

"Sea Power"

(Noter til Foredrag, holdt i Søe-Lieutenant-Selskabet den 13' November 1945 af Captain G.H.Peters, D.S.C., R.N.).

Sea Power is something which I would have to explain to an audience which was not made up of Naval Officers. Here all I need say is that it has for hundreds of years been the foundation of the British Empire, but something never understood by Germany.

I hope to trace the influence of Sea Power in the 1939-45 war and show how little the principles have changed.

No official history of the war at sea. No diaries. I can only therefore give personal observation and experiences.

Lecture is a Naval lecture given to Naval Officers, although I shall say little of the Air Force and Army I do not discount the work in any way. All three services are dependent on each other.

The whole of the lecture must be considered as Confidential especially my remarks on the Submarine warfare. I intend also to quote freely from papers and documents obtained from Germany.

2. The six years of war in three phases:

Defence - Consolidation - Attack and on to Victory

This is our job, the same as the traditional role of the British Navy, to defend the country until a strong army can be built up, to transport that army to the point of attack and then to maintain it.

The traditions of the Royal Navy is therefore most explicitly defined in the prayer of Sir Francis Drake, written in a letter to Fox before he sailed into Cadiz to attack the Spanish Fleet in 1587:

"O Lord God when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning but the continuing of the same until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory:through Him that for the finishing of thy work laid down His Life,Our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Amen."

3. The Defensive Years.

1939. The "PHONEY" war year. The conquest of Poland and standstill in France.

For the Royal Navy:

Blockade (Economic Warfare)

Patrol to contain the German Fleet

A/S Operations

Convoy starting 5th September.

Torpedoing of "Athenia" within a few hours of the declaration of war. Torpedoed then shelled. Loss of 112 lives.

The battle of the Atlantic to be taken later.

1940. Occupation of Denmark, Norway, Holland and France.

Tactical sea room obtained for the small but modern German Fleet.

Treacherous action in Norway did not achieve success without substantial cost. Cruisers sunk at Oslo. Destroyers at Narvik- The open flank.- Loss of many store ships.

A German Rear Admiral has written:

"The operation had to be undertaken in many respects contrary to the dictates of military experience right under the nose of an overwhelmingly powerful enemy with great naval experience who controlled the flank of the route."

With reasonable Military and Air Forces it is my belief that Sea Power could have prevented the capture of Norway. The navy alone could not do this.

The German Navy obtained, however, bases of the utmost strategic importance.

The German advance continued through Holland, Belgium and finally France. There was nothing for the Navy to do-except the glorious epic of Dunkirk when 350,000 men were brought back to fight again.

From a paper written in 1944 by an officer of German Naval Staff:

Occupation of the Channel Coast.

"The wide extend of the newly-acquired coasts produced such demands for personnel for patrol minesweeping and harbour

defence flotillas, port parties, harbour defence posts, and, above all, for Coastal Artillery detachements (the latter are entirely manned by the Navy in Germany). that the available reserves of personnel were hopelessly inadequate and the shortage could be met only by calling up new recruits who were given a short training. This illustrates how little the war preparations begun in 1939 had progressed.

"The occupation of the Dutch, Belgian and French coast down to the Spanish frontier greatly improved Germany's strategic position at sea, providing her first, with free access to the Atlantic together with the necessary important French Naval bases, and second, with the entire Channel coast and its numerous large and small ports, which were required for an invasion of England.

"Since, simultaneously, France as an opponent had ceased to exist, thus neutralising the whole of French North Africa, and Italy, with her numerically appreciable fleet, had entered the war on the side of Germany, the situation at sea had altered during the short period April-July, 1940, to a hitherto unimagined extent in Germany's favour. It now required only the entry into our Coalition of friendly Spain to close the Mediterranean in the West, thus making it to all intents and purposes an Axis sea.

"The way to Egypt and the Near East oilfields would thus have lain open and England would have had to accept the compromise peace for which the German political command was striving.

"The Naval Command in Wilhelmshaven, on which staff I was serving at that time, felt certain that the war would develop in this direction and made the necessary preparations accordingly. These included the allocation of gun crews from the Naval Artillery to the Straits of Gibraltar. Why the political leaders of the Reich, at that time, were unable to secure Spain's adherence to the Axis, I do not know.

"I have the feeling that the great Naval strategic possibilities of such a development were not fully appreciated by them, and that therefore this solution was not urged by them with sufficient vigour.

