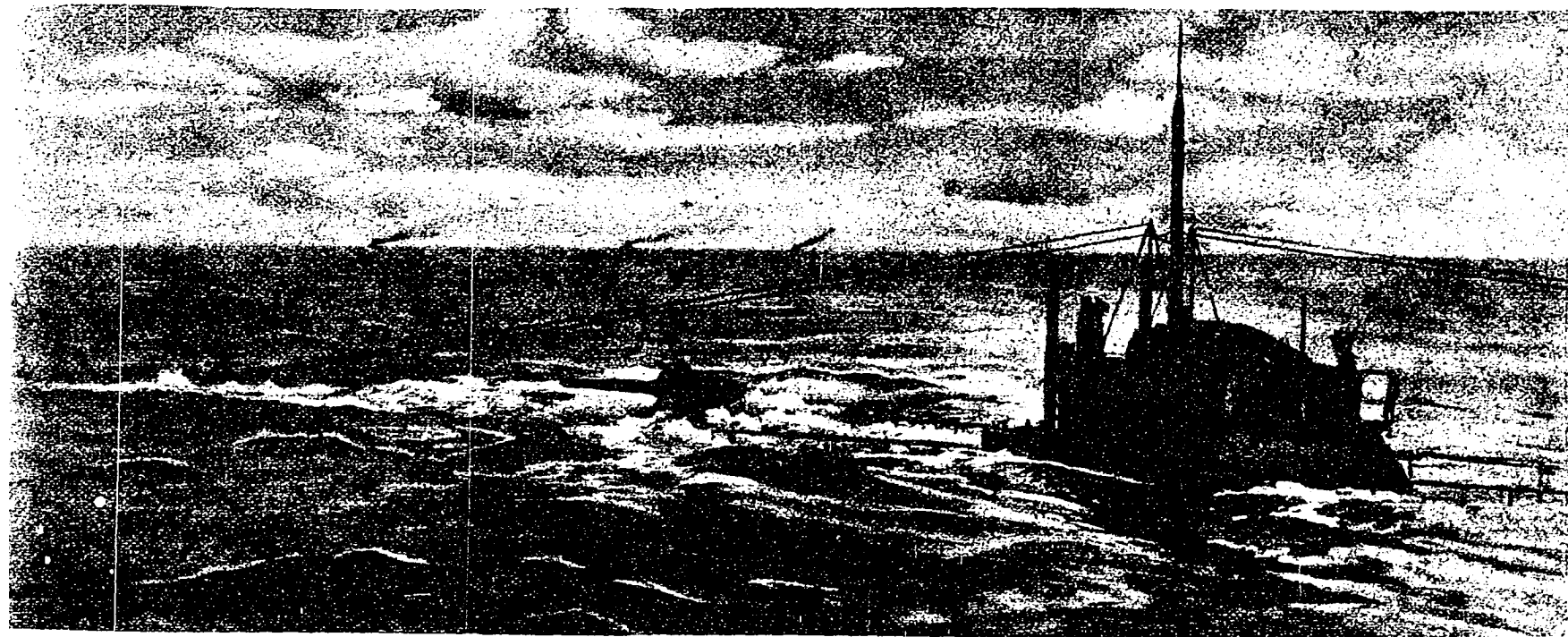


U-BOATS OFF SHORE!

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Discusses the Possibilities and Purposes of Germany's Submarine Attack



Big German Submarine Preparing to Attack.

HOWEVER much the U-boat attack last week on shipping off the American coast may have startled the people of this country, there was one place where thinking was not for an instant diverted from its sure course. That was where most was known about the destructive powers of the submarine—in the Navy Department. There the attack was considered in all the aspects of its possibilities and its purposes.

