometres away that was to seal the fate of the E13. At 07.39 the German Naval High Command received a message saying that the battle-cruiser SMS Moltke had been torpedoed while operating in the Gulf of Riga. The torpedo was fired by the British submarine E1. Even though the battle-cruiser was only lightly damaged (eight men were killed and the ship took in 435 tonnes of water) the attack showed the danger from British submarines operating in the Baltic. The attack on Moltke was the reason why at 09.28 the Danish vessels lying near the E13 observed two German craft approaching at high speed from the south (later identified as the torpedo boats G132 and G134). From the mast of the front torpedo boat flew a flag signal: "Abandon ship!" It was clear the Germans intended to attack the stranded submarine. G132 initiated the assault by firing a torpedo, which, however, went to the bottom and exploded harmlessly not far from the submarine. This was followed by cannon fire from around a distance of around 300 yards. E13 quickly received a number of hits and caught fire. The submarine's crew had initially sought shelter inside the hull but it could not withstand the German shells. When water started pouring into the hull and reached the submarine's batteries it produced toxic chlorine gas. At the same time German shells hit the ammunition inside the E13's hull. The gas and exploding ammunition forced Lt Cdr Layton to give the order which all captains dread: "Abandon Ship!" Less than three minutes had passed since the Germans launched the attack.

DESPITE their orders from Navy High Command, it was not until they saw the crew of the E13 jumping into the water, trying desperately to swim the few hundred metres to the solid ground of Saltholm that



Above: Three of the E13's submariners on the casing of the submarine while interned at the Royal Dockyard in Denmark. The damage done by the German shells is visible behind them. Below: E13's periscope, destroyed by a German shell. Photos: Danish Naval Museum.



the spell was broken and the Danish torpedo boats sprung into action. The Soulven, which was closest to the E13, let go of its anchor and accelerated towards the German torpedo boats. Simultaneously the crew managed to launch one of the Soulven's lifeboats, which immediately made for the British submariners in the water. The Soulven, followed by Storen, closed on the two German torpedo boats, which were still firing, not at the burning submarine but at British submariners in the water. Despite their previous instructions from Naval High Command the Danes still did not open fire. Instead the two torpedo boats - flying signals protesting the German violation of the Danish neutrality - managed to place themselves between the Germans and the E13. This made the Germans cease firing. Having achieved their goal anyway, the two enemy torpedo boats returned to international waters and quickly disappeared to the south. The entire attack had lasted less than five minutes. The Danish task force, which had left Taarbæk some hours before, was at this time 5-6 miles from the E13, and even though the 24cm guns of Peder Skram were able to reach a target at that distance, it did not open fire. The commander of the task force later explained that he feared that a shooting match between the ships would lead to war between Denmark and Germany. He was not ready to bear responsibility for that. The German attack killed 14 of E13's 30-strong crew. Nine drowned, five were killed by German shells and bullets and one sailor was missing, presumed dead. Another two submariners were wounded. The episode also had serious consequences for Captain Haack. The Chief of Navy, Vice-Admiral Koføed-Hansen blamed him for not having been prepared to counter a German attack. Haack had not moved rapidly or decisively enough to stop the attack once it had begun. Haack's promising career in the Navy therefore hit a wall and he left the Service in 1917. The 15 survivors of E13 were interned at the Royal Dockyard at Copenhagen, while the bodies of the dead were recovered and sent home to England on board the S.S. Vidar, escorted by three Danish torpedo boats. The internment was supposed to keep British submariners out of the war, but in October 1915 Lt Cdr Layton and Lt Eddis managed to escape and return to England, where they both subsequently rejoined the Royal Navy. The Danish government delivered an official complaint to the German authorities, but never received an apology.