Battleship Bismarck. A Survivor's Story

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Summary/Zusammenfassung:

However, the idea of writing this book was born while I was still standing on the upper deck of the sinking Bismarck on twenty-seven May 1941: since there is no vantage point from which the whole of this giant ship is visible, I thought, will it ever be possible for anyone, even an eyewitness, to assemble the countless details of the battle now ending into a complete and coherent account? But this attack, taking place in my day and between two states that had been allies until then, impressed me so deeply that I made note of some of the people and ships involved: Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville, Captain Lancelot Holland, the battle cruiser Hood, and the aircraft carrier Ark Royal. A year-long cruise in a light cruiser to Africa, the West Indies, and the United States in one thousand, nine hundred and thirty got us accustomed to life aboard ship, and at the same time assuaged our yearning to see the big, wide world, which naturally had played a role in our choice of profession.

Topics/Themen:

Bismarck, British, Kriegsmarine, German, Naval, Battleship, Matrosenhauptgefreiter, Matrosenstabsobergefreiter, Kapitänleutnant, Oberartilleriemechaniker, Stabsoberbootsmann, VE DAY, With Berlin surrounded Adolf Hitler committed suicide on 30 April 1945 His named successor was Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz During his brief spell as

Article/Artikel Text:

Battleship Bismarck A Survivors Story By Baron Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg Translated by Jack Sweetman Contents P... one hundred and thirty-seven downloads seven hundred and thirty-nine Views 4MB Size word This content was uploaded by our users and we assume good faith they have the permission to share this book. If you own the copyright to this book and it is wrongfully on our website, we offer a simple DMCA procedure to remove your content from our site. Start by pressing the button below! Report copyright / DMCA form DOWNLOAD PDF Battleship Bismarck A Survivors Story By Baron Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg Translated by Jack Sweetman Contents Preface Acknowledgments Table of Equivalent Ranks one The Bismarck and Her Captain two The Bismarck Joins the Kriegsmarine three Sea Trials and Battle
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Commanders, urging me to publish my unique story. He thereby encouraged me to do what I had first thought about doing eight years earlier. But at that time there were several reasons why I had to push it into the back of my mind again: so much of Germany was still lying in ruins that it did not seem an appropriate time to write on a military subject; not enough time had elapsed for me to be able to write about something that touched me so deeply; I was studying law at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University; I had to finance not only my schooling but my subsistence, no easy task in the immediate postwar years, and at the same time engage in the urgent and time-consuming business of seeking a new profession. During my years of service overseas as consul general and ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, many people, particularly foreigners, told me, you must write about the Bismarck someday. But not until 1975, when I retired, did I have the time and other prerequisites to deal responsibly with the subject; by that time the British had returned the official records of the German Navy to the Federal German Archives. Much had already been written, both at home and abroad, on the operations and sinking of the Bismarck. Naturally, none of the writers was able to provide the reasoning behind the crucial tactical decisions that the Fleet Commander, Admiral Günther Lütjens, made during the ships Atlantic sortie. Nor, of course, can I, but in the pages that follow I have tried to put myself in Lütjenss place and frame of mind and I believe that, having been an officer in the ship, I can make a contribution to the history of the Bismarck and Exercise Rhine. This book is dedicated to the memory of all who died as a result of the sinking of the Bismarck but especially to the memory of her commanding officer, Kapitän zur See Ernst Lindemann. As captain of a flagship, he served in the shadow of his Fleet Commander, and did not have the opportunity to demonstrate the outstanding leadership of which he was capable. Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg Herrsching am Ammersee November one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-nine Acknowledgments I would like to thank Dr. Jürgen Rohwer and Vice Admiral B. B. Schofield for permission to use their track charts of Exercise Rhine; Fregattenkapitän Paul Schmalenbach, second gunnery officer in the Prinz Eugen during Exercise Rhine, for photographs of the battle off Iceland; Kapitänleutnant Herbert Wohlfarth, captain of the U-556 in May 1941, for permission to use the certificate proclaiming the U-556 the guardian of the Bismarck; and Herr Rolf Schindler, for preparing the track charts for publication. I would also like to thank the following people and institutions for their advice and deeds: Captain Robert L. Bridges, USN (Ret.), Castle Creek, New York, U.S.A.; Herr Joachim Fensch, Weingarten, Federal Republic of Germany; Mr. Daniel Gibson Harris, Ottawa, Canada, who was assistant to the British naval attache in Stockholm in May 1941; Herr Franz Hahn of the Military Historical
Training Center, Mürwik Naval School, Federal Republic of Germany; Dr. Mathias Haupt of the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Federal Republic of Germany; Herr Bodo Herzog, Oberhausen, Federal Republic of Germany; Herr Hans H. Hildebrand, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany; Konteradmiral Günther Horstmann, German Navy (Ret.), Basel, Switzerland; the Department of Photographs of the Imperial War Museum, London, England; Mr. Esmond Knight, London, England, who was a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve aboard the Prince of Wales in May 1941; Dr. Hansjoseph Maierhöfer of the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv-Freiburg, Federal Republic of Germany; Mr. Philip Mathias, Toronto, Canada; Mrs. Mary Z. Pain, London, England; Fregattenkapitan Dr. Werner Rahn, Mürwik, Federal Republic of Germany; Dr. Hans Ulrich Sareyko, Äußwärtigen Amt, Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany; Kapitän zur See Hans-Henning von Schultz, German Navy (Ret.), Ramsau, Federal Republic of Germany, who was the intelligence officer aboard the Prinz Eugen during Exercise Rhine; Herr Torsten Spiller of the Deutsche Dienststelle (WAST), Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany; and Mr. Tom Wharam, Cardiff, Wales. I want to convey my special thanks to those who have prepared this English-language edition. I am grateful to my translator, Dr. Jack Sweetman, who has succeeded admirably in retaining the flavor and spirit of my story; to my technical adviser, Dr. Karl Lautenschlager, whose expertise in naval matters, especially those pertaining to the German Navy, earned my great admiration; to Mr. Thomas G. Webb, who did the excellent painting of the Bismarck that appears on the jacket of this book; and to my editor, Mrs. Mary Veronica Amoss, Senior Manuscript Editor of the Naval Institute Press, who demonstrated rare skill in making my story appear as if it were written originally in English. Others at the Naval Institute Press to whom I would like to express my gratitude are Mr. Thomas F. Epley, Editorial Director, for many invaluable suggestions and for his careful management of my book from start to finish; Miss Beverly S. Baum, Design Manager, for the painstaking care with which she designed the book; Mrs. Marjorie B. Whittington, Administrative and Editorial Assistant, for her many typings of the English-language manuscript and her conscientious handling of all matters relating to photographs and drawings; and Miss Rita Connolly, Production Manager, who, in face of great odds, successfully maintained a tight production schedule. B.v-M-R. Translators Note For assistance in the preparation of this translation, it is a pleasure to record my thanks to: Lieutenant Commander George L. Breeden III, USN, Lieutenant Fred H. Rainbow, USNR, and Lieutenant Commander Paul Stillwell, USNR, whose expert advice was invaluable in dealing with technical matters; the author, Baron Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg, who kindly read and commented on the translation of his
book; Mary Veronica Amoss, Senior Manuscript Editor of the Naval Institute Press, who eliminated many infelicities of expression; and, last but never least, my wife, Gisela, who helped in countless ways. J.S. Table of Equivalent Ranks
Kriegsmarine Grossadmiral Generaladmiral United States Navy — Fleet Admiral
Royal Navy — Admiral of the Fleet Admiral Vizeadmiral Vice Admiral
Konteradmiral Rear Admiral Commodore Commodore Kapitän zur See Captain
Fregattenkapitän Commander Korvettenkapitän Lieutenant Commander
Kapitänleutnant Lieutenant Oberleutnant zur See Lieutenant, Junior Grade
Leutnant zur See Ensign Oberfähnrich zur See — Fähnrich zur See Midshipman
Stabsbootsmann* Chief Warrant officer Oberbootsmann* Warrant Officer
(W-3) Stabsbootsmann * Warrant Officer (W-2) Bootsmann * Warrant Officer
(W-1) — Master Chief Petty Officer — Senior Chief Petty Officer
Oberbootsmannsmaat * Chief Petty Officer Bootsmannsmaat * Petty Officer 1st
Class Matrosenstabsbootsmann PETTY Officer 2nd Class Matrosenstabsbootsmann
Petty Officer 3rd Class Matrosenhauptbootsmann Seaman Matrosenbootsmann —
Matrosenbootsmann Seaman Apprentice Matrose Seaman Recruit Admiral Vice-
Admiral Rear-Admiral Commodore Captain Commander Lieutenant Commander
Lieutenant — Sub-Lieutenant — Midshipman Cadet — Warrant Officer — — — — Chief
Petty Officer Petty Officer Leading Seaman Able Seaman — Ordinary Seaman —
Bootsmann designates the rating or specialty of petty officers and warrant
officers, The suffix maat designates a senior petty officer. A title without a suffix
designates a warrant officer. Other ratings are substituted as appropriate. For
example: Maschinenmaat, Obersignalmaat, Oberartilleriemechaniker,
Stabsbootsmann. one The Bismarck and Her Captain Sea Battle Between
the English and French! Churchill Bombards the French Fleet! So read the giant
headlines in the daily newspapers on Hamburg kiosks. This sensational display
told the German public of the bloody attack by a British naval force on French
warships lying in the harbor at Oran, Algeria, at the beginning of July 1940. The
attack was part of a determined British attempt to prevent the Germans from
seizing the French Navy, a threat raised by the French surrender late in June.
Nominally, the fleet was under the control of the Pétain government, but most of
it had taken refuge in ports outside of France. On the morning of three July, a
British naval force, consisting of two battleships, a battle cruiser, an aircraft
carrier, two cruisers, and eleven destroyers, appeared off the coast of Algeria. Its
commander immediately presented the French admiral with an ultimatum to
surrender his ships. When the allotted time had expired and the French had
taken no action, the British opened fire. Thirteen hundred French seamen were
killed that afternoon, and three French battleships were destroyed or damaged.
