

**RUDYARD KIPLING  
WITH THE  
BRITISH FLEET**

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Rudyard Kipling with the British Fleet by Rudyard Kipling

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Rudyard Kipling  
*with*  
The British Fleet

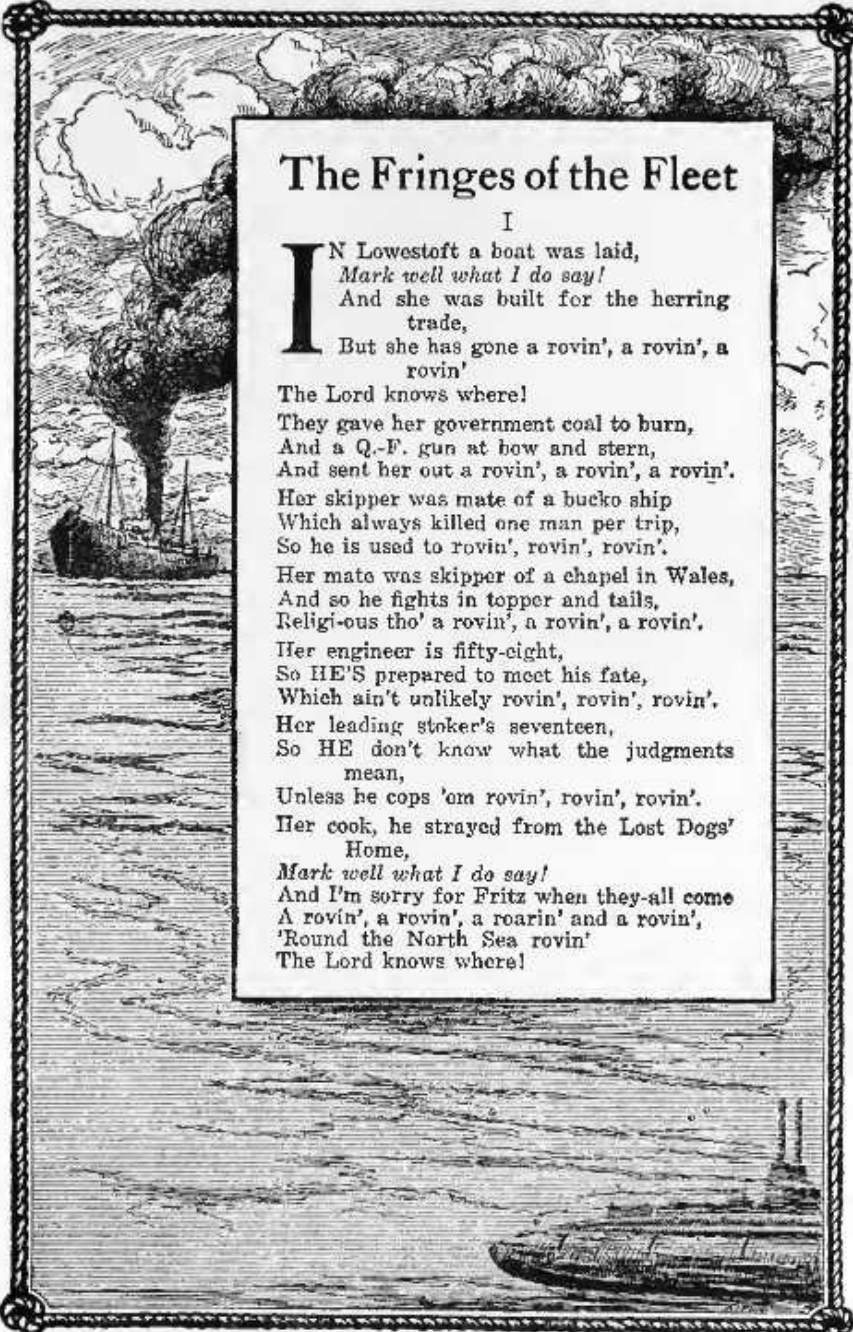
*1st edition for the  
Boston American  
of L. 2402*



FOR THE

**BOSTON AMERICAN**

EVENING AND SUNDAY  
EIGHTY SUMMER STREET,  
BOSTON, MASS.