"As I have been informed by colleagues, the OKM's influence

of the consideration of important politico-strategic combinations of this nature were very slight, since a war council consisting of representatives of the various high commands did not exist. On the other hand the most important decisions were taken by Adolf Hitler himself (by intuition) so that in fact only the putting of these plans into effect was entrusted to the High Command.

"In my view, therefore, a tremendous opportunity of rapidly bringing the war to a favourable conclusion for Germany was neglected."

The Battle of Britain.

1. The necessity for Command of the Air.
2. The right use of Air Power.
3. Before invasion there must be command of the sea.

Napoleon knew about it. So did the Germans.

A German Rear Admiral about

The Invasion Plan (Sea-Lion).

"It is my firm conviction that the invasion operation of 1940 in its intended form would have led to a complete failure, if not indeed to a catastrophe.

"The situation would have been very different had the invasion been prepared in advance in peace-time in Germany and had a large fleet of possibly 500-1000 Naval ferry-barges, with a large covering of light craft, been in readiness before the beginning of the western offensive, so that immediately following Dunkirk, or even slightly earlier, the invasion attempt could have been undertaken with the support of strong airborne landings. In these circumstances, the invasion would probably have succeeded.

"It must be stated that in the circumstances of 1940, the presence of the powerful English Navy prevented an invasion, since at that time neither the English Air Force, the English Army nor the so-called Home Guard was sufficiently powerful to stave it off. Even the fact that the German Luftwaffe was unable in 1940 decisively to defeat the R.A.F. could not have prevented the invasion had the British Navy not stood in the background.

"The German Navy had, naturally, clearly realised that the major weakness in England's position was her dependence on

sea communications and had therefore brought all suitable surface vessels, including the precious battleships and pocket-battleships, the heavy cruisers, AMC's and, above all, U-boats and E-boats, into operation against these sea lines. The Navy thought that this attack by the Navy on the English sea lines should be supported both directly and indirectly by all available forces of the Luftwaffe. The Navy had no great expectations from the mass attacks on London and other towns, but would rather have had the Luftwaffe concentrate its attack with mines and bombs on English port and dockyard installations, and also as far as possible with torpedoes on the English East Coast commercial traffic; any resulting destruction of port and dockyard installations, indeed every disturbance of their activity, and also any damage to enemy shipping space was bound to increase the effect of the Navy's attack on England's sea lines.

"But the Luftwaffe believed firmly at the time in their ability in the air to force England to make peace."

A German General thought much the same.

Field Marshal von Rundstedt in an interview:

"It was nonsense, because the ships were not available; they first had to be brought from Germany and the Netherlands; they were barges which had to be reconstructed so that a tank could be driven out of the bows and all that sort of thing. Then the troops had to learn how to embark and disembark in and out of the barges. We looked upon the whole thing as more of a game, because it was obvious that no invasion was possible since our Navy was not in a position to cover a crossing of the Channel and the carrying of reinforcements. Nor was it possible for the German air force to play the part which should fall on the Navy.

Perhaps we might have come over; but how things would have gone with reinforcements and supplies after this, that is another matter. I was always sceptical about the matter. I must admit that serious preparations were made, but we only had a very few paratroops at the time—one airborne division."

And this is what Rundstedt reports as Hitler's view:

"I have a feeling that the Führer never really wanted

an invasion of England. He never had sufficient courage. Afterwards he said, "On land I am a hero, but I am frightened of water." He definitely hoped that you would somehow make overtures to him. Afterwards it was too late, everything on your side had become very much stronger.

4. Italy and the Mediterranean.

Mussolini and his "Mare Nostrum". Land based bombers could not do the work of a Fleet which was not prepared to fight.

British Sea Power continued to pass vital supply convoys to Malta both from Gibraltar and Alexandria.

Sir James Somerville. The convoy goes through.

Sir Andrew Cunningham.

(a) "The disparity of forces was so great that I had no course open to me but to attack."

(b) The Malta Convoy which failed. Another was sent.

(c) "Don't look round now, Girls."

The effect of sea attack on Rommel's supply line. Culminating in a steady loss of 50% of his supplies.

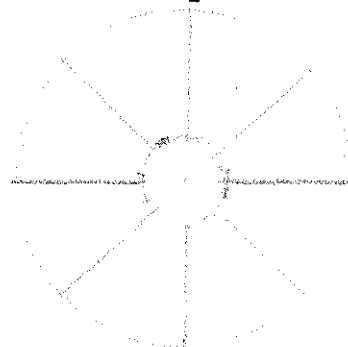
Cruisers (Penelope) - Destroyers - Swordfish a/c.

Malta the springboard for the attack on Italy.

At Malta the Italian Fleet surrendered.