Only the battleship Strasbourg and five destroyers managed to escape to Toulon.
As I read the news accounts of this amazing event, I was reminded of the British seizure of the Danish fleet at Copenhagen in the midst of peace in the year 1807. But this attack, taking place in my day and between two states that had been allies until then, impressed me so deeply that I made note of some of the people and ships involved: Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville, Captain Lancelot Holland, the battle cruiser Hood, and the aircraft carrier Ark Royal. Still, I had no inkling of the role that within a year these men and ships would play in the fate of the battleship Bismarck, to which I, a thirty-year-old Kapitänleutnant, had just been assigned. In June 1940, when I first saw the Bismarck, she was in the Hamburg yard of her builders, Blohm & Voss, awaiting completion and acceptance by the German Navy. Therefore, what I saw was a dusty steel giant, made fast to a wharf and littered with tools, welding equipment, and cables. An army of workmen was hustling to complete the job, while the crew already on board were familiarizing themselves with the ship and conducting whatever training was possible under the circumstances. But under this disguise, the distinctive features, both traditional and novel, of the future battleship were already apparent. There it was again—that elegant curve of the ship’s silhouette fore and aft from the tip of the tower mast—then a characteristic of German warship design that sometimes led the enemy to confuse our ship types at long range. Other things about her were familiar to me because I had served in the battleship Scharnhorst, but everything about the Bismarck was bigger and more powerful: her dimensions, especially her enormous beam, her high superstructure, her 38-centimeter main-battery guns (the first of that caliber installed in the Kriegsmarine), the great number of guns she had in her secondary and antiaircraft batteries, and the heavy armor-plating of her hull, gun turrets, and forward command- and fire-control station. She had a double-ended aircraft catapult athwartships, another first for the Kriegsmarine, and, as did the Scharnhorst and her sister the Gneisenau, the new, spherical splinter shields on her antiaircraft stations on both sides of her tower mast. At first sight of this gigantic ship, so heavily armed and armored, I felt sure that she would be able to rise to any challenge, and that it would be a long time before she met her match. A long life was very obviously in store for her. Still, I thought, the British fleet had numerical superiority, and the outcome of any action would depend on the combination of forces engaged. But questions like that seemed to lie far in the future, as I began my service in the Bismarck. I had supreme confidence in this ship. How could it be otherwise? When my assignment to the battleship Bismarck reached me in May 1940, eleven years of naval service lay behind me. I was born in Spandau in 1910, into a family that originated in Baden but some of whom migrated to the east. The profession of arms was a family tradition. My
father was killed in action as a major in command of the 5th Jäger Battalion in the Argonne in April 1916; my only brother, who was younger than I and a captain in the Luftwaffe, was killed on two September one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-nine while serving as a squadron commander in the Richthofen Wing during the Polish campaign. In April 1929, I graduated with excellence from a classical high school and entered the Weimar Republics 15,000-man Reichsmarine. By the time the several thousand applicants had been subjected to rigorous examination, the class of 1929, to which I belonged, numbered about eighty men. A year-long cruise in a light cruiser to Africa, the West Indies, and the United States in one thousand, nine hundred and thirty got us accustomed to life aboard ship, and at the same time assuaged our yearning to see the big, wide world, which naturally had played a role in our choice of profession. We then went through the Naval School and took the standard courses on weapons before, towards the end of 1932, we were dispersed among the various ships of the Reichsmarine as Fähnriche zur See. A year later, together with my classmates, I became a Leutnant zur Seet and then served as a junior officer in a deck division and as range-finder officer in the light cruisers Königsberg and Karlsruhe. Following my promotion to Oberleutnant zur See in 1935, I spent a year as a group officer at the Mürwik Naval School, training midshipmen. Early in 1936, I took a course at the Naval Gunnery School in Kiel in fire control, which began my specialization in naval ordnance. There followed two years in our then-very-modern destroyers, first as adjutant to the commander of the 1st Destroyer Division, then as a division and gunnery officer. At the end of these tours, I was promoted to Kapitänleutnant. In the autumn of one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-eight the Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine first sent assistants to the naval attaches in the most important countries. There were very few of these posts and when I was offered one of them, and moreover the important one in London, not only did I feel honored but I felt that an inner longing was being satisfied. I accepted it and took up my post with great pleasure. The outbreak of the Second World War brought this assignment to an abrupt end and, in October 1939, I began two months service as fourth gunnery officer of the battleship Scharnhorst. The following month, I took part in the sweep into the Faeroes-Shetland passage, which was led by the Fleet Commander, Admiral Wilhelm Marschall, in his flagship Gneisenaun, and which culminated in the sinking of the British auxiliary cruiser Rawalpindi. Afterwards, the Scharnhorst had to go into the yard for an extensive overhaul and I was appointed first officer of the destroyer Erich Giese. As such, I participated in mine-laying operations off the east coast of Britain in the winter of 1939-40 and in the occupation of Narvik during the Norwegian campaign of April 1940. All ten of the German destroyers engaged in this
operation were lost, half of Germany's destroyer force. I had to be given a new assignment and, because of my weapons training, I was appointed fourth gunnery officer, my action station being the after fire-control station, in the Bismarck, which was soon to be commissioned. I looked forward with keen anticipation to serving in this wonderful new ship. Before going to my new duty, however, I took a short leave. In the quiet of an Upper Bavarian health resort, where visitors were few in wartime, my thoughts continually wandered back, whether I wanted them to or not, to the moving months I had spent in London, only a year earlier. What changes had taken place in Anglo-German relations since then, so completely at variance with my hopes and wishes! Very early in life, actually during my school days, I acquired a special interest in Great Britain, her people, language, history, and political system. My own family history influenced me in this direction. In the eighteenth century, Sir George Browne, son of John, Count of Altamont, of the house of Neale O'Connor, an Anglo-Norman family that settled in Ireland and later spread to England, entered French service. Subsequently, he transferred to the Prussian Army, in which he fought in the Seven Years War. Made a privy councillor after the war, he became a chamberlain and treasurer in foul Silesia. His daughter, Franziska, married one of my direct forebears. Visits to Britain over the years had deepened my interest in that country. In one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-six I accepted an invitation to the home of English friends in Colchester, and now I could not forget the long discussions we held over the burning necessity to preserve peace between our two peoples. Unfortunately, the time I had spent as assistant naval attache in London, personally very enjoyable, was tragically overshadowed from the outset by the continued deterioration of Anglo-German relations. A relentless succession of international events was responsible. I remembered it with a heavy heart. By the time I arrived in London in November 1938, the British public had all but given up hope that the ceding of the German-populated Sudetenland to the Reich, which had been forced upon the Czech government with British and French consent at Munich the previous September, would produce the hoped-for relaxation of international tensions. An aggressive speech by Hitler at Saarbrücken barely two weeks after the conference in Munich had contributed to Britains anxiety: disillusionment grew and it became ever clearer that a policy of appeasement would be disastrous for Europe. The attack launched by German state authorities on nine November against Jewish life and property within the territory of the Reich came as another shock and created a worldwide sensation. The evening before my departure from Berlin for London, I myself had witnessed the sudden appearance on the Kurfürstendamm of organized squads armed with tire rods and crowbars, the destruction and plundering of Jewish stores, flames
enveloping the synagogue on the Fasanenstrasse. An invisible speaker constantly admonished the subdued crowd that witnessed this spectacle, in silence or whispering under its breath, Go on! , DONT stand around!, NO picture-taking! In the ugly face of this naked force and brutal suppression, I had recognized the unmistakable harbinger of still worse things to come. Early on the morning of eleven November, I reached London in a spotlessly clean British railway car. The lead article in The Times, A Black Day for Germany, unreservedly condemned the violence. It voiced my opinion exactly; I could have signed every sentence. It was terribly depressing to be starting out on my first mission abroad under these circumstances, and I was grateful to my British friends for being so tactful as not to mention to me the events in the Reich that must have shamed all decent German patriots. Germany took another politically significant step in December 1938, this time concerning the German naval construction program, which then conformed to the terms of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of June 1935. In this agreement, Germany pledged not to increase the strength of its fleet to more than thirty-five per cent of the strength of the British fleet. This percentage applied not only to the total strength of the fleet, but to individual ship categories, as well. Although the treaty granted Germany the right to parity in submarine strength, the Reich professed its willingness not to go beyond forty-five per cent of British submarine strength. Should it ever appear necessary to exceed these limitations, the matter was to be discussed. At the time it was signed, the treaty was accepted with satisfaction in Germany, because it overturned the limitations set by the Treaty of Versailles and made possible the building of a bigger and a balanced fleet. Now, in December 1938, the Reich called the attention of the British government to the clause in the treaty that allowed Germany to exceed the forty-five per cent limit on its submarine strength if a situation arose which, in the opinion of Germany, made it necessary to do so. Such a situation, Berlin informed London, now existed. The government of the Reich, therefore, intended to build up its submarine tonnage to parity with the British. Simultaneously, it announced its intention to arm two cruisers under construction more heavily than had been originally provided. Technically, the German claims were perfectly in order. But were they being made at a politically propitious moment? The British, aware of the capacity of Germanys shipyards, were bound to know that the Reich would not have its increased submarine tonnage available for several years. And political opinion in Great Britain, already disturbed by the Munich Agreement, was such that the presentation of Germanys claims at this moment could only work to the political disadvantage of the Reich: this view was frequently expressed in conversations in London at the time and widely voiced by the British press. Therefore, why not patiently await the tactically
