

## A Gentleman's War?

### The Diary of Captain Albert Horace Brown of SS *Huntsman*

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The activities of the Third Reich's surface raiders have attracted relatively little attention because overall they were not very successful in sinking Allied merchant shipping compared with aircraft or U-boats. It may be argued, of course, that the German "fleet in being" policy restricted the captains of *Kriegsmarine* surface raiders so that they were unlikely to find the richest pickings. Instructed to avoid action with British naval forces, even markedly inferior ones, they were scarcely in a position routinely to attack large convoys.<sup>1</sup> But there were two main reasons for those instructions. First, there was the obvious one that as long as the raiders were roaming the oceans, the Royal Navy (RN) had to make disproportionately expensive efforts to find them. Second, and almost as obvious, was the fact that German vessels could not risk serious damage due to the lack of repair facilities, especially in distant waters. When the cruisers *Exeter*, *Ajax* and *Achilles* (New Zealand Division) engaged *Admiral Graf Spee*, Commodore Henry Harwood did so knowing that if his ships suffered damage they could limp off to the Falkland Islands for repair, while his opponent had to face a longer and more hazardous limp back to Germany, since the dockyard at Brest was not yet available.

This situation applied particularly in the earlier part of the war, when it was commonplace for large North Atlantic convoys to have a battleship, albeit often an elderly one, in escort to deal with surface threats. The German raiders were fine ships, but only *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*, neither of which was yet in service in 1939, had the ability to face the heavy guns of a battleship.<sup>1</sup> At the outbreak of war *Admiral Graf Spee* was deployed in the South Atlantic, partly to intercept vessels in the Australia trade and partly in the correct anticipation that British shipping to and from India and East Asia would be re-routed around the Cape. Because the distances were so long, and the RN suffered from the well-known shortage of escorts, these ships had to sail independently, their only protection being the patrol squadrons deployed to look for the enemy. This system had been a proven failure in the First World War, but in the absence of perhaps a dozen more battle cruisers, or at least heavy cruisers capable of worrying the German raiders, there was no alternative.

Captain Hans Langsdorff of *Graf Spee* had apparently got himself in a favourable position from which he could cruise around the trade routes both east and west of the Cape of Good Hope and pick off merchant vessels he knew must come his way. The weather in the southern hemisphere spring was agreeable, and he had a powerful, well-found ship supported by the 12,000-ton tanker/supply ship *Altmark*. His embarked seaplane, of which

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he made frequent use, gave him early warning of vessels he might intercept or any warships he might wish to avoid.

His problem was the same one Vice-Admiral Gunther Lütjens of Bismarck and *Prinz Eugen* was to face in 1941. While the RN possessed few units both fast enough to catch him and powerful enough to guarantee his destruction, it did have plenty of ships capable of finding him and maintaining contact while decisive force was concentrated: the sheer ubiquity of the RN and its Commonwealth counterparts was a considerable part of their strength. In the event, he was probably unlucky: Commodore Harwood's squadron, which finally caught up with Langsdorff, did not contain a single ship which either out-gunned *Graf Spee* or had armour to face the pocket battleship's eleven-inch shells with impunity; all they had was speed and agility. But this part of the story is well known and is mentioned here only in the context of the crucial importance Langsdorff placed on preventing his victims from sending radio messages revealing his identity and position.

This is of interest because it relates to a remarkable fact: in the sinking of eight British merchant vessels, not a single merchant seaman was killed and the only wounded were three "boys" (stewards) when *Wairoa* disobeyed the order not to use its radio, causing Langsdorff to destroy the wireless compartment with one of his automatic cannons. The stewards were wounded by shell splinters and were later treated in *Graf Spee's* hospital. These casualties were extraordinarily light compared with the huge losses soon to be sustained in the great convoy battles in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean. Langsdorff was still working by the old and gentlemanly rules of cruiser warfare: he regretted the necessity for what he was doing because he appreciated the common bond that exists between seafarers. Captain Brown certainly respected him, and indeed it seems that Captain Dove, another of his victims, came positively to like him. He, in turn, treated them with respect and generosity.

Captain Dove published an expanded version of his diary in 1940 and there are places where it is obviously influenced by propaganda considerations, including, interestingly, a clear distinction between Germans and Nazis – almost as if the author or the editor was already looking forward to the need for post-war reconciliation.' This was a theme picked up with enthusiasm long after the war ended by William Frischauer and Robert Jackson, where Captain Dau of *Altmark* was the caricature Nazi, even down to having "little piggy eyes."<sup>4</sup>

What Albert Horace Brown's diary adds to these existing publications falls roughly under three headings. It broadly confirms, with a few minor discrepancies, Dove's account of the taking of the various ships and the generous treatment the prisoners received on *Graf Spee*. It also provides a different perspective on life as a prisoner, in large part because Brown was a more austere and ascetic character than Dove. Where Dove moaned about the poor quality of ersatz coffee or the amount of space available per man, Brown simply chronicled these things. But finally, and most important, it gives a clear account of life aboard *Altmark* which differs significantly both from the account in Frischauer and Jackson and from the accounts in the British press after the prisoners were brought home by HMS *Cossack*.

Captain Dau was not the nicest man Brown ever met, but he was no monster either; at bottom he, too, was a seafarer. Faced with a rebellion in which the escape of the prisoners from the holds seemed both imminent and threatening to the safety of his ship, his reaction was to soak them with fire hoses and put them on bread and water for a day.' He and his

crew may have referred to Brown's Indian crewmen (Brown never called them Lascars) as "niggers," but it is worth recalling that the word "nigger" was not then nearly so pejorative as it has since become, and there is no suggestion that they were abused in any other way. As racists, neither Dau nor his crew were remotely comparable with some of their comrades on land. Indeed, Brown could easily have been given a bad time since Dau knew that the reason he had returned to *Altmark* rather than remaining in gentlemanly, if cramped, confinement on board *Graf Spee* was to protect, as far as he could, his Indian crewmen. Brown was a heavy pipe smoker, even by the standards of seafarers who measured tobacco by the pound rather than the ounce, and smoking was permitted only during the exercise periods, not in the accommodation. Dau could have had him in "solitary" – the punishment for breaking the smoking rules – virtually the whole time had he so chosen. He did not do so.