## The Fringes of the Fleet

I

**I**N Lowestoft a boat was laid,  
*Mark well what I do say!*  
And she was built for the herring  
trade,  
But she has gone a rovin', a rovin', a  
rovin'

The Lord knows where!

They gave her government coal to burn,  
And a Q.-F. gun at bow and stern,  
And sent her out a rovin', a rovin', a rovin'.

Her skipper was mate of a bucko ship  
Which always killed one man per trip,  
So he is used to rovin', rovin', rovin'.

Her mate was skipper of a chapel in Wales,  
And so he fights in topper and tails,  
Religi-ous tho' a rovin', a rovin', a rovin'.

Her engineer is fifty-eight,  
So HE'S prepared to meet his fate,  
Which ain't unlikely rovin', rovin', rovin'.

Her leading stoker's seventeen,  
So HE don't know what the judgments  
mean,

Unless he cops 'om rovin', rovin', rovin'.

Her cook, he strayed from the Lost Dogs'  
Home,

*Mark well what I do say!*  
And I'm sorry for Fritz when they-all come  
A rovin', a rovin', a roarin' and a rovin',  
'Round the North Sea rovin'  
The Lord knows where!

## The Trawler Fleet as Mighty Hunter of Mines and Submarines



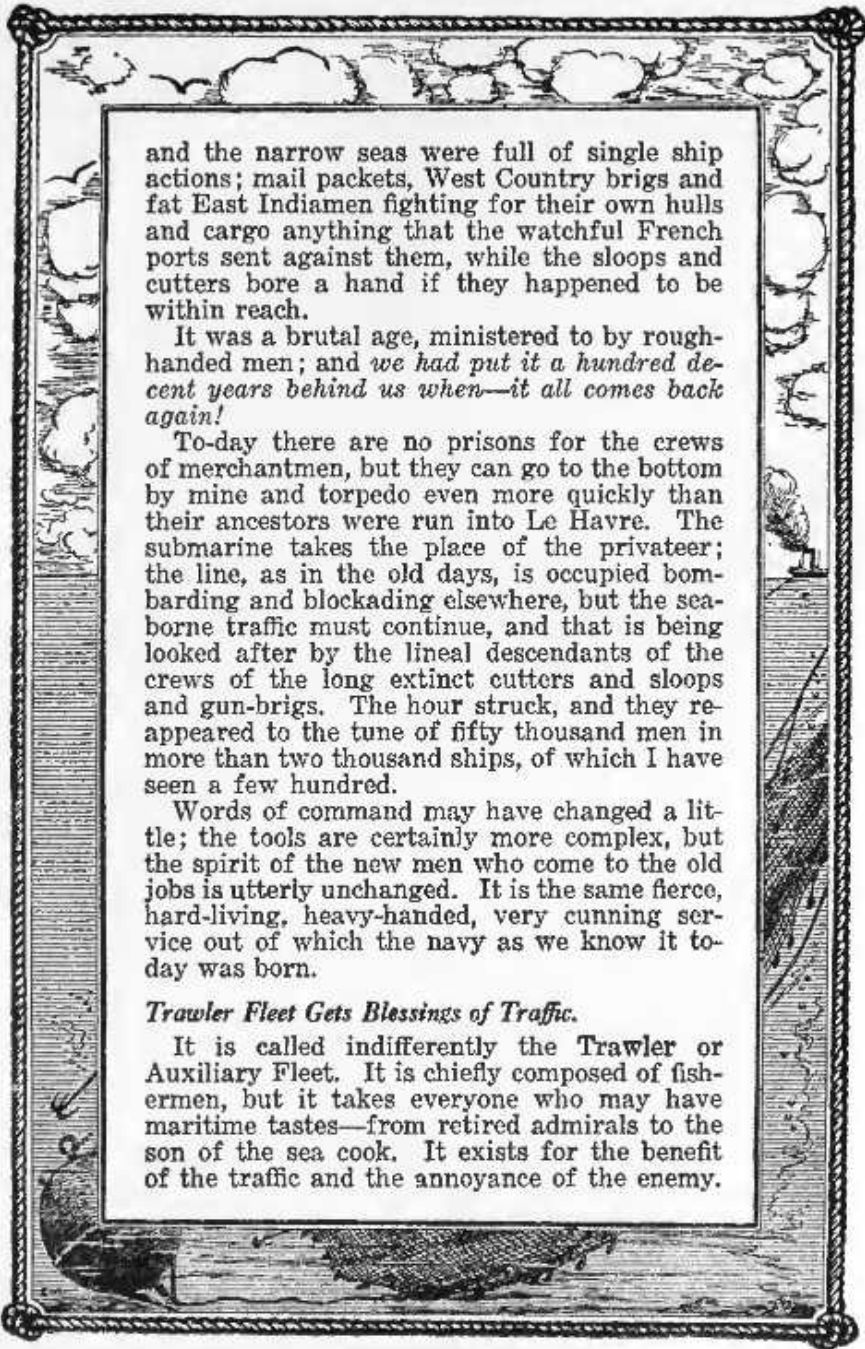
THE navy is very old and very wise. Much of her wisdom is on record and available for reference; but more of it works in the unconscious blood of those who serve her. She has a thousand years of experience and can find a precedent or a parallel for any situation that the force of the weather or the malice of the King's enemies may bring about.