correct moment? It was actions such as this that made it possible to read aggressive intent into everything Germany did, even when it was not there. The next crisis came in the spring of 1939, and it was a serious one. In mid-March, Hitler forced the Czech government to conclude a treaty making the provinces of Bohemia and Moravia a German protectorate. In violation of the Munich Agreement, he then occupied that area and incorporated it into the Reich. Czechoslovakia, as such, disappeared from the map. This action shook Europe like an earthquake. The British government and public were the hardest hit; the policy of appeasement towards Germany appeared to be shattered once and for all. Thereafter, many circles of British society avoided all contact with official representatives of the Reich. The German embassy tried desperately to find a way of interpreting the event to its host country. I realized that a political turning point had been reached. At the end of March, I attended a social gathering in HMS Calliope. This venerable sailing ship was used for training the Tyne Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Her home port was Newcastle. The affair was to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Samoan hurricane of 1889, which the Calliope had been fortunate enough to survive. Because some German and American fighting ships were also caught in the storm, the naval attaches of both countries were invited to the ceremony. The American attache was represented by his assistant, Lieutenant Robert Lord Campbell, with whom I traveled to Newcastle. On the way, I wondered what effect events in Czechoslovakia would have on the gathering in HMS Calliope. I need not have worried. I had a pleasant evening of good comradeship, only slightly dampened by Germany's treatment of its new protectorate. In his welcoming address, the British host spoke of troublous times but did not go into particulars, and the evenings planners saw to it that no one else spoke. Its a shame, Campbell said to me afterwards, I had thought of a few things to say and would have been more than happy to do so. I could not exactly share his regret. Only a month after the events in Prague, more alarming diplomatic signals came from Berlin. In his speech to the Reichstag on twenty-eight April Hitler gave notice that he was canceling two treaties: the German-Polish Nonaggression Pact of one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-four and the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935. In Great Britain, the cancellation of the naval treaty was seen as the prelude to an unrestrained expansion of the German fleet; while that of the pact with Poland appeared to augur another dangerous political adventure. Hitler had switched the course of European affairs onto another track. Whether the tremendous international risks he was taking would lead to the preservation of peace or to war was a question on which observers in London became increasingly contradictory. During the days when I was trying to find the answer to this
question, I often thought of an unforgettable meeting I had in London not long before. In the British Admiralty, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Troup, a rather taciturn Scot, was responsible for liaison with the accredited naval attaches. His assistant in this duty was the cosmopolitan, suave Commander Casper S. B. Swinley, who handled the day-to-day business of liaison. At a routine official gathering soon after my arrival in London, Troup said to me, Baron, one day soon you and I will dress in our cutaways, put on our top hats, climb into a taxi and visit Lady Jellicoe. I replied, Admiral, it would be a great honor. At that time no German naval officer had to be told who Lady Jellicoe was. But that was long ago, so I should explain that she was the widow of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe, who died in 1935. Lord Jellicoe commanded the British Grand Fleet at the Battle of Jutland in May one thousand, nine hundred and sixteen and was later First Sea Lord. He enjoyed great esteem in German naval circles as well as in his own country. Troup’s first invitation to visit Lady Jellicoe was, however, not followed up, and I almost forgot about it. Then, at another meeting, Troup again said, Baron, soon you and I will dress in our cutaways, put on our top hats and go in a taxi to visit Lady Jellicoe. I said, Admiral, I would be delighted. But once again it seemed that nothing was going to happen. Then one day Troup called me up: Be at my house in the designated dress tomorrow afternoon. We’ll drive to Lady Jellicoe from here. And so we did. Lady Jellicoe received us in her tastefully furnished London flat. The drawing room was decorated with many souvenirs of her husband’s long and distinguished naval career, notably a silver model of his flagship Iron Duke. I am delighted that Admiral Troup was so kind as to bring you to me, Lady Jellicoe, told me, and I bid you a cordial welcome. Then we discussed the two navies, the events of the world war at sea, the promising start towards an Anglo-German understanding around the turn of the century, its breakdown, and the subsequent, unhappy course of events. We parted with the mutual hope that peace between our two countries would be preserved—and that was more than an empty wish. I thought about this visit for a long time afterwards. Why had Lady Jellicoe wanted to see me? Ever since the end of the world war, her husband had been convinced that a political settlement with Germany would be in Britain’s best interest. He had worked for it with all his strength to the last, and this was the spirit in which Lady Jellicoe talked to me. On a daily basis, most of my duties as assistant to the German naval attaché were performed in the office. My dealings with the Royal Navy were limited to liaison with the Admiralty; I did not visit any British ships. I evaluated the daily and monthly press, professional periodicals, and literature on naval topics, and I cultivated my contacts with the assistant naval attaches of other countries. I assisted my chief in his reporting activities, one of which was to
observe the effects of Francos declaration of a blockade of the Republican coastal areas during the Spanish Civil War. Implementation of the one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-five naval treaty was naturally a very important facet of AngloGerman relations. Although the main business connected with that was not conducted in the office of the German naval attache in London, correspondence on the subject came to our attention. In it, the two governments informed one another of the most important data regarding the warships they had under construction and had completed. This is how we learned the names of new British ships; for example, the battleships King George V and Prince of Wales and the aircraft carriers Ark Royal and Victorious. A report from our consulate in Glasgow in the summer of one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-nine stated that the twenty-two ship-yards on the Clyde would be working to capacity on new naval construction into the winter, and some of them for more than two years. When the Prince of Wales was launched at Birkenhead on three May 1939, the London agency of the German News Bureau reported: This morning in Birkenhead the battleship Prince of Wales left the stocks, christened by the sister of the king. She is one of the fastest and most powerful ships in the British fleet. She has a displacement of 35,000 tons and is armed with ten 14-inch guns in three turrets, sixteen 5.25-inch guns in eight turrets, and numerous smaller guns. Her speed is said to be greater than that of the battleship Nelson, which makes twenty-three knots. The Prince of Wales is the second ship of its class to leave the stocks. The first was the King George V, which left the stocks in the presence of the king in February. Three more ships of the same class will follow. That is where my reminiscences ended. Now, these ships on paper were about to take on tangible form, and my ship, the Bismarck, would certainly meet one or another of them at sea. But the veil of the future still lay over the when and the where. My leave flew past, and at the beginning of June I arrived in Hamburg in typical Hamburg weather—rain. I registered at a hotel and awaited the morrow, when I was to report for duty to the commanding officer of the Bismarck, Kapitän zur See Ernst Lindemann. Lindemanns reputation as a naval officer was distinguished; he was known as an outstanding gunnery expert, but also as a strict superior, and so it was with some nervousness that I anticipated my first encounter with him. Ernst Lindemann was born in Altenkirchen/Westerwald in one thousand, eight hundred and ninety-four and entered the Imperial German Navy on one April 1913. Because he was not very strong physically, he was accepted only on probation. With the tenacity and energy that already characterized him, however, he weathered the hardships of a year of cadet training under a particularly strict officer in the heavy cruiser Hertha as well as did any of his comrades. Later, one of his classmates who served side by side with him as a naval cadet, wrote me:
His zeal and his concept of duty were exemplary; I cannot recall that he ever fell into disfavor or aroused the anger of our cadet officer. When one thinks what trifling misdemeanors could expose the cadets of that period to censure, it becomes obvious that Lindemann had unusual concentration and strength of will. Yet he was definitely not a careerist in the negative sense; he was an unselfish, helpful, and popular human being, wrote the same classmate, who also praised his strict and uncompromising concept of the personal and professional obligations of a naval officer. Nevertheless, he was not lacking in ambition. When in later years, Lindemann, who had in the meanwhile become an acknowledged gunnery expert, was told by his classmate that he, Lindemann, would certainly become Inspector of Naval Gunnery some day, he replied: I still hope at least to become commander of the first battleship squadron in the Kriegsmarine. But there was not such a squadron again in his lifetime. Lindemann went to the Mürwik Naval School in April 1914. Owing to the outbreak of the world war, this assignment had to be broken off and the examination usually given at the end of training was not held. Like his classmates, he was given sea duty and in one thousand, nine hundred and fifteen was promoted to Leutnant zur See. In the rank list for one thousand, nine hundred and eighteen he stood fifth among his approximately two hundred and ten classmates, and later in the Reichsmarine and Kriegsmarine he ranked second in his class. Most of Lindemanns service was in large combatants, on staffs, and at the Naval Gunnery School in Kiel. Early in his career, he made gunnery his specialty and he studied every aspect of it. In 1920, as an Oberleutnant zur See, he was posted to the fleet section of the Naval Staff in Berlin, and thereafter to the predreadnought Hannover. By 1925, he had been promoted to Kapitanleutnant and was on the admirals staff at the Baltic Sea Naval Station in Kiel. When that tour ended, he went as second gunnery officer in the predreadnoughts Elsass and, later, Schleswig-Holstein. Lindemann always performed his duties with the same industry and the same conscientiousness, said the classmate quoted above, for example, as second gunnery officer of the Elsass he took paperwork home with him, even though that billet in a predreadnought was generally considered a relatively soft job. After a tour as an instructor at the Naval Gunnery School in Kiel and after being promoted to Korvettenkapitän in 1932, Lindemann became first gunnery officer in the pocket battleship Admiral Scheer. It was at about this time, when more than twenty years of very successful service lay behind him, that he once told some friends that, actually, he was still on probation, because he had never been advised of his final acceptance into the navy! In 1936, he was assigned as a Fregattenkapitänt to the operations section of the Naval Staff, and, in 1938, as Kapitän zur See, he became Chief of the Naval Training Section in the Naval