When *Altmark* was finally cornered by the destroyer HMS *Cossack* in Norwegian waters, Dau could easily have aimed a machine gun into the hold where the prisoners were held and suggested to Captain Philip Vian that he might like to go away. Instead, he accepted the fact that he was almost certainly going to lose his ship and faced the boarding parties. His men were not trained for that sort of thing: armed only with revolvers, several were killed by Vian's men who were armed with rifles and who had been practising for just such an action. In Frischauer and Jackson's book we gain the impression that the dastardly Nazis intended a "party booking for Valhalla" by blowing up the ship. Since the ship presumably still had ammunition for the now defunct *Graf Spee* aboard, this would have been quite feasible. Instead, only ordinary scuttling charges were laid in order to prevent a valuable ship being taken – illegally as Dau saw it – as a prize. Because the ship ran aground and Vian wanted to move out as quickly as possible, the charges were not detonated.

### **A Note on Captain Brown**

This is not a work of family history, and the key facts are simply that Brown was born into a Liverpool seafaring family in 1876, apprenticed in 1892, and served as an AB on a variety of vessels, sail and steam, until April 1898 when he made his first voyage as third mate. From 1899 until 1907 he served as second mate or second officer with the Harrison Line. Although he had gained his master's certificate in 1901, he served as chief officer until 1914 when he got his first command. He had been captain of *Huntsman* since 1935.

From internal evidence, such as his explaining who people were and the fact that he was a total abstainer, which all his family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances knew, we may assume that his diary was not written as a "message in a bottle" should he not survive. It was almost certainly intended for publication, presumably set aside when Captain Dove, who got back to Britain two months before him, published first. He was, however, also in failing health and died "after a long illness" in 1943.

### **A Note on the Transcription**

Captain Brown was my maternal grandfather and the original diary is in my possession, though I intend eventually to pass it to Merseyside Maritime Museum along with various other items of his. There are two versions: one (version A) is written with a fountain pen on seven sheets of ruled foolscap paper and the other (version B) in a small hard-back pocket

notebook. I initially took B for the original version, but it is written with the same pen and the same ink throughout and with no variation in handwriting such as one would expect with varying weather conditions at sea. It also provides explanations of, and expansions on, observations made in the other copy and must therefore be presumed a "fair copy." The foolscap copy had been sent to Harrison and was returned to my grandmother on 29 November 1943. It is on poor quality paper with some water-staining, various afterthoughts, and crossings-out, again suggesting that it might be the prime record and version B a "fair copy." But as version A has almost nothing to add to version B, it is the latter which is used here. Where A does contain additional information this has been inserted in a footnote.

I have not tried to correct any of the errors of punctuation, which are numerous, nor to standardise such things as dates and times, which he abbreviated in whatever manner he felt like at the time. These are rendered as written, with such discrepancies as A.M./A.M./AM left unaltered. In places there are no paragraph breaks, and where the result seems totally indigestible I have inserted extra breaks: these are indicated by a pair of square brackets and an elision [...] at the beginning of the line. In a few places the narrative becomes slightly confused or repetitious. I have not "tidied up" such passages, which are printed exactly as written.

S. S. "Huntsman"  
 German Pocket Battleship "Graf Spee"  
 German Prison and Store Ship "Altmark"  
 H.M.S. "Cossack"

Personel7

"Graf Spee" Capt. Langsdorff.

"Altmark" " Dau.

2nd Ship Capt. "Ashlea" Capt. Pottinger.

1st " " "Newton Beech" Capt. Robison.

3rd " " "Huntsman" Capt. Brown.

4th " " "Trevannion" Capt. Edwards.

5th " " "Africa Shell" Capt. Dove.

6th " " "Doric Star" Capt. Stubbs.

7th " " "Tairoa" Capt. Starr.

8th " " "Streonshalh" - - -

H. M. S. "Cossack" Capt. Vian.

S.S. "Huntsman"

October 10th 1939. Proceeding homewards from Calcutta & Colombo & Port Sudan and War breaking out between Germany and England,<sup>9</sup> we proceeded to East Africa and a South African Port & then homewards.

In Lat 8° 30'S Long 5° 15'W approx. with fine clear weather a vessel was seen on the starboard Bow by the lookout. Our course was altered away from her but she was steaming at a high speed & appeared to be a war vessel. Our course was again altered away

from her & and she appeared to be a French Warship. I went down to tea & soon after Mr. Frost, the 3rd Officer reported that the vessel was now hull up so I left my tea and also the Ch. Officer & Wireless Officer Mr. McCorry & proceeded to stations.<sup>10</sup> A radio message was then sent out "Warship approaching, our position & our code letters." I again altered course away from her. She approached us at a very high speed, keeping her bow towards us so that we were unable to see her "Colours." From her appearance I took her to be French and she had been disguised as such. When she was quite close, she sheered off a little and the French Ensign the "Tricolour" was observed but I was suspicious and when she got quite close the French flag came down and Hitlers dirty rag of the Swastika was run up. The Radio Officer was ordered to send our name position and German Warship which he did and got it away twice."

The warship then signalled Heave to and do not use your Radio. I then told Mr. Thomson, Ch. Officer to go in my room and throw the weighted bag which contained all confidential and private papers on the Port side. I walked over to that side of the Upper bridge and saw it dropped and sink & then gave the order to stop as ordered by the "Graf Spee." We were unable to resist as we did not have any firearms, only a dart board and six darts. We were also unlucky with our wireless message as it was "off watch" period for single operator ships. As we lost our speed, the engines now being stopped a large motor launch heavily manned came rapidly alongside full of armed Germans dressed as Sailors and six Officers. They jumped on board before we had stopped or any ladder was over the side. The launch had a roofed cab and a thick mat on the top from which they sprang on to our deck & all over the ship. The Officers came up onto the Bridge and one asked where "was der Captain." I told him I was. He then said "where are your 'private papers.' I said over the side where you ought to be."<sup>12</sup> He then said we were all prisoners and Germans. & they ransacked the ship. My room was very roughly handled but without any success. The wireless room was very roughly searched and Mr. McCorry the operator was asked if he had sent out our position. He replied "Of course I have." He was then sent out of his room and had another good search & it proved fruitless also.

