

GUARDIANS *of our* COASTS

The Part the Navy Played in the War

TO-NIGHT I will try to give you a picture of the submarine menace and the wonderful service rendered by the Royal Navy, with its sister-branch, the Merchant Navy.

Many of you have visited our great ships of war, and tried to visualise what a sea battle would be like. Those great guns trained on the enemy as they dash through the seas, the watch-dogs of our homes—each man at his post, ready to die that you and I may live. Our merchant men steaming from the four corners of the world through danger of storm and enemy—cheerfully accepting the hardships of a sailor's life.

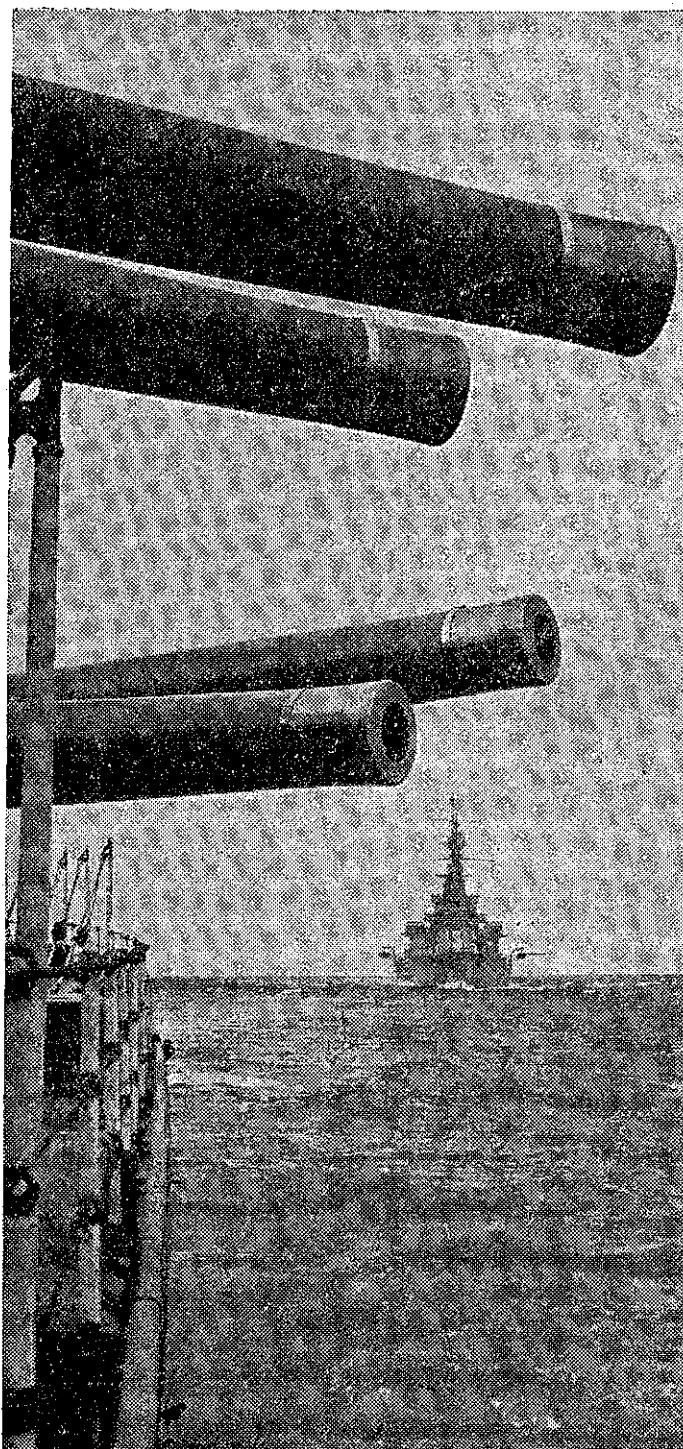
Strangely enough, it was the small craft that played a most important part in keeping England's sea-lanes clear of the enemy, and what a motley company! Rich men's yachts, old-fashioned paddle steamers, motor launches, fishing trawlers, sailing boats, even down to the Thames barge and humble fishing smack.

The famous Dover Patrol was made up of these strange crafts. Its duty was to keep the British Channel free from enemy submarines and mines—to meet and convoy our home-coming and outgoing merchant ships, and numerous other tasks. They were manned by naval and volunteer reservists—rich men, poor men, men who had never been to sea in their lives before, and the sturdy British fishing folk, of the stock that made Nelson and Drake famous.

COME for a trip with me to Chatham, Dover, Portsmouth and other Channel ports—you will see the motley crowd so tightly packed together that you would wonder how on earth they managed to get away to sea. What are those flags flying from many of them? They are talking to each other, and orders are passing to and fro, each boat picking out its instructions in some mysterious manner from the mass of flag-waving. Now a fussy little steam trawler is snaking her way through the pack, followed by others of the same type—our first trawler is the flagship of the small company—they are going out to take over their spell of duty, watching nets, hunting for submarines, laying mines, or sweeping for enemy mines.

How is this job done? Well, each trawler has a strong wire hawser be-

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tween them, each boat keeping an allotted distance from the other. The wire sweeps the sea at a depth that will foul the mine and cut through the mooring wire, so bringing the mine to the surface. It is then exploded by gunfire.

Mine-sweeping is a very risky job, and many are the men who have lost their lives at this task. The enemy mines were laid very cleverly, both our own and German mines having apparatus which moored them automatically at desired depth below the surface. The Germans had mines that kept to the bottom of the sea for some time after they had been laid—this allowed the submarine mine-layer to get clear away before it rose. Mines are anchored by a heavy mushroom disc and special steel wire. The trawlers become very clever at sweeping, but it is a tiring job, which must be done in all kinds of weather with only brief spells of rest.

WHAT is that destroyed doing away on the horizon? An enemy submarine has been reported—the destroyer is dashing round like a greyhound, but the submarine has sighted her and dives. Too bad! But what are those large columns of water shooting up in the air? The destroyer is dropping depth charges, and with luck they destroy the submarine or bring her to the surface. A depth charge is a considerable weight of high explosives which could be dropped from a vessel and which exploded automatically on arrival at a pre-arranged depth. They are terrible things, and if the submarine is within range it is all up with her.

You will understand more readily the difficulty of the patrols with Germany having destroyers and submarine bases at Ostend and Zeebrugge, just a few miles from our Channel ports, but with men like Captains Bowring, Evans of the Broke, Lewin, Hamilton Ben and many others of outstanding ability—and not forgetting the brave, high-spirited crews—the enemy had no easy task in penetrating our defences.

The submarine menace became so bad about October, 1914, and Germany's boast that she would sink our shipping on sight caused the British public to become panicky, with the result that the Admiralty came in for a good deal of criticism, which was unmerited. New departments had been formed to (Continued overleaf.)