High Command. This post was followed by one that was a high point in his long and successful career as a gunner, command of the Naval Gunnery School. Without doubt, given his specialization in ordnance and his other professional and personal qualities, he was destined to have command of the newest, biggest, and most heavily armed German battleship: the Bismarck. The appointment reached him in the spring of 1940. The morning after my arrival in Hamburg Lindemann awaited me in the captains cabin aboard ship. I appeared, as was usual in such cases, in small service dress, that is, a blue jacket with rank stripes around the cuff, and blue trousers. Lindemann, of medium height and build, with sharply chiseled features, stood, similarly dressed, before his desk and looked at me intently with his blue eyes as I announced, Kapitänleutnant von Müllenheim reporting aboard for duty, as ordered. I thank you for your report and bid you welcome aboard, he replied with a friendly smile and gave me his hand. My objective, he continued, is to make this beautiful, powerful ship ready for action as rapidly as possible, and I expect your full cooperation. Because of your training in the fire control of heavy guns, your action station will be the after fire-control station, as you already know. But that wont be enough to keep you busy before the ship is commissioned and for a while after that, so I've decided to make you my Personal adjutant; you've been an adjutant before and also had an interesting tour in London. I was surprised—and very pleased—to hear that I was to be adjutant. He went on to explain what he expected of me. This duty wont occupy more than your mornings, and in the afternoons you'll be at the disposal of the first gunnery officer, who'll tell you just what he wants you to do. This will be your schedule until the maintenance of the combat readiness of the ship requires you to work all day in gunnery. As adjutant, your main job will be to prepare records and reports, supervise correspondence, and carry out whatever orders I might issue. After a short pause, Lindemann added: One more thing. In the future, I would prefer to hear people on board use the masculine form when speaking of the Bismarck. So powerful a ship as this could only be a he, not a she. I resolved to accede to his wish and, although I have had a few slips of the tongue, have done so ever since. [Out of respect for the one and only commanding officer of the Bismarck, this rule has also been followed in the German edition of this book. ] Then Lindemann gave me his hand again, wished me well in my new assignment, and the interview was at an end. As I closed the door of the cabin behind me, I was certain I had just met a very impressive personality, a man who would carry out his new assignment intelligently and conscientiously. Lindemann's manner was in all respects professional. Being an adjutant was good duty under any circumstances, but in this particular case it would also lead me into a close working relationship with an obviously ideal
commanding officer. 2 The Bismarck Joins the Kriegsmarine twenty-four August 1940: commissioning day for the Bismarck! Beneath a cloudy sky, a strong, chilly wind from the east bank of the Elbe was raising whitecaps in the river and sweeping over the stern of the ship, whose port side was still made fast to a wharf of the Blohm & Voss building yard. The sun was not shining but, at least, I thought to myself, with the wind coming from that quarter, the ceremony would not be spoiled by rain, and that was something to be thankful for. The crew, in pea jackets and service caps, was lined up three or four deep on either side of the upper deck, from the quarterdeck to the forecastle, the officers and senior petty officers wearing their ceremonial daggers, and the officers their silver-brocade belts, as well. The division officers drew up their men along the joints in the decks planks and reported to the First Officer, Fregattenkapitän Hans Oels, that their divisions had been formed. The ship s staff officers stood in a body slightly aft of the starboard gangway, opposite which was the honor guard, with a drummer and a bugler. The fleet band was ready on the quarterdeck. Farther forward, under the barrels of the after-most 38-centimeter turret, representatives of Blohm & Voss added a civilian touch to this otherwise thoroughly military scene. Attention! Face to starboard, barked Oels as a sleek white motorboat bearing the battle ensign and the commission pennant came into view, and the bugler sounded the appropriate signal. all eyes were fixed on the boat, which slowed down and came alongside the gangway. The honor guard presented arms and the commanding officer was piped aboard by the bosun. Crew formed for commissioning ceremony, reported Oels. Followed by Oels and myself as adjutant, Lindemann reviewed the crew, then mounted a podium on the quarterdeck to deliver an address. The men, now standing in ranks eleven or twelve deep, faced their commanding officer and the flagstaff at the stern. Two signalmen held the halyards taut, ready to raise the battle ensign. Seaman of the Bismarck! Lindemann began, Commissioning day for our splendid ship has come at last. [ Lindemann actually said, Soldiers of the Bismarck. The Germans refer to their naval seamen as soldiers, but use seamen when referring to men in their merchant marine. ] He called on the crew, on each individual, to do his best to make her a truly effective instrument of war in the shortest possible time, and thanked Blohm & Voss for having worked so hard that she had been completed ahead of schedule. He spoke of the significance of the hour at hand, which demanded a military solution to the fateful questions facing the nation, and quoted from one of Prince Otto von Bismarcks speeches to the Reichstag, Policy is not made with speeches, shooting festivals, or songs, it is made only by blood and iron. After expressing certainty that the ship would fulfill any mission assigned to her, he gave the command, Hoist flag and pennant! The honor guard
again presented arms and, to the strains of the national anthem, the ensign was hoisted on the flagstaff at the stern and the pennant on the mainmast. Both waved smartly in the wind. The battleship Bismarck had joined the Kriegsmarine. Laid down on one July one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-six and launched on fourteen February 1939, the Bismarck had a net displacement of 45,950 metric tons and a full-load displacement of 50,955.7 metric tons. [According to calculations contained in a report of the U.S. Naval Technical Mission in Europe, whose records include the construction specifications of both the Bismarck and the Tirpitz, when the Bismarck was completed, her full-load displacement was 53,546 metric tons.] Her overall length was 251 meters, her beam 36 meters, and her designed draft was 9.33 meters or, at maximum displacement, 10.20 meters. Of special interest is the fact that, in comparison with most large warships of the period, her beam was relatively wide in proportion to her length. This characteristic ran counter to the prevalent desire for ever more speed, which called for the least beam possible in relation to length. However, the Bismarcks wide beam seemed to work to her overall advantage, because it lessened any tendency to roll in a seaway and, thus, increased her value as a gun platform. It also reduced her draft, which could be important in the shallow waters of the North Sea. Furthermore, it allowed a more efficient use of space, better placement of armor, a greater distance between the armored outer shell and the longitudinal torpedo bulkheads, which protected the ship against underwater explosions, and simplified the arrangement of the twin turrets of the secondary battery and of the heavy antiaircraft guns. More than ninety per cent of the Bismarcks steel hull was welded. As added protection against an underwater hit, her double bottom extended over approximately eighty per cent of her length. Her upper deck ran from bow to stern, and beneath it were the battery deck, the armored deck, and the upper and middle platform decks. A lower platform deck ran parallel with the stowage spaces, which formed the overhead of the double bottom, almost throughout. Longitudinally, the ship divided into twenty-two compartments, numbered in sequence from the stern forward. Armor comprised the highest percentage of the ships total weight, some forty per cent, and qualitatively as well as quantitatively it was mounted in proportion to the importance of the position to be protected. The upper deck was reinforced by armor that ran almost its entire length. This armor was only fifty millimeters thick but it provided protection against splinters and would slow down an incoming projectile so that it would explode before striking the armored deck below, which protected the ships vital spaces. The armor on this deck was from eighty to one hundred and twenty millimeters thick and ran longitudinally between two armored transverse bulkheads, one hundred and seventy meters apart. At the stern, the
armor thickened into an inclined plane to protect the steering gear. Between the transverse bulkheads, the ships outer shell was covered by an armored belt, whose thickness varied up to three hundred and twenty millimeters and which protected such important installations as the turbines, boilers, and magazines. Higher up, the armor was between one hundred and twenty and one hundred and forty-five millimeters thick and it formed a sort of citadel to protect the decks above the armored deck. The two-story forward conning tower, the elevated after section of which served as the forward fire-control station, was also armored in varying thicknesses. Since as a weapon system the Bismarck was almost exclusively a gun platform, protection of her guns was of the utmost importance. Her main turrets were protected by armor that ranged in thickness from one hundred and fifty to three hundred and sixty millimeters. Her secondary armament was less heavily protected; indeed, the relatively light armor in those areas left something to be desired as protection against heavy projectiles. The arrangement of the superstructure was very similar to that of the Prinz Eugen and other German heavy cruisers. There were four decks forward and three aft. The tower mast was on the forward bridge, and atop it were the main fire-control stations for both the antiaircraft guns and the surface batteries. The propulsion plant, which comprised nine per cent of the total weight of the ship, consisted of three sets of turbines for which twelve high-pressure boilers supplied steam. The plant was designed to Provide a top speed of twenty-nine knots at a total horsepower for the three shafts of 138,000, but subsequent modification increased these maximums to more than thirty knots and 150,000 horsepower. By the time she had been completed, the Bismarck was one of the fastest battleships built up to that time. Her maximum fuel-oil capacity was 8,700 tons, which gave her an operating range of 8,900 nautical miles at a speed of seventeen knots, and 9,280 nautical miles at sixteen knots. This was a remarkable range for a turbine ship of that day, and it shows that, from the outset, the Bismarck was intended for high-seas operations. However, it was some 1,000 nautical miles less than the range of the preceding Scharnhorst-class of turbine battleships, and it might be that this relative lack of endurance contributed to the Bismarck's unhappy end. Electric-drive steering gear controlled two rudders mounted in parallel, each with an area of twenty-four square meters. A big-gun ship such as the Bismarck needed an enormous amount of electrical energy. To supply it, there were four generating plants comprised of two 500-kilowatt diesel generators and six steam-driven turbo-generators. In total, these generators delivered approximately 7,900 kilowatts at two hundred and twenty volts. The battleships main armament consisted of four double 38-centimeter turrets, two of which, Anton and Bruno, were mounted forward,
and two, Caesar and Dora, aft. Their maximum range was 36,200 meters. For these guns, her normal load was eight hundred and forty rounds, her maximum load 960, each of which consisted of the shell, a primer, and a principal charge. The shells were so heavy that they had to be conveyed from the magazines on the middle platform deck to the turrets by means of a mechanical hoist.

Secondary armament consisted of twelve 15-centimeter guns in six double turrets equally divided on either side of the ship. They had a maximum range of 23,000 meters. The normal ammunition supply for these was 1,800 rounds.

