



*Department of Internal Affairs.*

**A Fairmile submarine chaser the day before her launching in a New Zealand shipyard.**

But by this time the "Admiral Graf Spee" had had enough and retired at high speed to the westward, shadowed by "Ajax" and "Achilles." As she made for the River Plate, the "Graf Spee" opened fire with her 11 in. guns whenever her pursuers came too near. Half an hour after midnight the German ship anchored in the roadstead of Montevideo. Reinforced by the cruiser "Cumberland," "Ajax" and "Achilles" kept watch off the port while the world waited and wondered. A few days later the "Graf Spee" was scuttled and blown up by her company, and her Captain committed suicide.

The "Achilles" sustained only slight damage in the engagement. About twenty minutes after action commenced an 11 in. shell fell short of the ship in line with her bridge and burst on the water. Splinters killed four ratings in the control tower and stunned the gunnery officer, Lieutenant R. E. Washbourne, R.N., himself a New-Zealander. Captain Parry and the Chief Yeoman on the bridge were slightly wounded.

Two men were killed outright when heavy shell splinters entered the control compartment. An ordinary seaman replaced one of the dead men and carried

out the essential duty coolly and efficiently for the remainder of the action.

A boy acting as communication member to the guns behaved with exemplary coolness throughout. He passed information to the guns and repeated their reports clearly for the information of the control officer. He was heard at one time most vigorously denying the report of his untimely death which had somehow spread round the ship.

The River Plate action was the first serious blow dealt in this war to the Nazi forces of Hitlerdom. Since then the Royal Navy and the Dominion navies have passed through more than four years of one of the most exacting and dangerous periods in the whole of our great naval history. They have demonstrated again and

again that British seamen "can outwit, outmanœuvre, outfight, and outlast the worst that the enemy's malice and ingenuity can contrive."

It has not happened that other New Zealand ships have fought in actions such as that of the River Plate. Naval warfare has been described as months of dull routine, punctuated by brief periods of intense activity. This has been the lot of "Leander" and "Monowai" and some of the little ships of the Royal New Zealand Navy. They have seized their chance whenever it has come their way, and their standard has been that set by "Achilles" in her first action. That standard is in line with the highest traditions of the Royal Navy.

In May, 1940, H.M.N.Z.S. "Leander" left New Zealand on a cruise which lasted more than sixteen months. Much of that period was spent on patrol and escort duties in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. "Leander" had one stroke of good fortune when she intercepted the Italian armed merchant cruiser "Ramb I," which was sunk after a brief action. In June-July, 1941, "Leander" was in the eastern Mediterranean and took part in offensive operations against Vichy French naval and military forces on the coast of Syria.