The main principles of sea warfare hold good throughout all ages, and, *as far as the navy has been allowed to put out her strength*, these principles have been applied over all the seas of all the world. In matters of detail the navy, to whom all days are alike, has simply returned to the practise and resurrected the spirit of old days.

In the last French wars, a merchant sailing out of a channel port might in a few hours find himself laid by the heels and under way for a French prison. His Majesty's ships of the line, and even the big frigates, took very little part in policing the waters for him, unless he were in convoy. The sloops, cutters, gun-brigs and local craft of all kinds were supposed to look after that, while the line was busy elsewhere.

### *The Changes Wrought in a Century's Flight.*

So the merchants passed resolutions against the inadequate protection afforded to the trade,



and the narrow seas were full of single ship actions; mail packets, West Country brigs and fat East Indiamen fighting for their own hulls and cargo anything that the watchful French ports sent against them, while the sloops and cutters bore a hand if they happened to be within reach.

It was a brutal age, ministered to by rough-handed men; and *we had put it a hundred decent years behind us when—it all comes back again!*

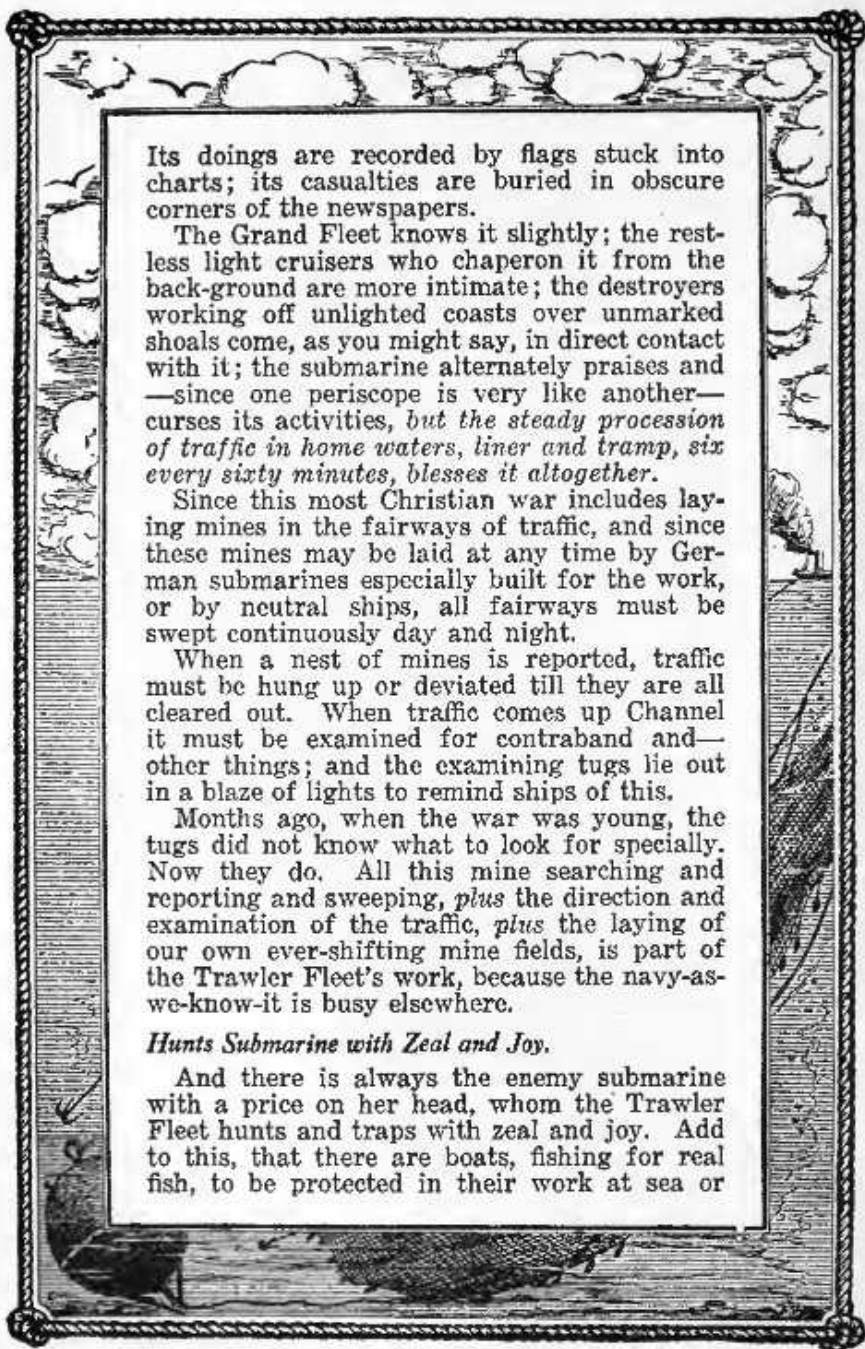
To-day there are no prisons for the crews of merchantmen, but they can go to the bottom by mine and torpedo even more quickly than their ancestors were run into Le Havre. The submarine takes the place of the privateer; the line, as in the old days, is occupied bombarding and blockading elsewhere, but the sea-borne traffic must continue, and that is being looked after by the lineal descendants of the crews of the long extinct cutters and sloops and gun-brigs. The hour struck, and they re-appeared to the tune of fifty thousand men in more than two thousand ships, of which I have seen a few hundred.

Words of command may have changed a little; the tools are certainly more complex, but the spirit of the new men who come to the old jobs is utterly unchanged. It is the same fierce, hard-living, heavy-handed, very cunning service out of which the navy as we know it to-day was born.

#### *Trawler Fleet Gets Blessings of Traffic.*

It is called indifferently the Trawler or Auxiliary Fleet. It is chiefly composed of fishermen, but it takes everyone who may have maritime tastes—from retired admirals to the son of the sea cook. It exists for the benefit of the traffic and the annoyance of the enemy.





Its doings are recorded by flags stuck into charts; its casualties are buried in obscure corners of the newspapers.