[...]The Ch Officer Mr Thompson was then ordered to muster "all hands" during which time his room was searched without finding anything useful. I had been told we would be taken on to the "Graf Spee" which was the name on the German sailors?<sup>13</sup> caps but when they found our crew were Indians sixty-seven in number and seventeen Europeans they changed their minds." Then the hatches were opened to see if any of our cargo was useful and found chests of tea, bales of gunnies (jute bagging) etc so they decided to take what was of use to them before sinking us. I was given a document to the effect that the "Huntsman" was now their prize and a note referring to (if their orders were obeyed the preservation of our lives and property. My Chronometer & Sextant and the two chronometers belonging to the ship were taked to the "Graf Spee." I was given a receipt for my Chronometer & Sextant (which I still have) typed in German & I was told Mr. Winston Churchill would pay for my loss. We were now<sup>15</sup> in charge of (3) three German reserve Officers & twenty-five Naval ratings. The 1st Officer was a man called Schunemann who had been Master of a German coasting vessel on the East Coast of Africa who knew a lot of people in those ports whom I knew quite well, and had often seen the "Huntsman" in those ports.<sup>16</sup> He was a very decent fellow. He asked me if I knew a ship or the Capt. of a ship called "Incomati" [?].

[...]As it happened I did. he then told me that he was saved from drowning some time previously that Capt. Fox had saved his life. He had been taking a German tug boat to

Beira & she capsized & all hands were drowned except him who had got hold of an old tree floating down the river out to sea. It seems from his story that the Capt. came on deck early in the morning and went on the bridge saw the tree and picked up the telescope to see what it was and fancied he saw a man clinging to it. He altered his course and picked up this man and thereby saved his life. I asked him what he would do if they caught the "Incomati." He thought for some time and then replied. He then said "I should go to Capt. Langsdorff and ask him to excuse me as I could not take that ship off Capt. Fox. The 2nd Offr. was a man named Holty. He told me that he arrived at German port in a Hamburg American liner and one hour later he was on his way to Kiel to join the 'Graf Spee'." He was not allowed to go home or family or even to write to them. Another officer named Dittman acted as 3rd Offr. & he said he had not been able either to go or communicate with his people either. The "Huntsman's" Officers kept watch with them and we were cruising about aimlessly waiting for what we didn't know but they told us we would be put on the first neutral vessel and landed at the nearest port.

On the 16th Oct. 1939. We found a tanker lying close to us when we got out on deck flying the Norwegian flag & "Sogne" on her bow and stern. We were then told we were to be transferred to her and landed in a neutral country but we soon found out she was a German supply vessel. Two large motor launches were put off from her & the "Graf Spee" also put two in the water & they took stores from the tanker. Our hatches were opened and the launches were loaded with tea, bales of burlap:<sup>8</sup> good Indian Carpets, Ghee (Indian butter) cases of rubber shoes and anything else they could find which might be of use to them.<sup>18</sup> Also all the ship's stores except cases of milk which we had with our own effects. They then lashed the lifeboats down lifebuoys etc which would float preparatory to sinking our ship so as to leave nothing to help to trace her position. We were then ordered into their motor launches to go to the "Sogne" but five of our engine room crew were keeping steam and were to be sent over later. I was then told to get in the launch but I refused saying I would not go till I got the five who were there with me.<sup>19</sup> About 4.30 P.M I was informed that the rest of my crew were ready to go and seeing them in the launch I left my ship very sorrowfully & went to the "Sogne" with the last of my crew.

[...]When nearing the "Sogne" I noticed the name on the bow was "Altmark" but it had been painted over but was still visible when near to. I saw the Indians go up the ladder on to the deck & their belongings & then having done all I could I went up on deck myself & was escorted forward where I was shown into a temporary structure built just abaft the forecastle headwire lashings around stanchions & canvas outside & inside on the port side. The Officers and Engineers were inside making a table for us to eat off and forms also as there was no accommodation at all. The "Altmark's" Carpenter got us wood & helped us to erect same. We had all our own bedding with us & we had to make our beds on the tops of our trunks which we placed fore & aft on both sides of our quarters.<sup>20</sup> It was not so very comfortable but we soon got used to it and it was warm weather. I had my wireless set with me & we got music and news but they took it away after a couple of days as they said it oscillated and their bearings could be obtained from same, but they would return it when I left the "Altmark." But I never got it again as I had no time when I left the "Altmark" as I nearly got left there. I also had a bottle of whisky from my room as I thought it might come in handy for someone, not that I wanted it as I am a Total Absterainer, never having tasted but not bigoted or prejudiced as I know there are occasions when it is useful if not really invaluable

[...]Sanitary conditions were very poor. Water was rather scarce also as it had to be condensed and their plant was not too big." We only got a small tin basin three parts full every morning to wash with & had to go on deck and wash in the open which we did not like, but there was no other place to do it. To have a bath was not possible but when asked for we got a bucket full of water so that we could have a rinse off. The Indian crew were on the other (the Starboard) side in the same but larger accommodation as there were seventy-six of them and the sanitary quarters were close to them which were supposed to be for us, but as there were so many of them we gave them up and made our own. All the ship's stores had been brought from the "Huntsman" so they were able to do their own cooking and live the same as usual as long as they lasted and then had to eat what was to be had. I am afraid they had to break their caste but I expect under the circumstances they could be exonerated by fasting or payment.

17th. Oct. 1939. Same conditions all day. Prison Lieutenant Schmidt Eckhart and Doctor Tyrolt<sup>22</sup> visited us morning and evening. They were very much inclined to be sociable, particularly the Doctor who had travelled considerably having been through the Grand Chaco pig-sticking and also shark fishing at the river Plate & boxing at the Seamen's Institute at Buenos Ayres where he acknowledged he had been knocked out cold by a British fireman. He did all he could for us and was very attentive to me. I suffer from Nasal Catarrh" & he had me in his surgery every day and tried to relieve it, but without effect & when I went to the "Graf Spee" he sent word to the Doctors there (there were three there) and I was given a lotion and a syringe to use three times daily and also gave me treatment with radiant heat in a bed in the hospital. I used to fall asleep under it and an alarm clock was at my head to wake me when the time was up. He also used the only injection he had against colds on Capt. Starr who had told him he had injections before for them & apologised for not having more. I think he liked our company so as to improve his English, which was not too good but he was a good hearted man, but one expects humane treatment from a man of his profession.

