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DURING THE long period of peace after the conclusion of the Napoleonic War in 1815 the British Merchant Navy came to be generally regarded as a trading organization—that and nothing more. It was largely forgotten by the British people that the Merchant Navy actually had a war history dating back to a period anterior to the founding of the Royal Navy—that it was, in fact, the parent of the Royal Navy. Few recalled the great part that merchant seamen had borne in former wars or remembered that in earlier periods of British history the merchant sailor had stood between his country and the would-be invader when little or no progress had been made in the organization of a fighting Navy as a State institution. The Merchant Navy was thought to be an organization without traditions and with little remaining romance, owing to the advent of steam, which had replaced sail-power. That was a narrow and mistaken view, as events were to show.

During the Great War of 1914-18, British merchant seamen quickly came to be recognized as no ordinary men engaged merely in facilitating the barter and exchange of a commercial community, but as belonging to the great brotherhood of fighting men, instinct with sturdy patriotism and proud of the traditions of the Merchant Navy dating back over centuries to the early years of British history. Its officers and men quickly set up a record of daring, resource, and fine seamanship so conspicuous that it was necessary to amend the statutes and make new regulations to enable suitable recognition of their gallantry to be given them. The mer-

chant seaman, unassuming and modest, took his stand, with the full recognition of an aroused and grateful public opinion, beside the men of the purely fighting services. It was the master of a New Zealand trading ship, the "Otaki," who was awarded posthumously the Victoria Cross for his valorous and nearly successful action with a single gun against a heavily armed German raider.

His Majesty King George V, himself a sailor, in a message of appreciation of the services of the British merchant seaman in 1915, referred to "his Merchant Navy." After the war he appointed the Prince of Wales Master of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets. The then Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, accurately described the Merchant Navy as "the jugular vein of the nation."

Nearly 15,000 British Merchant Seamen gave their lives in the war of 1914-18; nearly 2,500 British merchant ships, totalling 7,750,000 tons, were lost through enemy action; nearly 2,000 ships, totalling 8,000,000 tons, were damaged or molested by the enemy. There was a black period in 1917 when it looked as if the enemy's ruthless submarine warfare against the Merchant Navy would paralyse Britain's war effort. The adoption of sailings in convoy saved the situation. The British merchant seamen reverted to the traditional methods of his forbears and thus assisted the Royal Navy to provide security for "such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions."

The story of the Merchant Navy during the twenty-one years between 1918 and 1939 is not a happy one, but if many