Antiaircraft defense consisted of heavy, medium, and light guns. As heavy flak, the Bismarck carried sixteen 10.5-centimeter quick-firing guns in twin mounts, with a maximum range of 18,000 meters. Sixteen 3.7-centimeter guns in twin mounts provided medium flak, and twenty 2-centimeter in twelve single and two quadruple mounts provided light flak. Since a battleship is essentially a floating gun platform, a description of the Bismarcks gunnery equipment and procedures may be helpful, especially because these differed from navy to navy. Her surface fire-control system was installed in armored stations forward, aft, and in the foretop. Inside each station were two or three directors. A rotating cupola above each station housed an optical range finder and served as a mount for one of three radar antennas. The director, which was basically a high-powered telescope, was used to measure bearing for surface targets. In contrast to most other navies, the Kriegsmarine did not mount its directors in the rotating range-finder cupola, but below it, inside the fire-control station. The director was designed like a periscope so that only the upper lens protruded slightly above the armored roof of the fire-control station. Not only the optical range finders but also the radar sets were used to measure range to the target. German radar had a shorter range and poorer bearing accuracy than the optical equipment. It gave exact range information in pitch darkness or heavy weather, but it was extremely sensitive to shock caused by the recoil of heavy guns. Range and bearing information from directors, range finders, and radar were received in two fire-control centers, or gunnery-computer rooms, which provided continuous solutions to ballistic problems. Control of the guns was primarily the task of a gunnery officer. His personality, as expressed by his choice of words and tone of voice, could influence the morale of his men. Either the main battery or the secondary battery could be controlled from any one of the three stations, whose directors were brought to bear on a target by two petty officers under the direction of a gunnery officer who observed the fall of a “hot. In each station, there was a lock-ready-shoot indicator whose three-colored lights showed the readiness of the battery, the salvo, and any possible malfunctions in the guns. When the battery was ready, the petty officer on the right side of the director would fire by pressing
a button or blowing into a mouthpiece. It was also possible to actuate the firing system from any of the computer rooms. The gunnery officer could order a test shoot to find the range, or he could order a series of full or partial salvos. Rather than waiting to spot each splash between salvos of a test shoot, he could use a bracket to find the target. A bracketing group consisted of three salvos separated by a uniform range, usually four hundred meters, and fired so rapidly that they were all in the air at the same time. On the Bismarck it was customary to fire bracketing groups and, with the aid of our high-resolution optical range finders, we usually succeeded in boxing or straddling the target on the first fall of shot. The gunnery officer was aided in spotting the fall of shot by one of the gunnery-computer rooms, which signaled him by buzzer when the calculated time of projectile flight had expired. Once the range and bearing had been found, the gunnery officer in control would order, Good rapid. He could choose to fire full salvos of all eight guns or partial, four-gun salvos fore and aft. In either case, the firing for effect was as rapid as possible. Firing could also be controlled by the individual turret commanders. This allowed great flexibility in case of battle damage. However, in action it was most important for the senior gunnery officer to retain control of the batteries for as long as possible, because central fire control with the help of computer rooms was far superior to independent firing under the control of the turret commanders. As defense against magnetic mines and torpedoes, the Bismarck was equipped with a Mineneigenschutz. [Degaussing gear] This device consisted of a series of cables that encircled the ship inside the outer hull below the waterline. It was supposed to dissipate the magnetic field generated by the ship so that the enemy's magnetic mines and torpedoes would not detonate. For reconnaissance, the spotting of shot, and liaison with friendly forces, the Bismarck carried four single-engine, low-wing Arado-196 aircraft with twin floats, which also served as light fighters. Two of these machines were stored in a hangar beneath the mainmast, the other two in ready hangars that held one aircraft each on either side of the stack. The planes were launched by means of a catapult located between the stack and the mainmast. This installation ran laterally across the deck as a double catapult, so that launching could be to either starboard or port. The crew consisted of one hundred and three officers, including the ships surgeons and midshipmen, and 1,962 petty officers and men. It was divided into twelve divisions, whose numerical strength varied from one hundred and eighty to two hundred and twenty men. The battle stations of Division one through Division four were the main and secondary batteries. Division five and Division six manned the antiaircraft guns. Division seven consisted of what we called functionaries, that is, such specialists as master carpenters, yeomen, cooks, and cobblers. split eight
consisted of the ordnancemen, and Division nine combined signalmen, radiomen, and quartermasters. Division ten through Division twelve were the engineers. During our operational cruise, split one through Division 6, reinforced by approximately half of Divisions seven and 8, occupied every other action station, checkerboard-style. When Clear for action! was sounded, the free watch occupied the vacant action stations. The pilots and aviation mechanics we had on board belonged to the Luftwaffe and wore Luftwaffe uniforms. The air observation people were naval officers who were experienced in the recognition and evaluation of events at sea and had been detailed to the Luftwaffe; they served also as radiomen. When we departed on our Atlantic operation, the fleet staff, prize crews, and war correspondents raised the total number embarked to more than 2,200. On twenty-seven May 1941, when the Bismarck sank, only one hundred and fifteen of them were saved. At the time I joined the ship, her entire crew had not yet been ordered aboard. Some sixty-five technical officers, petty officers, and men had been aboard since around the middle of April, and sixty or so members of the gunnery department arrived in June. These men were subjected to what was called a building course, the purpose of which was to familiarize them with the ships equipment from the keel up. Many of them, when they first saw the Bismarck, with her mighty guns and heavy armor-plating, said to themselves, Well, nothing can happen to me here, this is really floating life insurance! The petty officers buried themselves in the intricacies of the engine rooms, the weapons, the trunking and valves, then made drawings and prepared lectures for the instruction of the men. Because of the building work that was still going on, the crew was not, at this time, living aboard. Most of them were housed in two barracks ships, the Oceana and the General Artigas. Training began, and the petty officers and their men were assigned their stations. In order to get to know their ship, the men moved through her in small groups, crawling through the hold and ventilation shafts, climbing the bridge and the tower mast, and making themselves familiar with the double bottom, the stowage spaces, the bunkers and the workshops. Instruction was given on general ship-board duties, on individual areas of competence, and on procedures for clearing for action. So-called emergency exercises began early. We were already at war, so first of all, we had aircraft- and fire-alarm exercises, then damagecontrol and clear-for-action exercises. These were gone over again and again, always at an increased tempo. Signalmen and radio operators, corpsmen, cooks, and stewards began arriving. It was a very young crew; the average age of its members was around twenty-one years, and very few of them had ever been in combat. For many, the Bismarck was their first ship. The daily routine was: reveille at 0600, breakfast at 0630, sweep the decks and clean up at 0715, muster at 0800, then either
instruction or practical work at such things as maintenance of the ship and stowing the masses of provisions that were being taken aboard at this time—flags, signal books, binoculars, charts, foul-weather gear, enciphered documents, typewriters, medications, food, drink, everything needed for a ships company of more than 2,000 men. The noon break was from one thousand, one hundred and thirty to 1330, after which duties similar to those of the morning continued until 1700, when the evening meal was served. At one thousand, eight hundred and thirty the deck was cleaned again, then the duty day came to a close. The call to swing hammocks was sounded at around 2200. During this period, Lindemann lived only to accomplish what he had identified as his primary objective when I reported aboard: to have his ship combat-ready, in terms of both men and material, in the shortest possible time. He had his officers report to him regularly on the progress being made in training the crew and outfitting the various departments, but he did not rely solely on these reports. He was frequently to be seen around the ship, satisfying himself on the spot, attending training, supervising whatever construction remained to be done, asking cogent questions, giving orders, and meting out praise and censure. In addition to these activities, he spent a great deal of time on his paper work, especially reports on questions concerning the ships guns, with which he was so familiar. I can still see the clear, steep handwriting in which, in polished terms, he explained his requests and wishes, amended the drafts of other peoples correspondence, or put proposals that would lead to the earlier combat-readiness of the ship into a style that made them irresistible. As a rule, Lindemann gave me his orders when I reported to his cabin in the morning. Shortly after I took up my duties, he told me to prepare a schedule of official visits, on which I would have to accompany him, to Hamburgs civil and military authorities. In due course, we visited the senate of the Free and Hanseatic City in Hamburgs venerable Rathaus, or town hall, called on the admiral of the Hamburg Naval Headquarters, and on various military commanders and headquarters important to the ship. In August and September one thousand, nine hundred and forty Hamburg was already a target of quite frequent but not very heavy British night bombing raids. Whenever possible, the Bismarcks guns joined in the citys antiaircraft defenses, and so one of our calls was on the commander of Hamburgs air defenses, Brigadier General Theodor Spiess, in his roomy offices on the Aussenalster. During visits such as this, wartime security put something of a constraint on the subjects of our conversation, but nevertheless we gained an insight into the morale of official Hamburg. Optimism and confidence in victory were universal. What else, indeed, would one expect, right after the fall of France? Most of the visits involved a boat ride across the Elbe from the Blohm & Voss yard. The first time we made this
crossing, Lindemann suddenly asked, Do you know how big the Bismarck really is? He asked this because the Bismarck was officially rated at 35,000 tons, and very few people knew her true tonnage. Well, I answered, 35,000 tons plus fuel and water, I think. Not without pride, Lindemann said, 53,000 tons, fully equipped. When he saw how much that impressed me, he added, But that is strictly secret information! Of course, I promised not to divulge it and didn't until the end of the war. I found Lindemann a thoroughly competent naval officer and gunnery man, one who not only quoted but lived by Prince Otto von Bismarck's motto, Patriae inserviendo consumor (I am consumed in the service of the fatherland). He seemed to be always on duty. When his name came up in the wardroom, it invariably evoked high respect and there was a feeling that it would be impossible to equal his almost ascetic-seeming devotion to duty.