[...]The Indian crew behaved splendidly, cooked their own food<sup>24</sup> and eat on forward hatch which was abreast of our door which was a wire screen one, so we were able to see and talk to them. They often gave us one of their chapatties (pancakes). They had plenty of Indian tobacco and matches and smoked at will & had an idle life, like us. They were allowed about three quarters of an hour morning and evening for exercise etc. unless something out of the ordinary was going on, viz: A ship in sight, target practice or "oiling the 'Graf Spee'," which was done from the forward or afterward end of the ship by a large flexible pipe suspended on cushions and a heavy wire. My boy and the Officers' and Engineers boy (our stewards) brought our food for us but we washed up ourselves, taking turns in half a bucket of water. Late this night we heard six explosions & then another much heavier one which we presumed was a torpedo sinking my ship. I was pleased it was done at night so I could not see her go as I was very fond of her and very much attached to her.

18th. Oct. Our Prison Officer confirmed our surmise in the morning and said "She died hard."<sup>25</sup>

This day the crews of the "Ashlea" Capt. Pottinger and the "Newton Beech" arrived from "Graf Spec" Capt. Robison having been captured on the 5th. and 7th. Oct. but as the "Altmark" had not been contacted had to be kept on the "Graf Spee." We then heard how they were caught & we told them about our own capture. "Graf Spee" departed just before  
dark

19th. Oct. 1939. Daily routine

Rise at 6.30 A. M. on to forecandle or fore deck & if lucky get a bowl of water & wash in the open.

7.30 A. M. Breakfast. Bread, margarine, jam & tea.

9.20-10.05 A. M. Morning exercise on Forecastle head.

11.30 AM. Dinner, Soup, tinned meat, vegetables & a cup of tea. Twice weekly meat with rice or macaroni as a vegetable & a cup of tea.

2.35-3.05 P. M. Evening exercise on Forecastle head. No awnings or shelter, so if raining no exercise.

Tea. 5.00 P. M. Tea, bread and margarine, canned sausage (German variety) sometimes a tin of sardines (one tin for two persons) sometimes jellied eels or cheese for a change.<sup>26</sup> We had a few books to read which were passed on to the other prisoners when read and soon fell to pieces. The "Altmark" was cruising about slowly between 10° to 20° S. Lat and 10° to 20° W Long. As we had Greenwich time we were able to get a rough position with a shadow pin at noon. But the days were long and tedious. Washing and drying our clothes helped pass away some of the time for us. We had brought four cases of condensed milk with us from our lifeboats but the purser of the "Altmark" confiscated two of them and we gave one to the Indian crew, keeping one for ourselves which lasted us a long time using it sparingly but the time came for the last tin and all in our quarters insisted on me keeping it for my own use (as it really belonged to the "Huntsman" in the first place) and some of the food I couldn't eat, which they divided amongst themselves, so I had to accept it. I bored two holes in the top of the tin and made wooden pegs to keep it airtight when not in use, and using it as sparing as possible I made it last fifty-seven days. (Ideal Milk) The tin was then washed out on Jan 22nd. 1940 and used as a water dipper.

[...]The Chief Steward had brought all the tobacco with him from the "Huntsman" about 60 lbs Capstan Full & Medium strength in a pillow slip & the Indians had all theirs also and about twenty gross boxes of matches. I kept giving it to the other prisoners who had none & finally ran out of it and then the Indians gave me some of theirs which I did not like but I smoked a bit of it all the same. The Capt. of the "Altmark" was very much afraid of fire having once been on fire at sea during his career and we were not allowed to do any smoking or striking of matches in our quarters, but we took no notice and risked it anyway? Anyone caught was given twenty-four hours solitary confinement, but he got his food and water. Mr. McCorry the Wireless Operator got caught after being warned and got a three day sentence. When released I asked him how he fared. He replied "Did not care if it was a month as he was allowed to smoke there and he had a book called 'Gone with the Wind' to read without being disturbed and it would take a very long time to finish it. We passed his share of food to him at meal times. The Ch. Off. of the 'Trevannion' also got caught & punished the same.

Oct. 21st. to 27th. Long weary days, same routine. Got four or five old packs of cards to play with which were a great consolation for card players. Some were given to the crews in the other decks and passed many an hour away and lost and won lots of imaginary money. We had some darts which belonged to Mr. Edwards Ch. Eng. of Huntsman but the Germans had confiscated the board, so we made a board out of the softest wood available and passed away quite a lot more time. Won and lost made not a bit of difference as money was useless there. Lights out at 10.00 P. M. except a blue light near the hatch and all slept quite well in general



Oct. 28th. "Graf Spee" returned after nine days absence. We were not allowed on deck as she was oiling from the "Altmark" and storing by motor boats. Fine weather, sea smooth.

7.30 PM. Capt Edwards, Ch. Offr. and Ch. Engr. of "Trevannion" were ushered into our quarters, having been sunk on the 22nd. of Oct. The "Graf Spee" had peppered them with a small gun for using the radio after being warned no to use it. Fortunately no one was hurt.

Now thirteen in our quarters & thirty-four in the Officers deck. The crew of nineteen were placed in a store room on the main deck forward of the poop on the port side.

Oct 29th. "Graf Spee" departed. "Altmark" went cruising again.

Nov. 7th. Shortage of water Condenser trouble. No noon cup of tea.

Nov. 8 & 9th. Rough weather, S. E. wind, strong shipping heavy seas fore and aft. Our quarters nearly washed out. Very cold & uncomfortable.