Why did the Germans, at vast risk to their boats and crews, decide to deliver an attack on American shipping along the Atlantic Coast? What did they hope to accomplish? What was their strategy?—for it is certain that they thought out, in accordance with their psychology, every prospective advantage. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, when asked for an answer to these questions, replied:

“Let us, in the beginning, try to look at this from the standpoint of the German Admiralty. In the first place, it is safe to state that they have one main naval object at the present time. That is to destroy the shipping of the United States, if possible. The second question, as far as we can see into the German mind, is: Where is that American shipping?”

“To be sure, there is a certain amount of shipping which goes up and down our coast or which runs to West Indian or South American ports. But the shipping in this trade is mostly small and unimportant, and the cargoes carried are not of great military importance. Therefore, from the point of view of doing damage that will hurt us in a military

sense, Germany can gain most by striking primarily at our transatlantic vessels. It follows that it will not pay her to conduct regular operations against coastwise ships, and that this attempt against coastwise schooners and other vessels must have as its object something else than the amount of shipping that might be destroyed.

“Now, before attempting to say what that object is, let us look at the attack from the other point of view—our own: If Germany is going out for transatlantic vessels, where can she best strike them? From Germany's home ports of submarines to the sea area off the coasts of France, England, and Ireland, is a matter of only two or three days. That means that a submarine after reaching that locality can stay two or three weeks before she must return for oil and provisions. If, on the other hand, the submarine crosses the ocean to our own coast the voyage would itself take nearly two weeks, and the length of time it could operate off our own coast before being forced to return for fuel would be only one week. The net result, on the basis of these comparisons, is that the German submarines can operate against our shipping at least twice as long if they conduct their operations nearest their own bases.

“Much has been said about possible submarine bases on this side of the ocean. These bases could be either shore bases or floating supply ships. Of course, if such bases existed the length of time enemy submarines could remain on our coasts would be greatly increased. The Navy Department has constantly maintained a large organization for the spe-

cial purpose of searching out any possible bases either within the United States or at neighboring points in the West Indies or in Mexico. It is impossible to state flatly that no bases exist, but it is possible to say that careful and consistent search has failed to reveal any.

“Why, then, are they doing it?”

“First, merely to carry out the known German system of terrorizing the enemy; second, in this particular case, it may be the definite belief of the German Admiralty that this campaign will force the United States to withdraw destroyers and patrol vessels now in European waters in order to protect our own coasts. To do this would be playing directly into the hands of the German Admiralty, because, as it has been seen by what I have said before, it pays them better to attack our ships on the other side and not here; if we withdraw destroyers and patrol boats from the other side it would make it that much easier for the Germans in their chosen field of operations.

“We must realize, therefore, that while Germany may and probably will continue to send occasional submarines to our own coasts, and while these submarines may occasionally sink ships off our shores, we must regard their operations as secondary.

“This does not mean that we must not use every available means to protect our coastwise shipping and to make it dangerous for the submarines of Germany to appear here, so long as we do not weaken our anti-submarine operations on the other side. This the Navy Department is doing with every resource at its command.

“The Summer months are, of course, the best for a transatlantic voyage by German submarines, but they are also the best months for our operations against German submarines in these waters, by the use of patrol boats and other craft not large enough to send across the ocean.

“The navy does not anticipate anything like a successful blockade of our coast, and while occasional losses must be expected, it is important to emphasize again that we must not be diverted from our main purpose of getting troops and supplies across the ocean with the greatest regularity and in the greatest numbers possible.”

In answer to a question as to the ability of the navy to meet convoy needs Mr. Roosevelt said:

“As the number of merchant ships increases, the number of available navy ships for convoying purposes will also increase. It may be said that as far as the actual safety of ships goes the presence of German submarines on this coast does not increase the danger.”

There are two sets of opinions in Washington as to the interpretation of Germany's submarine attack along our shores: One, that it is a desperate move of the enemy, an approaching the end of a losing submarine warfare; the other, that it represents an extension of Germany's underseas campaign. The former opinion is held by T. S. Butler, who has been a member of the House Committee on Naval Affairs for twenty-two years and is one of the three members of that committee, which confers with the Senate Naval Affairs Committee.