The Grand Fleet knows it slightly; the restless light cruisers who chaperon it from the back-ground are more intimate; the destroyers working off unlighted coasts over unmarked shoals come, as you might say, in direct contact with it; the submarine alternately praises and—since one periscope is very like another—curses its activities, *but the steady procession of traffic in home waters, liner and tramp, six every sixty minutes, blesses it altogether.*

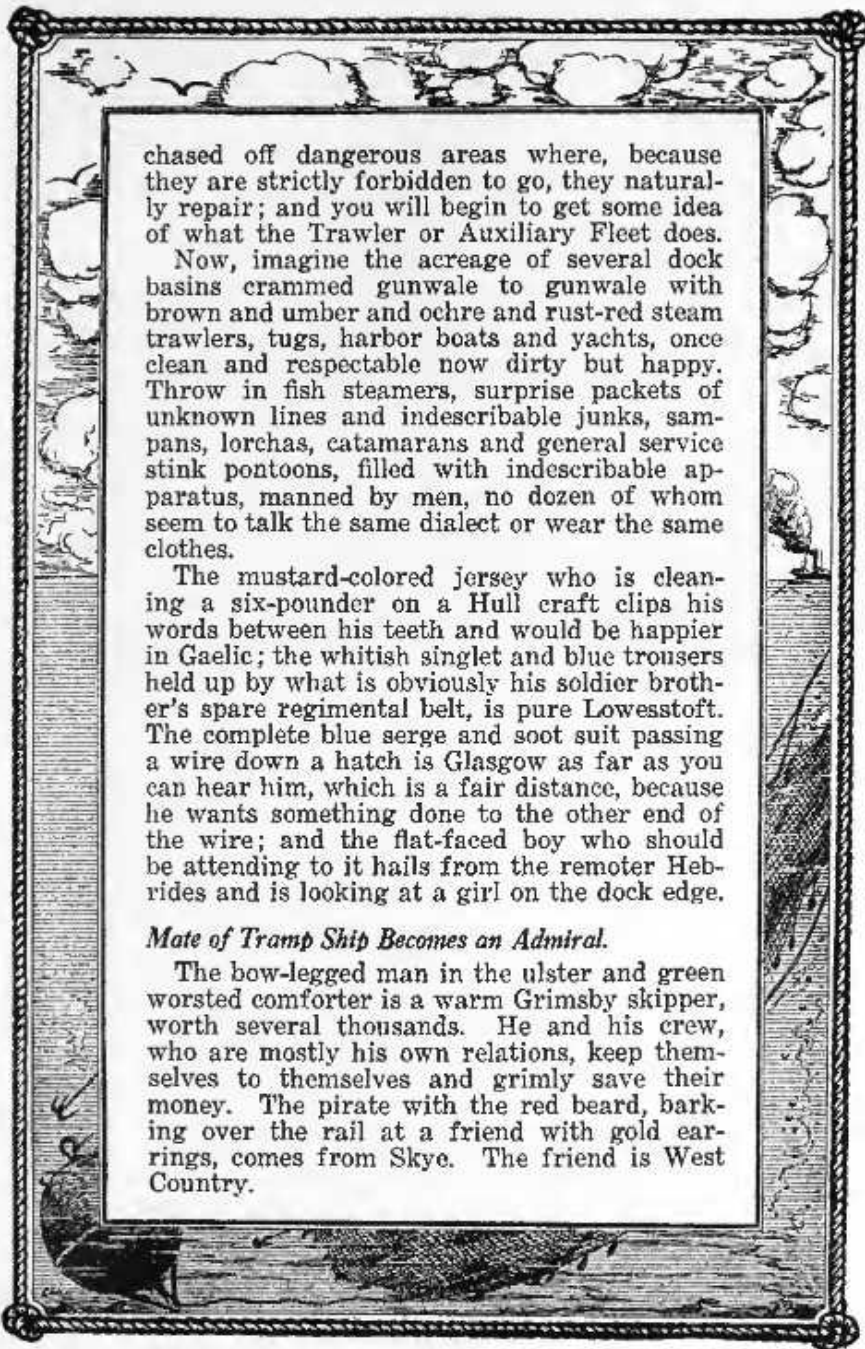
Since this most Christian war includes laying mines in the fairways of traffic, and since these mines may be laid at any time by German submarines especially built for the work, or by neutral ships, all fairways must be swept continuously day and night.