Nov 11 th. Moved to a warmer and drier spot, much more comfortable and less draughty. Now in No.1 Top deck which had been full of empty beer drums. Deck covered with Burlap and Indian Carpets from the Huntsman's cargo. Well lit and ventilated. About thirty feet deck space clear and we were able to walk about for exercise. We also had more room for dart games. Now seem to be in about 46 00 S 20 E & ship's course was altered to the North West. Vessel rolling considerably & proceeding about eight knots, weather rather cold.

Nov. 16th. 1939.

"Altmark" stopped. fine weather. A home made target was put overboard & the "Altmark" steamed round it using two quick firing guns with tracer bullets! Shooting not at all good. After practice retrieved target & proceeded. The Guard Officer asked me what I thought of this drill. I said "Poor shooting" and he did not seem pleased and said they had heavier guns & were able to deal with submarines. I am confident there are three (3) 4.7 guns mounted, one right aft and one on each side amidships in the after end of the centre castle well concealed. Plates in the after end of the centre castle have a bulb plate overlapping which at times shows rust which is washed off at once when seen. Also right under this end of the house I have seen men going in and out with emery paper etc evidently lower cleaning metal. There is a door into a compartment at the after part of this deck & the deck inside is about ten inches lower than the deck outside and on each side is an I fore and aft. The after part of this compartment was screened off with three or four thicknesses of burlap as curtains and about one third of its width from the inside bulkhead a rounded piece of metal could be felt about the size of a 4.7 gun.<sup>29</sup> The Capt. told me on one occasion they were able to defend themselves.

Nov. 26th. 1939.

"Graf Spee" returned after a twenty-eight day cruise during which she had been round South Africa up to East Africa and had caught or rather disposed of<sup>30</sup> a small tanker of 700 tons in ballast. She was close in to the land and all the crew with the exception of the Master got ashore and away. The Master, Capt. Dove was the only person captured. Very poor costly cruise. The "Graf Spee" oiled & stored from the "Altmark" & we were not allowed on deck for our usual exercise. The Ch Offr of the "Trevannion," Mr Venables was caught in the act smoking in living quarters and received a sentence of three days in solitary confinement

Nov. 28th. All executive officers & Masters prisoners received orders to take enough clothes for fourteen days & be prepared to transfer to the "Graf Spee." At about 4.00 P.M. we were transferred by motor launches. We were placed in a compartment said to have been for the use of midshipmen but they had none. Quite good about 20 X 30 feet. three tables, settees and chairs, a pantry, a baggage room and a washing room with ten washbowls & two showers & cold water for an hour in the morning & in the afternoon. Here we met Capt. Dove of the Africa Shell who welcomed us as he had been all by himself from his capture except for spending some evenings with Capt. Langsdorff of the Graf Spee.

We were all issued with hammocks & bedding, seventeen were swung overhead the rest slept on tables, settees, on and under tables and at 9.00 PM "Lights out"

Called at 6.30AM. Hammocks and bedding rolled up and passed out & stacked in a recess outside, twelve chairs were passed in. Breakfast 7.00AM. Bread, butter (?)<sup>31</sup> Porridge, jam or marmalade, Bread, Margarine & Tea.

Dinner 11.00 AM. Soup, Meat & Rice or Macaroni and a sweet sometimes fruit juice and bread.

Tea 4.00 P.M. Bread, sausage or canned meat, no sugar for tea at first but obtained some on request.

Exercise on Quarter Deck

8-9 AM. 5-6 P.M.

Loudspeaker in quarters some music from records now & then No news. Controlled by the Radio Officer. We had two packs of cards and the books from the libraries of the ships sunk & talking were our only means of passing away time.

Dec. 1st. 1939. I was escorted by Capt Schunemann to the Capt's quarters & Captain Dove also I received a courteous welcome from Capt Langsdorff who invited us to take chairs and name our drinks. "I suppose you will have the usual" to Capt Dove which was accepted. He then asked me. I replied: Thank you, but I am a total abstainer. he said one drink "would not do me any harm" but would I like a mineral water. I asked him for a "Ross's Royal Ginger Ale" as I felt sure he would not have that, but he rang his bell and the steward was ordered to bring it. To my surprise he brought it, so I could not very well refuse, though I did not want to drink with him or anyone else. He was quite chatty and spoke, I thought confidently in manner, about his ship. He seemed to be proud of her ability. Also other various things, one being the "magnetic mine" which we would never be able to discover the secret of. But I believe we at home knew at the time he was talking.

[...]He said he had been told I was not satisfied with my treatment and would like to know what I had to complain about. I replied that in the British Merchant Service, the Master's duty was to remain with his crew and I had promised my Indian crew I would not leave them until they were landed in British territory if not back to India if possible. He considered this for maybe a minute then said "I admire you for wanting to go back to keep your promise" and "I will do all I can to allow you to do so." I thanked him for his promise. He also spoke of a "Secret weapon" which we would "never find out" but our ships would be sunk by it. He evidently alluded to the Magnetic Mine which I believe we had found out all about when he was talking about it. I never spoke to him again except to say "good morning" and return his salute?

Dec. 2nd 1939 At day break the plane revved up & the catapulted off with a roar and returned about 8[?] 15 AM and went off about 2.00 P.M. We were not allowing [sic] our afternoon exercise on deck this day At about 6 00 P M fire and station alarms were

sounded, and the buzzer in our quarters rang & we were locked in, our skylight was screwed down & an additional cover put on. Then two heavy guns fired. An hour later an officer came and told us the fight was over and locked us up again. Soon after several shots were fired to sink their victim, which was the "Doric Star" Capt Stubbs. They also had to pick up the plane which had landed in the sea; evidently short of petrol.<sup>33</sup>

About 9.00 P.M. our room was opened and Capt Stubbs & Officers of the Doric Star were ushered into our quarters and we got their experiences told us and some news that had been heard by them after our capture because we did not believe what the Germans told us. We then all turned in for the night.