Nevertheless, the man had a big heart, a characteristic he was more inclined to exhibit to his men than to his officers, and a radiant smile that greatly contributed to the affection he enjoyed among the crew. Maschinengefreiter Hermann Budich said later: I completed a years building course in the Bismarck and was then steward to the Rollenoffizier, [The Detailing Officer, who assisted the First Officer in distributing the seamen of the ships company among the battle stations, as called for by the battle or clear-for-action drills. The composition of the divisions was determined and drill stations were assigned on this basis. Every member of the crew had to be berthed in a space as near as possible to his action station so that he could reach it without interrupting the ships traffic patterns. ]

Korvettenkapitän Max Rollmann, who occupied a cabin in the General Artigas. Here I encountered many officers, and began to know and esteem Kapitän zur See Lindemann. When one bumped into an officer in the confines of the barracks ship, ninety per cent of the time a bawling out resulted. When the Old Man came aboard, he radiated an aristocratic but not overbearing calm. If there was any excitement, he immediately took charge. In short, the ordinary sailor came to trust this man, despite his piston rings. [Captains stripes] three Sea Trials and Battle Practice The day came for the Bismarck to leave the Hanseatic City for the first time and undergo her trials, which were to be conducted in the eastern Baltic. She had been lying with her stern to the Elbe, but on fourteen September one thousand, nine hundred and forty tugs turned her one hundred and eighty degrees. A day later she slid into the channel and steamed through a mass of ships and launches, past the familiar landscape of the village of Blankenese, to the lower Elbe. How often I had passed this way on ships in peacetime, when the banks were full of people waving friendly greetings. But now it was wartime; the Bismarcks sailing had not been announced, and the banks were empty. Early in the evening we dropped anchor in Brunsbüttel Roads, in order to enter the Kiel
Canal the next morning. Naturally, the first time we anchored, I wanted to watch the operation. The anchor chain ran out with what to those who were forward of the navigation bridge sounded like a great roar but, because of the length of the ship, was scarcely audible to those aft. Furthermore, since the hull of the ship remained completely motionless, which is far from the case when a cruiser drops anchor, anchoring must have seemed to the men aft like something that was going on in another part of town. After darkness fell, the air raid alarm sounded; the Brits were back. Aided by the light of a searchlight ashore, the Bismarck joined in the antiaircraft fire. But there was no visible result. On sixteen September, we entered the canal with the ship in a state of heightened watertight integrity. In the highest state of readiness, that is, cleared for action, all passageway doors and ventilation fittings, both intake and outlet, were closed, so that the Bismarck was divided into eighteen watertight compartments and a number of hermetically sealed spaces. In heightened watertight integrity, which was usually ordered when navigation was hazardous, passageway doors and ventilation fittings remained open. There was also an intermediate state, wartime steaming condition, which was used when there was a high risk of encountering the enemy. The transit of the canal took two days and on the evening of seventeen September we made fast in Scheerhafen, near Kiel. For the young engineers who had their hands on levers controlling 150,000 horsepower, bringing this giant of a ship through the narrow canal on her maiden voyage was a great achievement. The slightest error on their part could have had disastrous consequences for both the ship and the canal. And so, when we got to Kiel, Lindemann came on the ships loudspeakers and congratulated the men in the boiler rooms and engine rooms. The following week was devoted to aligning the ships batteries. After spending a few more days at a harbor buoy, on twenty-eight September we steamed under the escort of Sperrbrecher thirteen for Arkona, on the island of Rügen, then went on to Gotenhafen (now Gdynia) without escort. [ A Sperrbrecher was a converted merchant ship, whose function was to sweep mines that the Kriegsmarines regular minesweepers might possibly have missed. One such vessel was generally assigned to protect large German warships in waters where there was a high risk of mines. The ship being protected followed in the Sperrbrechers wake. ] We spent fully two months at the Gotenhafen naval base, trying out the ship and her systems in the Gulf of Danzig. After testing her degaussing gear, we made measured-mile, endurance, and high-speed runs and tested her general maneuverability. Not until 23 October were the engines cleared for full speed. Our ship did very well in all these tests. She was extremely steady, and rolled and pitched very little, even in a seaway. Her rudder response was almost immediate, and she did not heel excessively when she made a turn;
when backing, even at speeds close to bare steerageway, she turned so easily that she could get out of tight spots without the help of tugs. We also tested to see how maneuverable she would be if only her engines were used in case her steering gear and rudders should be put totally out of action during an engagement. It was found that with both rudders locked in an amidships position, the Bismarck could be held on course only with great difficulty. The reason for this was that the convergent design of her propeller shafts provided only a weak turning movement, even with the outboard shafts rotating in opposition at full power. No one aboard at the time could have had any idea of the fateful effect this flaw would one day have. Lastly, with the thought that only the powered steering gear might be disabled while the rudders could still function, turning the rudders by manpower alone was practiced. For such manual steering, the crews of both after 15-centimeter turrets, a total of thirty-two men, would have to proceed as expeditiously as possible to Compartment II of the upper platform deck, where the manual steering gear was located. Of course, full speed could not be maintained with manual steering because of the pressure of the water against the rudders. The upper speed limit under these conditions was about twenty knots. To us in the ship, high-speed runs were the most exciting of the tests. Then, the giant warship would surge forward with the full power of her engines at play, yet she lay steady in the water, making but a small bow wave. On the upper deck, there seemed to be hardly any vibration, but sometimes the men on the living decks had to hold their plates and utensils on the tables to keep them from bouncing to the floor. This shaking did not occur at the highest speeds, however, out at a slightly lower, so-called critical speed, at which the vibrations of the different parts of the ship were mutually reinforced and created maximum vibration throughout the ship. Earlier, when I was serving in the Königsberg, she sometimes vibrated so violently that the optical fire-control instruments could not be used. Ultimately, the problem was remedied by keeping away from the critical speed so as to minimize the reinforcement effect. But I never experienced anything like that in the Bismarck. The speed trials continued into November, a speed of 30.8 knots being recorded on one occasion. That exceeded the designed speed! Not only were there joy and pride on board, but an appreciation of the tactical advantage that such a speed might provide during the coming operation in the Atlantic. The crews already boundless confidence in their ship was once again justified. One day, after a series of measured-mile runs, we had an unusual experience. In a fairly rough sea, we were entering the harbor of Gotenhafen when we suddenly suffered a minor malfunction of our steering mechanism, and came to a full stop to repair it. Nearby was a fishing boat, lying low in the water and laboring along. So low, in fact, was she lying that
her abundant catch was obviously about to be spilled back into the water. By megaphone, she called to the Bismarck: Could you give us lee? Our catch was so good that we can't stow it safely. Briskly, Lindemann ordered the officer of the watch to do as requested, and we escorted the boat into the calm waters of Gotenhafen Roads. Next day the Bismarck had fish on the menu! Along with the mile runs, we carried out intensive training in the safe operation of the ship at sea. The green crew found their sea legs and became thoroughly familiar with their new surroundings. Emergency drills were followed by more emergency drills, or Rollenschwoof, [Emergency rushes] as the men called them. The word would be passed to Make fast the passageways! which meant Set the cleared-for-action state of watertight integrity. Or, Fire! When that word was passed, the source of the flames would be sealed off and hoses made ready to extinguish them. Or, Man overboard! In this exercise, a life buoy would be thrown over the side to mark the spot where the man fell. A lifeboat would be launched with all possible speed, pick up the buoy, and then be hoisted in. Every man had to know his station and, at drill, proceed to it at once and perform his duties as instinctively as a sleepwalker. Emergency drills often began on the quarterdeck, where the off-duty section of the crew, some 1,600 men, would be mustered. Alarm bells would sound an emergency signal—for example, tuy-tuy-tuy-tuy-tuy (make fast the passageways!)—and these 1,600 men would storm down assigned companionways to their Posts. Step lively! Step lively! but not on the head or fingers of the man below you. Two steps down, get a good grip, swing down, spring off to the right, always faster, lively, lively. So well practiced did the crew become that five minutes after the word was passed, the bridge had a report from every station. Hermann Budich and two of his comrades, wanting to be first at their station in Compartment IX of the lower platform deck and therefore to avoid the choked companionways, sought a different route. They discovered a little-used companionway aft. Hanging onto the inner edge of the hatch, they took their usual two steps down, let go, and flew, rather than ran, for their station—all this with heavy tools stuck in the belts of their work clothes. Out of breath, they reached their goal, the first to do so, and reported it clear. But hadn't Budich brushed against something soft at the bottom of the companionway? What could it have been? The men's division officer, Kapitänleutnant (Ingenieurwesen) Werner Schock, did not attend the critique that followed the drill, but when it was over they were ordered to report to his cabin at once. There, a corpsman was applying cold compresses to a beautiful black eye. Gentlemen, he began what promised to be an unpleasant interview, if it weren't that everyone looks so much alike in work clothes, I would have caught you earlier. I know you move fast, but you don't have to ram your tools down my throat! Be more careful! Now, get out!