When a nest of mines is reported, traffic must be hung up or deviated till they are all cleared out. When traffic comes up Channel it must be examined for contraband and—other things; and the examining tugs lie out in a blaze of lights to remind ships of this.

Months ago, when the war was young, the tugs did not know what to look for specially. Now they do. All this mine searching and reporting and sweeping, *plus* the direction and examination of the traffic, *plus* the laying of our own ever-shifting mine fields, is part of the Trawler Fleet's work, because the navy-as-we-know-it is busy elsewhere.

#### *Hunts Submarine with Zeal and Joy.*

And there is always the enemy submarine with a price on her head, whom the Trawler Fleet hunts and traps with zeal and joy. Add to this, that there are boats, fishing for real fish, to be protected in their work at sea or



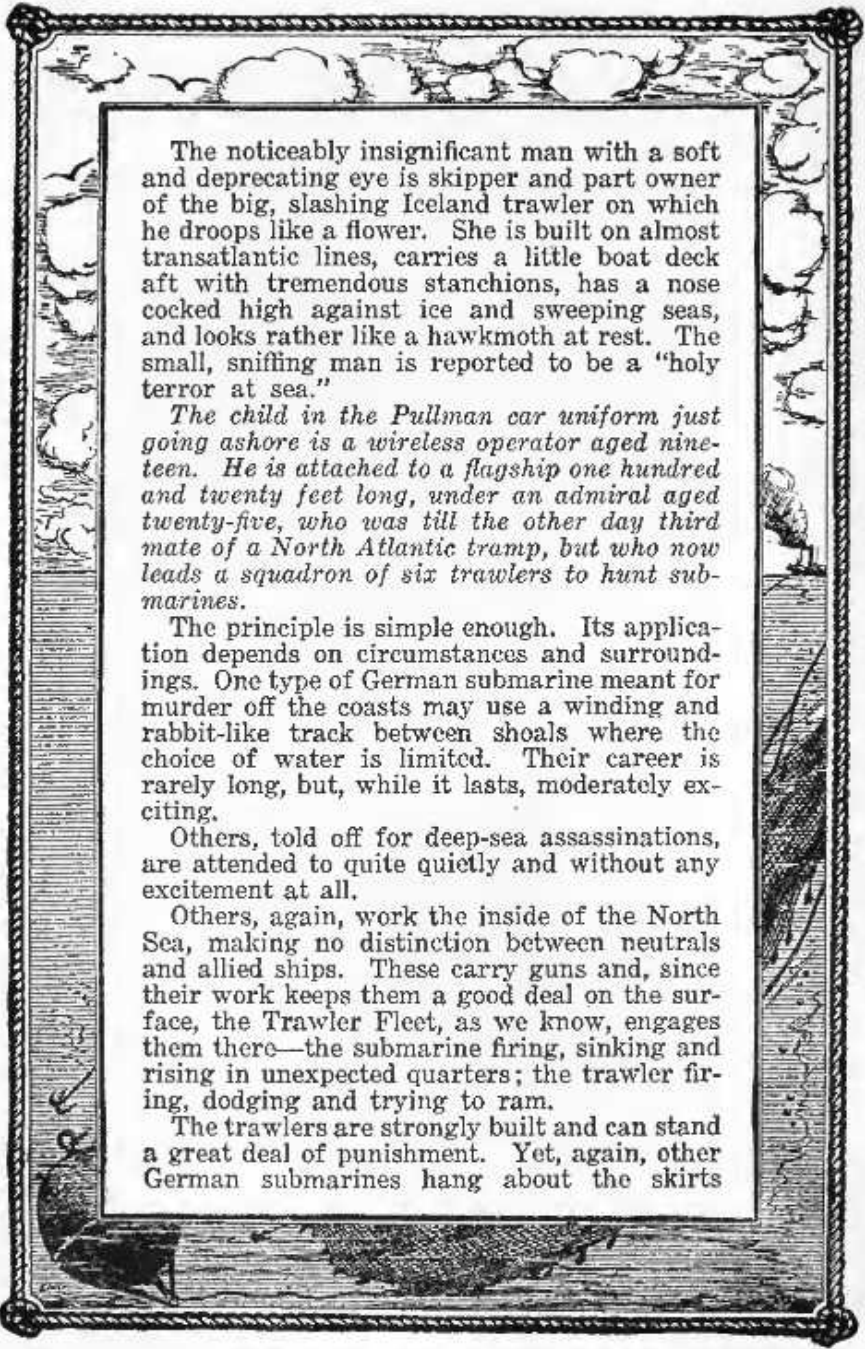
chased off dangerous areas where, because they are strictly forbidden to go, they naturally repair; and you will begin to get some idea of what the Trawler or Auxiliary Fleet does.