Dec. 3rd. 1939. About 6.00 A.M. plane catapulted off with a roar which woke us up before our time, the alarms rang and we locked and battened down and we heard the rush of feet heading to action stations: Soon after a heavy bark like a 6" gun then porn porn firing were heard & then quiet again. About an hour later a series of heavy shots & then a torpedo was let loose evidently to sink another victim in a hurry. About 9.00 AM Capt Starr of the "Tairoa" and some of his officers were ushered into our quarters and we learned she was the latest victim. Apparently the first salvo was to prevent the message being sent by the Wireless Operator, but I was told that he kept on sending till his instrument was damaged. He escaped injury, however. Five of the crew were wounded, three deck boys being placed in the hospital for a week and treated by one of the three doctors of the "Graf Spee." We were now very crowded and had not seating accommodation for all, namely fifty-one & we had to sleep as best we could. Hammocks, on the tables, settees bath room luggage room and some on the deck. We also had to eat as best we were able. As soon as one finished his place taken by another till all were fed. Washing up our dishes was also quite a job as there was not enough crockery for all and had to be washed up for each sitting, but it was done cheerfully in the camping out spirit and we were all very confident the "Graf Spee's day would come & meet some of our Navy & victory be with us.

Dec. 4th.-5th. Got extra time on deck allowed for exercise allowed for exercise on account of crowded quarters. The ratings of the "Tairoa" & "Doric Star" were quartered in another part of the ship, there now being 196 prisoners on the "Graf Spee."

Dec. 6th. About 1.30 P.M. Contacted the "Altmark." Mr. Thompson Ch Off of "Huntsman" told me had orders to have my belongings ready to go to the "Altmark" but he must not let me know. The Junior Officers & crews of "Doric Star" & "Tairoa" were sent to the "Altmark." Having protested against being separated from my Indian Crew I was sent & Capt. Starr of "Tairoa" & were promised to have Officers' quarters but we were put in the same quarters as I had been in before, which as it would hold thirty gave us a lot of space & were able to walk about. We were also told we would be landed in a neutral country or on a neutral ship somewhere, sometime. I was allowed to smoke there as it was on deck so long as I kept out of sight, so that the Capt. didn't see me. Capt. Starr only smoked a cigar when he could get one which was not often? However, I was back with my Indian crew which cheered them up and they gave me a great reception. My "boy" was able to bring our food and lots of other small things also. Jolly good boy & faithful & trustworthy. I gave him all my money & gold watch to mind for me before I was searched, which he returned as soon as the searching party had found nothing to take from me. I was now able to see them anytime & if any complaints arose report them to the Prison Lt or Doctor and get it looked into on their behalf. The Doctor was a very nice man also the Lieutenant but the Guards were very poor specimens. I had a bit of a bother with one of them but he got the worst of it. It

arose about a clock. We had two in our quarters one belonging to Mr. Thompson, my Ch. Offr. & the other to the Capt. of the "Trevannion" & he had promised the Lieut the loan of his for the crews in another deck without my knowledge. This guard wanted to take my Ch. Officer's clock but I grabbed it at the same time he did but he couldn't get it off me. So he tried to pull out his revolver and after several tugs at it did so. I told him to shoot or get the Lieutenant. So he went away & brought the Lieut who said there had been a misunderstanding & apologised & told the guard off good & proper. He was a dirty piece of work. One of those little sneaks, making trouble wherever he could. To catch a man smoking & report him & get him punished & such like seemed to give him great satisfaction?'

Dec. 14th. 1939. Received orders to remove ourselves & effects aft to an Officer's room with accommodation for two (which was rather smaller than what we were used to) but it was quite nice clean and comfortable but being at the aft end of the ship I could not see my crew as much as before but I got permission to go and see them if any were sick. Our quarters were a room 8ft X 9ft approx & contained two wardrobes, six Drawers, two Bunks, a settee and a table & a chair. A book rack but no books? a wash stand, hot & cold water for about half an hour A.M. & P.M. A toilet locker with glass shelves and a mirror in the door, and a rack on top for water bottle & tumblers. We had to do our own laundry work in the washstand & dry it in the room. We got a 71b Empty butter tin & cleaned it out & filled it with water & also the wash basin for the times when the water was off and so we managed to keep our clothes clean & ourselves also. When it got cold the steam heat was put on & we were able to dry out washing without any trouble.

[...]Of course I did not see my Indian crew as often, but I was always told if any were sick. I was allowed to go with the Doctor to see them. One morning Capt. Dau of "Altmark" informed me that one of the Indians had leprosy. I told him I did not believe it & would like to see him. He said the Doctor had made a blood test which showed it. I said no less than three tests were necessary & he said they had no more stuff left to test again. However the Doctor took me to see him and I found he had some tiny pimples & had scratched them off, leaving a white spot where the pimple had been which of course showed up plain on his dark skin? I explained this to the Doctor & the man was allowed to return to his shipmates. A lot of my time was spent with a large collection of foreign stamps to remove from one book to two larger ones which were loose leaf ones which I am glad to say I was fortunate enough to get them home safely. We made a Brown paper draughtboard & got some bits of wood & made some men & blacked one lot with lead pencil but we did not play very much as I don't think either of us cared for the game. I certainly do not?38 But they did not get the satisfaction of seeing us doing nothing or looking downhearted. Not that we were but if one has nothing to do the time goes so slowly & one can't be or look as cheerful as usual. One evening the Prison Lieutenant informed us they had sunk the "Barham," the "Ark Royal" and several other naval vessels. Capt. Starr asked him if he knew any more funny stories. But he did not reply and left us apparently annoyed. This was about the time we had been told by the "Altmark's" carpenter that the "Graf Spee" had been sunk at Montevideo. I heard he had been punished for telling us. I think he was a Norwegian.

Another evening the Guard came when I was shaving and said there was no need to shave as we could not go anywhere and no one to see us.

We told him that we were going to the Opera to see "Florodora" and would he let us know when the taxi came as we were afraid we might be late. He went away & never even

liberty on deck now we were living aft weather permitting, but when approaching the Norwegian coast we were locked up all the time. Our portholes were screwed up and covered with a blank port by a spanner and opened up at daylight so as to prevent us signalling if any ship passed near to us. The food was principally canned goods. Beef, fish mostly sardines, brawn preserved potatoes sometime blanc mange and canned fruit. Christmas Day food was much better & more than we could eat so saved it for the next day. We often sent bread, margarine and sugar to the prisoners forward. The bread was not too good. The lower third part of the loaf was like rubber & uneatable. I think it was out of the oven & put in the refrigerator before being cold. At any rate about 1/3rd of the lower part of the loaf was like rubber & we could not eat it & so we had to get rid of it over the side when opportunity arose as if we were seen to leave any we would get less or none & if we had got caught I am sure we would have got no more. However, we did not get caught.