5. Sea Power as a Cartwheel.

With the turning of the tide of war we came back slowly to the Consolidation and Attack phase.



The Military Commander and his love of the interior lines of communication.

The Naval Commander appreciates at all times the use of Sea Power to make full use of the Cartwheel.

1. The Atlantic Life line
2. The Africa Life line to Egypt
3. Supplies to North Russia

4. Supplies to Russia by the Persian Gulf (Building of Road and Rail)
5. Supplies to India and Burma and on to China
6. Communication with Australia.

These were the Build-up or Consolidation days.--Later the Attack.

6. We must look back a little before we can see the Cartwheel lead us onwards to Attack.

The wheel stood in grave danger of being broken in two places:

- (a) The Submarine war, to be dealt with separately
- (b) After standing alone for a year the treacherous attack at Pearl Harbour brought U.S.A. into the war. But a U.S.A. temporarily knocked out of the Pacific Sea Power ring.

The fall of Singapore. Admiral Phillips and the loss of "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse".

Ceylon stood open for invasion whilst the Royal Navy strained to the utmost tried to raise a fleet to defend India and the life line up the East coast of Africa to Egypt and the oil of the Persian Gulf.

My personal experiences of the battle in which the Royal Navy never ran away. Well hardly ever before.

The result was a "Fleet in being" based on East Africa and the Atols of the Indian ocean.

A growing coldness between the German and Japanese General Staff.

Madagascar- a vital base on our flank which could not be allowed to fall into the hands of an enemy. This for the sake of the Cartwheel.

7. The Battle of The Atlantic.

This alone could not be covered in a lecture of twice the duration of this one.

Attack by single U-Boats developed to hunts by wolf packs.

Constant change in area of attack. The most striking being the slaughter of ships off the U.S. East coast in the first half of 1942.

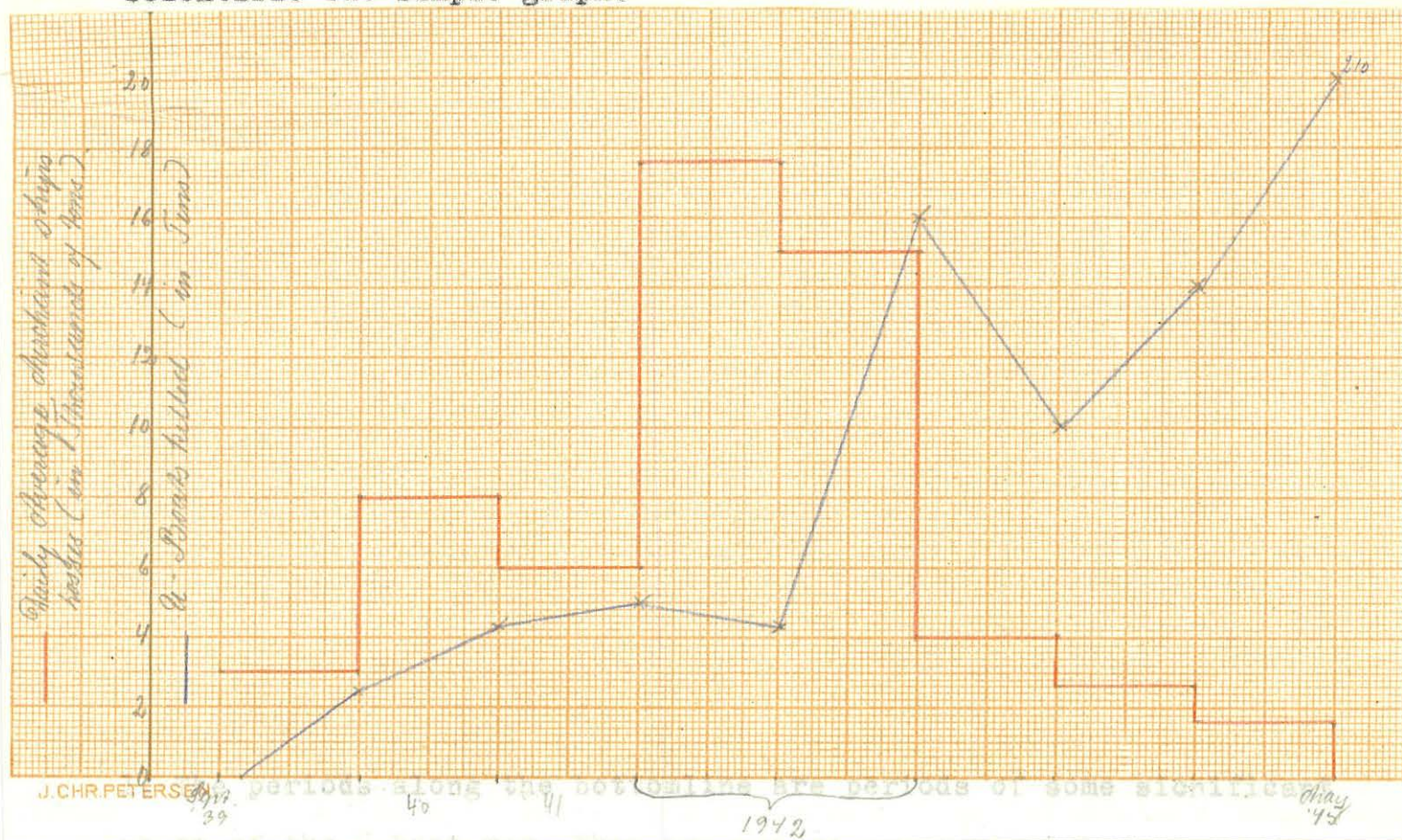
At this time the war Cabinet gave Priority. 1. to all to