Now, imagine the acreage of several dock basins crammed gunwale to gunwale with brown and umber and ochre and rust-red steam trawlers, tugs, harbor boats and yachts, once clean and respectable now dirty but happy. Throw in fish steamers, surprise packets of unknown lines and indescribable junks, sampans, lorchas, catamarans and general service stink pontoons, filled with indescribable apparatus, manned by men, no dozen of whom seem to talk the same dialect or wear the same clothes.

The mustard-colored jersey who is cleaning a six-pounder on a Hull craft clips his words between his teeth and would be happier in Gaelic; the whitish singlet and blue trousers held up by what is obviously his soldier brother's spare regimental belt, is pure Lowesstoff. The complete blue serge and soot suit passing a wire down a hatch is Glasgow as far as you can hear him, which is a fair distance, because he wants something done to the other end of the wire; and the flat-faced boy who should be attending to it hails from the remoter Hebrides and is looking at a girl on the dock edge.

*Mate of Tramp Ship Becomes an Admiral.*

The bow-legged man in the ulster and green worsted comforter is a warm Grimsby skipper, worth several thousands. He and his crew, who are mostly his own relations, keep themselves to themselves and grimly save their money. The pirate with the red beard, barking over the rail at a friend with gold earrings, comes from Skye. The friend is West Country.



The noticeably insignificant man with a soft and deprecating eye is skipper and part owner of the big, slashing Iceland trawler on which he droops like a flower. She is built on almost transatlantic lines, carries a little boat deck aft with tremendous stanchions, has a nose cocked high against ice and sweeping seas, and looks rather like a hawkmoth at rest. The small, sniffing man is reported to be a "holy terror at sea."

*The child in the Pullman car uniform just going ashore is a wireless operator aged nineteen. He is attached to a flagship one hundred and twenty feet long, under an admiral aged twenty-five, who was till the other day third mate of a North Atlantic tramp, but who now leads a squadron of six trawlers to hunt submarines.*

The principle is simple enough. Its application depends on circumstances and surroundings. One type of German submarine meant for murder off the coasts may use a winding and rabbit-like track between shoals where the choice of water is limited. Their career is rarely long, but, while it lasts, moderately exciting.

Others, told off for deep-sea assassinations, are attended to quite quietly and without any excitement at all.

Others, again, work the inside of the North Sea, making no distinction between neutrals and allied ships. These carry guns and, since their work keeps them a good deal on the surface, the Trawler Fleet, as we know, engages them there—the submarine firing, sinking and rising in unexpected quarters; the trawler firing, dodging and trying to ram.

The trawlers are strongly built and can stand a great deal of punishment. Yet, again, other German submarines hang about the skirts