Feb 14th. 1940. A Norwegian destroyer stopped & boarded the "Altmark" off the Norwegian Coast (which we were about five miles off & was covered with snow) at about 4.30 P.M. It was bitterly cold outside but our quarters were warm with steam heat. We Watched her come close to our port side and a boat with 4 men & an officer in it boarded us. The prisoners forward also saw them through a spy hole they had found and thought this was their opportunity to break out & let them know of the presence of prisoners on board, but the winches were going slowly to prevent them from freezing up & they turned turned them on full speed so as to make enough noise to drown the noise. The hose pipe was also played on them with icy cold water to drive them below again. So the destroyer departed either bribed or fooled by the "Altmark's" Capt & we were allowed to proceed. The next morning a notice was posted up forward as follows:-

Date. 15th. Feb. 1940

Posted 16th. Feb. 1940.

On account of today's behaviour of the prisoners forward they will get only bread and water tomorrow instead of the regular food.

Further I have given order that neither the Prison Officer nor the Doctor will make the regular rounds after this. Any severe cases of sickness can be reported on occasion of sending down the food.

Dau. Captain."

Biscuits & water were served once before the "Cossack" came along & released us all.

Our tea when this riot took place did not come along until it was all over and as it happened at the For'd end we had no knowledge of the riot. But when it came along (about two hours late) the prison Officer & a guard brought it & they were both soaking wet. I asked them if it was raining (I knew it was not) & he said No he had been having trouble with the crew prisoners & had to use the fire hose on them to prevent them from breaking out so he forced them below again as he said he could not shoot unarmed men.<sup>40</sup>

Our food was as usual as we had not been implicated as we were at the other end of the ship.

17th. Feb. 1940. Vessel proceeding very slowly down the Norwegian coast about 1½ miles off & south of Bergen. Retired to bed about 10.00 P.M but was unable to sleep. Having tried without success I got up and put on my clothes and laid down & still could not sleep, so I got up again and noticed my pyjamas were showing below my trousers so I tucked them into my socks & laid down again but still could not sleep so I got up and sorted out all

my clothes in the trunk & the suitcase then I tried to sleep. I was in the lower bunk & Capt. Starr in the upper one fast asleep. Then I heard noises: a dull phut-phut rather erratic & thought something was wrong with the engines. Then a heavy bump which shook the ship.

[...]I next heard a shout "rather guttural" in the passage which sounded like "Any British prisoners here" I could not believe my own ears but I shouted "Yes." That woke up Capt. Starr and I told him. Then a deep bass voice unmistakably British boomed out "Any British prisoners here" Capt Starr replied through the ventilator holes at the top of his door from his bunk as follows. Yes two Captains Reply came Open the door. Reply from Capt. Starr Locked in from outside can't break out. Reply. Stand clear of the B thing then. The door was then charged but it only shook. The another deep voice shouted "Let me get at the b...thing. Heavy thud and shake but no result. The same voice, [rifle] Butts and shoulders & a crash and the door came in and three bluejackets with it. Capt Starr shouted Rescue party, what ship. Reply came H.M.S COSSACK." We shook hands with them and they told us what had so far happened on the "Altmark" and the latest news about the war. All about the "Graf Spee" etc. & you can imagine how pleased we were.

[...]We had to remain where we were for some time on account of shooting on deck, but when it eased up a bit Capt. Starr started off with his effects; only a suitcase. I soon followed him with a trunk & also a suitcase & my toilet case etc but had to leave my large trunk behind. The ladders from the H.M.S "Cossack" were on the Forward deck, port side and we were right aft. After I had started off the Capts. Steward of the "Tairoa" met me on the deck, he was coming to help Capt. Starr. His name was "Connaughton" I believe. Very good of him. I told him Capt. Starr had gone so he gave me a hand with mine & so I saved a few things more than I expected. Half way on the after fore & aft bridge I saw two men helping another one & he called me by name. I stopped & went back to speak to him. I found he was the electrician who had to screw our ports up at night & open them in the morning. But he was a decent sympathetic fellow & did what he could for our comfort. He put an electric fan on our table during the hot weather, and now & then left a couple of cigars on the table when he was going out. I asked him what was the matter & he said he was shot in the leg." I told him I hoped it was not very bad & then went on. I then had to pass through the Centre Castle to the forward fore & aft bridge & then down a ladder to the fore deck. There was a ladder there up<sup>42</sup> to the "Cossack's" deck & someone threw a rope down which I made my trunk fast to & up it went & I followed it. I then met Mr. Johnson the 2nd Officer & Mr. Creer 2nd Engr & I asked them if the Indian crew were all safe. They both assured me that they had seen & counted them & none were missing. I then called the Serangs<sup>43</sup> & they also assured me that all were safe.

[...]It was pitch dark & the "Cossack" had cast off from the "Altmark" but I groped my way aft as far as the funnels & wedged my trunk & case between them & then went further aft & was escorted to the Officers' ward room & made very welcome. Fed with everything they had to give us. Cups of hot tea or coffee which were very welcome as it was very cold. Having got fairly warm I filled my pipe with some Tobacco the Indians had given me as I had given my own to the other prisoners before our rescue & then had not enough for myself. An Officer of the "Cossack" passed near me & stopped & asked me what I was smoking. I told him, and showed it to him. He took one smell of it & then turned the pouch inside out & all contents fell on the deck & he went away. A few minutes later he returned & gave me a Four ounce tin of "Four Square" tobacco & told me to smoke that and let someone else live. so then I had a real good smoke with good tobacco and was very grateful

to him. Shortly after I was informed that Capt. Vian wished me to use his bedroom to sleep in as he would be up all night and not using it himself. He also had a mattress put in his sitting room on the deck for Capt. Starr's use. An electric heater was in each room but what with the cold and the excitement I was unable to sleep only short snatches. I was up early washed & dressed & went out on deck & got a thrill at the speed we were travelling and also the ship's behaviour." One of the officers saw me & took me to their Messroom & there I had a most enjoyable meal & talk with them. We made a very good passage across & arrived at Leith where we received a most enthusiastic welcome from nearly all the inhabitants who seemed to be there.