do with the battle against the U-Boats. Escort vessels were produced in thousands and fitted with every possible scientific device.

Radar Asdic, but above all a thorough and painstaking TRAINING was insisted upon.

In a very few months time the HUN will start off on all his old tales. The submarine officer will undoubtedly state that if the German Army had fought on a little longer the U-Boat will prove decisive.

Let us look at the case analysed in the form of a scientific but simple graph.



periods along the bottom line are periods of some significance phase of the U-boat war. They are not of an equal number of days, but this in itself is a convenience.

2. Red line: the average shipping loss per DAY over the period. Thousands of tons.
3. Green: the U-Boats deemed killed or almost certainly killed during the periods in TENS.
4. Seek therefore 0-20 Thousands of Tons or Tens of U-Boats.

Let us take note of the frightful losses of 1942. Note the steady rise in the U-Boat kills. Note the steady fall in Shipping lost. When the mean of the Red falls so steadily and the Green rises in this matter, know always that the U-Boat was as completely and utterly defeated as the rest of the German Forces.

Was it done by Aircraft or by Surface ships?

The official figures:

Surface ship	45 %
Air	40 %
Submarine	7 %
Air and Surface cooperating	5 %
Mines and other	3 %

Total: 781.

1942. Let us return to the Cartwheel as the symbol of Seapower.

The landings in French North Africa was possible by Sea Power alone.

Surprise. Cover was a Malta Convoy. - G.A.F. disposition to intercept.

Losses in initial landings. One ship damaged but her landing craft reached the beaches on time,

Thereafter constant attack from sea and air.

1943. The landings in Italy. Sea and Air Power almost complete. No naval opposition.

Remember the Burma campaign was being supplied by sea all this time. Supplies to Russia almost at highest level. Still the Cartwheel.

1944. Invasion of Europe.

It is so recent that there is nothing I need say excepting only to remind you of: Why did not the Germans invade England?

(a) Command of the Sea and necessary craft.

(b) Command of the Air.

Inspite of the impregnable West Wall.

9. The Conclusion.

A German Rear Admiral writing in 1944, knowing this war to be lost and already preparing for the next:

"Yet in solving this question it must be presumed that in a future war Germany will be able to begin the conflict with a decisively great Navy and initial advantages. Whether such an opportunity will occur again in history cannot be said. During the peace, however, let us prepare for this invasion, and provide the necessary sea power and preliminary conditions so that in peace, as

in war, England can be compelled by this menace alone to hold Germany in different esteem."

The Age old Lesson.

I would not end my lecture with a German conclusion, but would far rather be more enterprising and detain you for a few minutes more whilst I try to sum up the lessons I have tried to point out in my lecture:

First there has been no change in this war in regard to Seapower and the necessity for a Navy.

Second there is as great need as ever before for our people and our Governments to realise the importance of Sea Power.

Third. It is of great interest to follow the discussions going on in the U.S.A. in regard to the combining of all services under one Head.

In my opinion an outstanding success of this war was the Chiefs of Staff Committee presided over by our unique Prime Minister Mr. Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington. Never was such fine coordination obtained before.

No one man could be the chief of all services. Hitler tried-but we have heard how he neglected the naval Staff problems.

And so I end with the words taken from our Prayer Book, written in about 1600:

"It is upon the Navy that under the good providence of God the Safety, Honour and Welfare of our Country does chiefly depend."