They did shout Warsaw! [ Used in the German Navy for gangway! ] before they jumped, but that was to alert anyone who might have been there to move out of the way, not to tell him to stay put. During emergency drills First Officer Oels had heavy responsibilities. His station at such times was in a secondary command center that had been set up in Compartment XIV of the upper platform deck. Since he was primarily responsible for the defense of the ship against fire, gas, and flooding, as well as for the maintenance of buoyancy and trim, the damage-control center was in the same compartment. There, also, was the ships security station, in which were kept plans that showed all the ways in which the pumping, flooding, fire-extinguishing, and ventilation systems could be used to combat the above-mentioned dangers. This area was the heart, so to speak, of the ship, where vital information was delivered and equally vital decisions were made. In mid-October Lindemann made an operational-readiness inspection. He ordered the most important emergency drills, then went around to each station, watched how the men handled their equipment, and asked pertinent questions. What he saw satisfied him. Seamen of the battleship Bismarck, he said in closing his critique, this day has convinced me that you have made good progress. Thanks to your instructors and to your own enthusiasm, the Bismarck is well on her way to becoming operational. The crew had completed a kind of crash course. In peacetime, it usually took at least a year to bring a warship from commissioning to combat-readiness but, because of urgent missions to come, the Bismarck could count on no more than nine months. My tour of duty as Lindemanns adjutant ended about this time. The change, which I foresaw from the start, was brought about by my assignment to a three-week gunnery course at the Naval Gunnery School in Kiel, in November 1940. At the end of August 1939, the schools course on fire control for large-caliber guns, which I was then taking, was interrupted by the threat of war. Now it was to be revived as the completion of gunnery training. At an all men aft assembly held for some special reason at the beginning of November, Lindemann remarked that on account of my valuable professional training I would henceforth serve in gunnery only. My place as adjutant was taken by Leutnant zur See Wolfgang Reiner. Although I left Lindemann most unwillingly, I realized it was a move that had to be made. As operational deployment approached, all that mattered was the combat-readiness of the ship, and that required that the utmost advantage be taken of everyones specialty. The second half of November was spent in more tests of the Bismarck and her engines. The only thing new was that gunnery drill was added to the routine. Not only were the brand-new guns tested for steadiness, the smooth working of their mechanisms, ballistic performance, and accuracy, but the resistance of the ships components to recoil was also tested. Practice firings
served to train the gunlayers in the best way of keeping on target. These drills could be carried out satisfactorily at close range with 8.8- or 5-centimeter subcaliber guns inserted into the barrels of the heavy and medium guns. Because the shells and powder charges used were relatively light, this kind of firing was economical. At the same time, it gave the gunnery officers practice in fire control. Full-caliber firing! Unforgettable was the day the Bismarck's heavy guns fired their first full salvo. How far, how violently would the recoil cause the ship to heel over, how quickly would she right herself? Below, in the engine rooms, where steam pressure was fifty-six times that of the atmosphere, the seconds passed slowly. A single crack in the main steam line caused by the shock of firing could result in the death of everyone in the engine room. Boom! The ship seemed to be abruptly jarred sideways, a few loose objects came adrift, a few light bulbs shattered, but that was all. Topside and in the control centers, it was quite different. Up there, the sideways movement was scarcely noticeable. Of course, the concussion had already been felt through-out the ship. Her steadiness in the water showed the Bismarck to be an ideal gun platform. At the end of her trials, the ship was scheduled to return to Blohm & Voss in Hamburg so that the yard could give her the finishing touches it had not been able to complete by September. On five December, therefore, the Bismarck departed Rügen under escort of Sperrbrecher six and steamed for Kiel. Passage of the canal again took two days, and on nine December we were back in Hamburg. Over Christmas, we were given leave. For most of us, this was our last chance to be with our families. Those who could not get away were able to spend a few more hours in hospitable Hamburg. I enjoyed two weeks of marvelous skiing in the Bavarian mountains. On twenty-four January 1941, the finishing touches to our ship were completed, but we could not immediately return to the Baltic to continue our trials and battle practice, as we had intended to do. A sunken ore ship was blocking the Kiel Canal, and the thick ice that had formed during this exceptionally severe winter was delaying salvage work. The idea of our making the long detour around Jutland was rejected by Berlin. Therefore, while we awaited our sailing date, set for five February, we conducted training and battle drills in Hamburg Harbor. When that day came the canal had still not been cleared, but we could not have left, anyway, because some of our pressure gauges and electrical lines to the boiler-room ventilators had been damaged by the extreme cold, and we were not ready for sea. Although this situation was remedied by sixteen February, the canal remained blocked and our departure had to be postponed again, this time to five March. At the end of February, Lindemann complained in the War Diary: The ship has been detained in Hamburg since twenty-four January. Five weeks of training time at sea have
been lost! On six March, we cast off from the wharf at the Blohm & Voss yard, steamed out into the Elbe, and once again headed downstream. As the familiar silhouette of Hamburg slowly sank astern, I had the feeling that this time our absence from the beautiful Hanseatic City would be longer. For part of the way, the admiral commanding the Hamburg Naval Headquarters did us the honor of escorting us in his flagship. Scattered passers-by waved from the banks of the river. At midday we dropped anchor in Brunsbüttel Roads. Three fighters flew air cover for us and an icebreaker and two Sperrbrechers anchored nearby to protect us against possible aerial torpedo attacks. We entered the canal the next day and, on the eighth, reached Kiel, where we spent a few days in Scheerhafen again aligning our batteries. Also, we had to take aboard ammunition, two of our four assigned aircraft, provisions, fuel, and water. Leaving Kiel, we continued our voyage east. Because of the thick ice in the western Baltic, the predreadnought Schlesien, a veteran of the Imperial Navy, went ahead of us to act as an icebreaker. Behind her came Sperrbrecher 36, then the Bismarck. On the afternoon of seventeen March we once again dropped anchor at Gotenhafen, which was to be our principal base until we sailed on our first operational cruise. The following days saw a great deal of activity. We conducted more high-speed trials and endurance runs and tried out our hydrophone gear. This apparatus emitted a sound impulse, by whose echo the range, bearing, nature, and conduct of its contact could be determined. A well-trained listener could even identify the type of vessel the echo came from. I still remember the report made by an operator in the Prinz Eugen, our companion on our Atlantic cruise, before the battle off Iceland on the morning of twenty-four May 1941, Noise of two fast-moving turbine ships at 280° relative bearing. The ships proved to be the Hood and the Prince of Wales. The most important thing now was intensive testing of our batteries. Practice firing for the instruction of the fire-control officers and gun crews alternated with carrying out projects for the Gunnery Research Command for Ships, an organization that ran its own trials on new ships with a view to improving the ordnance of various ship types. For me, as a gunnery officer, these tests were exciting but for the crew they just meant drill and still more drill. Battle practice in the daytime, battle practice at night! The men did not complain, however; they were in the swing of things and were becoming more and more anxious for our first operation at sea to get under way. On nineteen March, Lindemann learned from the captain of our younger sister ship, the Tirpitz, that, according to a directive issued by the Seekriegsleitung, [Naval War Staff] the Bismarck was to be ready for her first mission from three to four weeks earlier than originally intended — now she was to be ready at the end of April. This meant that Lindemann had to cut short the program of the Gunnery Research
Command for Ships. He arranged for it to end on two April, after which time we conducted our own surface and antiaircraft firing practices. We also spent more time than before in clear for action drills and in training our air crews. Since the Prinz Eugen, which was commissioned three weeks earlier than the Bismarck, was to be our escort on the upcoming operation in the Atlantic, we conducted tactical exercises with her. We also exercised with the 25th U-Boat Flotilla and, with the help of the tanker Bromberg, we practiced refueling at sea. It was at this time that we started doing searchlight drills. We carried seven searchlights: one was on the forward edge of the tower mast, two were atop the main hangar, and the other four were high up on either side of the stack. They were directed to their target through the use of large high-powered binoculars mounted in posts on the sides of the forward battle command station. The purpose of these drills was to provide practice at picking up an indicated object at first try and keeping the light on it. Besides the frozen lines to the boiler-room ventilators mentioned earlier, we were having a few other problems with the propulsion plant: some hairline cracks in superheaters; a broken ballbearing ring on the middle main coupling; a loose sleeve in one of the main steam lines; salt in one of the turbines. All these insignificant defects in the plant were repaired in short order, but in the War Diary Lindemann complained that they tended to tarnish the good impression previously gained of its reliability. When Naval Group Command North, to which the ship was subordinate, read his comment in the middle of April, it added: Considering that this is new construction, the engine malfunctions were very minor. In fact, the propulsion plant has been running more smoothly than expected. Lindemann must have felt increasingly impatient to be able to report to the Seekriegsleitung that his ship was ready for operational deployment. Over Easter, which fell on thirteen April that year, the Bismarck went in to Gotenhafen for four days. There, we were to take on more ammunition and have some work done on our engines. When we were at sea, the routine was still battle practice, more battle practice, and battle problems. In a battle problem, a particular tactical situation was assumed: we were, for example, covering an attack by the Prinz Eugen on a British convoy that was escorted by a battleship. We went into action with the battleship, in the course of which we received two hits. The damage done to the Bismarck would be presented as realistically as possible: electrical breakdowns by removing fuses, fires by using smoke bombs, gaseous fumes by using tear gas, and so forth. In the case of damage that could not be portrayed, damage notices would be posted in the relevant parts of the ship; for example, To the commander of the port II 15-centimeter turret: Turret destroyed by a direct hit. Your gun crew has been wiped out. That turret commander and his men would then cease to take part. In partially destroyed compartments, there was
feverish activity: fire hoses were hooked up, openings were sealed tight, alternate piping routes established, and all damage was brought under control. Obermaschinist Oskar Barho, of the main electrical control station, enjoyed the breakdowns and kept calm in the face of them. He gave precise instructions and repeatedly told his men: If I become a casualty, you must keep everything going exactly the same way, regardless of your grade! If you think one of my orders is incorrect, report it! The officers told their men again and again: If only two or three are still alive at your station, carry on. That's right, carry on! Execute the required emergency procedures at once! This could be somewhat difficult for a young seaman or stoker who received a damage notice and had to decide how to deal with it himself. He would then have to give orders, which previously had been done by officers—how often they had practiced that! Superiors intervened only when lack of experience led the men into making serious mistakes. Not a bad way to accustom a young man to thinking and acting on his own. After a battle problem, there would be a muster on the quarterdeck. Under the leadership of the captain, the damage done and the countermeasures taken were discussed in detail. Lindemann understood how to ask the right questions. Not only was he thoroughly conversant with the duties of naval officers and with his own specialty, naval ordnance, but he had a good understanding of technical matters. When the engines were the subject of discussion, he was quick to expose excuses for mistakes and attempts to gloss them over. Being a competent judge of these things, he would close the muster by distributing praise and censure. But his tone was always objective. The point of it all was that every man should learn and should have his confidence in himself and his ship built up. When we made a mistake, said Maschinengefreiter Budich, we did not hear angry words from our superiors. From time to time, the ship went in to Gotenhafen Roads to catch her breath. When the sky was clear and a gentle wind blew over the ship, we experienced some truly enchanting nights there. Once, when the full moon drew a broad silver track across the mirror-calm water, Matrose Paul Hillen was on watch on the upper deck. Seeing the captain coming towards him, he prepared to make his report, but Lindemann waved it aside and said: Isn't that a wonderful sight? Many people would give a great deal of money to see it, and we have it for free. Later, Hillen, who had only recently come aboard, said, It was the first time I heard, not an order, but a personal remark from a high-ranking officer. Yes, Lindemann had a winning way, which inspired affection. Many of the ship's survivors have testified eloquently to that. One of them put it this way: We admired, indeed we loved, our commanding officer, Kapitän zur See Lindemann. He was like a father to us. He always had an open ear for the cares and needs of his crew. One day, after being at sea a long time,
we dropped anchor and the signal was piped: Work details to the forecastle! That could mean only that the mailboat was coming out from Gotenhafen. And there it was, already quite close. Suddenly it was too close, and we heard a crash. Commented the chief bosun, Shit, no mail! Sadly he watched over the stern post as the boat, already taking on water dangerously, and its longed-for cargo returned, stern first, to Gotenhafen. Lindemann’s entry in the War Diary for the month of April was: In sum, all our time was taken up in training. Heavy emphasis was placed on how the crew would perform in the upcoming operation. The men seem to have come to recognize for the first time the magnitude of our mission, which they still don’t know, but easily guess. He was right. Rumors were rife that we were about to depart on a mission. Watchwords surfaced, were whispered from man to man, then disappeared to make room for new ones. The Tirpitz appeared in the Gulf of Danzig for her own working-up exercises and that provoked speculation that we were about to form a task force with her. 4 Plans for Commerce-Raiding At the beginning of the war, for which the navy was not prepared, the inferiority of the German fleet in relation to the British was incredible. The ratio was around one to ten. All we had ready for immediate deployment in the Atlantic were two pocket battleships, the Deutschland (soon renamed Lützow) and the Admiral Graf Spee, and twenty-six U-boats, and that small number of ships could not be expected to have a decisive effect on the war. The commander in chief of the Kriegsmarine, Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, who was taken completely by surprise by the outbreak of war with Great Britain, commented, Our surface forces are still so inferior to the British in numbers and strength that, should they become fully committed, the only thing they could show is that they know how to die gallantly. At least initially, the only naval bases Germany had at her disposal were in the southeast corner of the North Sea, as had been the case in the First World War; whereas, thanks to their geographical position and worldwide bases, the British could control every important sea lane and impede the passage of German warships to and from the Atlantic. However, when Germany occupied Norway and France in 1940, the Seekriegsleitung had advance bases to the north and west, which made it easier to deploy our surface forces and U-boats on the oceans. The Kriegsmarine is to carry out commerce warfare, and it will be aimed primarily against England. Overnight, this statement, contained in Directive No. one for the Conduct of the War of thirty-one August 1939, became the basis of the Seekriegsleitungs strategic objectives. The weakness of her fleet obliged Germany to confine herself to conducting economic warfare and to design an appropriate strategy. The Seekriegsleitung was convinced that, by cutting Britain off from her Atlantic supply lines, Germany could win the war, providing all resources were concentrated on this objective. To
Raeder, all resources meant all naval resources which, in turn, meant that our long-range, heavy surface units—battleships and pocket battleships—were to conduct commerce warfare on the high seas. This strategy was intended not only to disrupt Britain's trade but to tie down her forces and keep them from concentrating: when German commerce-raiders appeared in a certain ocean, Britain would have to move naval forces there, thus denuding some other area. In this way, it was hoped, other German operations such as a ships breakout into the Atlantic or its return to port would be facilitated. This offensive reached its high point in the first quarter of 1941. Between January and March, the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, under Fleet Commander, Admiral Günther Lütjens, spent eight weeks operating against British commerce in the Atlantic. The total of shipping sunk was relatively low, 122,000 gross register tons, but the mere presence of German battleships in the Atlantic had forced the British Admiralty to take inconvenient countermeasures. It had to deploy significant forces in the ocean areas menaced by the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and in the northern passages into the Atlantic, and the whole convoy system was thrown into disarray because, now, every convoy had to be escorted by at least one battleship. The Seekriegsleitung responded with a plan to form a four-battleship task force—the Bismarck, Tirpitz, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau—and send it into the Atlantic to prey on convoys. Although the intention was to send this force out as soon as possible, it turned out that the Tirpitz, commissioned on twenty-five February, could not be operational until the late fall, and in the meantime the Seekriegsleitung would have to be content with the Bismarck, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau. No wonder it was anxious for the powerful Bismarck to be operationally ready. The expectation with which the Bismarck was awaited was matched by a corresponding anxiety on the British side. To the Admiralty, it was clear that, when the German commerce-raiders in the Atlantic were joined by the Bismarck, the situation could only get worse. Therefore, it watched the Bismarck's progress towards operational readiness very closely and apprehensively. It was reported at one point that the Bismarck in company with light forces had passed Skagen on a northwesterly course on eighteen April 1941. That day the Bismarck was still training in the Gulf of Danzig. British interest in the Bismarck went back further than that, however. Since the beginning of the war, Winston Churchill, first as First Lord of the Admiralty and, after May 1940, as Prime Minister, had repeatedly pointed out the danger inherent in the German fleet being reinforced by the addition of the Bismarck and had taken part in discussions as to how this danger could best be countered. In February 1941, the Bismarck still not being operational, he tried to foresee what the Seekriegsleitung would do. He reasoned that it would not make
a move until the Bismarck and the Tirpitz had been completed—and up to that point, he guessed Berlins intentions correctly. It seemed to him that Germany could not make better use of these great ships than to keep them in the Baltic and, every now and again, start a rumor that they were about to depart for the Atlantic. This would compel Great Britain to keep a powerful force at Scapa Flow, the Home Fleets main base, to the detriment of other missions. It would also give Germany the advantage of being able to select her own timing for any operation; she would not have to keep her ships in constant readiness. And since the British ships would naturally have to go into the yard from time to time, it would be very difficult for the Admiralty to maintain superiority over the German commenceraiders at all times. Two months later, Churchill coupled a reference to the serious damage that the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau had done to British trade at the beginning of the year with the remark that the situation would shortly be made worse by the appearance of the Bismarck. Several times since the war began, he had pointed out the necessity of mounting air attacks to delay the construction of the Bismarck by at least three or four months, and said that success in such a mission would be helpful to British fleet dispositions worldwide. In August 1940, he wrote to the British Air Minister, Even a few months delay in Bismarck will affect the whole balance of sea-power to a serious degree. And in October, he wrote to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, The greatest prize open to Bomber Command is the disabling of Bismarck and Tirpitz. However, these hopes about the fate of the Bismarck were not to be fulfilled before she put to sea on her first operational cruise. Five Operation Orders for Exercise Rhine The success of the Gneisenau and Scharnhorst as commerce-raiders naturally led the Seekriegsleitung to intensify its conduct of this form of warfare with heavy ships. On two April 1941, as the Bismarck approached combat-readiness, it issued an operational directive that read in part: During the past winter the conduct of the war was fundamentally in accord with the directives of the Seekriegsleitung . . . and closed with the first extended battleship operation in the open Atlantic. Besides achieving important tactical results, this operation showed what important strategic effects a similar sortie could have. They would reach beyond the immediate area of operations to other theaters of war (the Mediterranean and the South Atlantic). The goal of the naval high command must be to maintain and increase these effects by repeating such operations as often as possible. We must not lose sight of the fact that the decisive objective in our struggle with England is to destroy her trade. This can be most effectively accomplished in the North Atlantic, where all her supply lines come together and where, even in case of interruption in more distant seas, supplies can still get through on the direct route from North America. Gaining command of the sea in
the North Atlantic is the best solution to this problem, but this is not possible with the forces that at this moment we can commit to this purpose, and given the constraint that we must preserve our numerically inferior forces. Nevertheless, we must strive for local and temporary command of the sea in this area and gradually, methodically, and systematically extend it. During the first battleship operation in the Atlantic the enemy was able always to deploy one battleship against our two on both of the main supply lines. However, it became clear that providing this defense of his convoys brought him to the limit of the possibilities open to him, and the only way he can significantly strengthen his escort forces is by weakening positions important to him (Mediterranean, home waters) or by reducing convoy traffic. As soon as the two battleships of the Bismarck class are ready for deployment, we will be able to seek engagement with the forces escorting enemy convoys and, when they have been eliminated, destroy the convoy itself. As of now, we cannot follow that course, but it will soon be possible, as an intermediate step, for us to use the battleship Bismarck to distract the hostile escorting forces, in order to enable the other units engaged to operate against the convoy itself. In the beginning, we will have the advantage of surprise because some of the ships involved [The Bismarck and the Prinz Eugen] will be making their first appearance and, based on his experience in the previous battleship operations, the enemy will assume that one battleship will be enough to defend a convoy. At the earliest possible date, which it is hoped will be during the new-moon period of April, the Bismarck and the Prinz Eugen, led by the Fleet Commander, are to be deployed as commerce- raiders in the Atlantic. The Gneisenau will also be sent into the Atlantic, but that will depend on when her repairs have been completed. [The Scharnhorst was undergoing a lengthy overhaul of her engines.] The lessons learned in the last battleship operation indicate that the Gneisenau should join up with the Bismarck group, but a diversionary sweep by the Gneisenau in the area between Cape Verde and the Azores may be planned before that happens. The heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen is to spend most of her time operating tactically with the Bismarck or with the Bismarck and the Gneisenau. In contrast to previous directives to the Gneisenau- Scharnhorst task force, it is the mission of this task force to also attack escorted convoys. However, the objective of the battleship Bismarck should not be to defeat enemies of equal strength, but to tie them down in a delaying action, while preserving her own combat capability as much as possible, so as to allow the ot

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