After ceremonies were over we were conveyed to Edinburgh hospitals, Eastern & Western & everywhere received a welcome I shall never forget. I had cups of tea with nearly everyone, Matrons, Nurses & others. I don't think I ever eat so many cakes before in my life even when I was a boy. I was placed in the western Hospital & got a small ward of twelve cots & a baby's cot & a bathroom. I got a good hot bath & then jumped into a nice bed and jumped out again even quicker. The nurse had three hot water bottles in it to make sure it was aired and I had sat on one. Fortunately it did not burst. Later the doctor visited me & carefully examined me and pronounced me O.K. I then tried to get to sleep but a newspaper reporter butted in & pestered me for a story for his paper. I also got a call to my Wife on the telephone & was delighted to know my family were well. Then to sleep which was good & sound & the nurse woke me for breakfast. Soon after a good breakfast I was taken to the Station to catch the Liverpool train and found most of our crew except the Indians all there & very excited.

However, we had a very nice journey and arrived safely at Lime Street [Station, Liverpool] where I was met by my daughter and quite a lot of friends & then a run through the Mersey Tunnel to home and beauty.

I found to my great delight that my wife was much better than I had expected.

Also all the rest of my family.

Rule Britannia.

### **Epilogue: The Press Goes to Work**

It is clear from the foregoing that the prisoners from the various ships sunk by *Graf Spee* were well treated. Unlike the victims of aircraft, mines, or U-boats, they were not left to take their chances in their ships' lifeboats. Nor like army or air force prisoners were they herded into over-crowded, under-supplied and disease-ridden camps where brutality was common. But it went much further than that. Captains Brown and Starr shared a comfortable cabin; they had steam heating in cold weather and an electric fan in hot. They had more food than they could eat and good medical care, and when they had requests, such as for sugar, these were politely received. Starr was given cigars and Brown was able to re-mount his stamp collection.

It may be argued that Brown and Starr were two elderly gentlemen (Brown was sixty-two, Starr sixty-three) who had gained favourable treatment through their seniority and dignified manner. Perhaps, but the supposed "piggy-eyed Nazi" did not prevent the Indian *untermensch* from preparing their own food in their own way as long as supplies lasted. If

he or his subordinates were half as bad as they were subsequently painted, they would surely have fed the Indians a choice of *blutwurst* or nothing, if only for the fun of inflicting torment.

And bad was certainly how they were painted. "Free after Torture in Nazi Ship," screamed the *Sunday Chronicle* in a sub-heading for which not a shred of evidence was given – or could be.<sup>45</sup> The *Daily Dispatch* was one of many to use the expression "Hell-Ship," while the *Daily Express* referred to Captain Dahl [sic] as a "bullying shrimp" fixated on vengeance. This accusation was on the authority of Captain Dove, the only captain among *Graf Spee's* victims who had never set foot on *Altmark* or, indeed, even met Captain Dau. The *Daily Sketch* referred to men "back from a living death" and got the "hell-ship" description in again.

When the reporters got among the ex-POWs they were able to get plenty of quotations to twist and facts to garble. In the *Sunday Chronicle* we find the *Altmark's* stokers "working like devils," which is understandable because getting coal into a diesel engine is not easy. The *Telegraph* provides us with a man who had been on bread and water for weeks (the "bread and water" order took effect on 16 February, the day of the rescue), and another who alleged that the Germans "made us as miserable as possible with their cruel, heartless treatment." Interestingly, the *Telegraph* also came up with the allegation – with a sub-heading – that the "Lascars" got preferential treatment at the drawing of rations. This may be the only time that the *Telegraph* committed itself in print to being more racist than the Nazis, but in the unlikely event it was true it was the greatest compliment they could have paid to Captain Brown's discharge of his perceived duty to his Indian crew members.

Also reported in the *Telegraph* was the account by an officer of *Tairoa* of how *Graf Spee* had machine-gunned their life-boats to prevent them from escaping. Members of *Cossack's* boarding party found members of the *Altmark* crew trying to launch a lifeboat and shot holes in it with their rifles for exactly the same reason. But it should be noted that they showed the same forbearance as their enemies by shooting holes in the boat, not in the already defeated men trying to use it.

Meanwhile, so-called facts like the number of prisoners, the number of the boarding party, of the crew of *Altmark*, and the weapons used on both sides, drifted around like so much froth driven by the wind. No accurate account of the events of the rescue, or anything which happened before it, could be pieced together from the accounts in the press, which are marked by technical ignorance, patriotic bigotry and a good deal of inventive talent. Or rather, such an account would need guidance to help us find which bits are true and which false.

This is where the text above may be useful. Amid the atrocity tales in the national press, we find in the more considered pages of the *Liverpool Daily Post* that Captain Starr thought his treatment reasonable, as did a Liverpool seaman called George Robinson. Captain Brown thought Captain Dau "a rotter and a pig," but made no allegations of brutality – and he got home with his stamp collection intact. An Australian seaman named Hill considered that, given the circumstances, he had been well-treated. The Brown diary may be thought to indicate that it is the moderate minority we should be believing. His last word on the subject may be taken from the *Liverpool Daily Post's* account of his brief address at the subsequent Thanksgiving Service:



He said he visited his men in the *Altmark* on every possible occasion, went down into their quarters, saw how they were treated and if they had any complaints tried to get them rectified.

Speaking of the food provided on the *Altmark*, Captain Brown said they got as much as they could eat. He personally got more, because he didn't like it. (laughter) They had porridge, brown (not black) bread and butter, tinned sausage and good soup, though they had to drink it from butter tins. For quite a long time they also got canned fruit.

One of the captain's quartermasters called out from the congregation asking him to tell them about the time they were put on bread and water; and the captain smilingly related...they were placed on that sort of diet; but they were rescued the same night. The accommodation was rather crowded; but those in charge of the *Altmark* did everything for them they could, and the captain would have been a much nicer man had he been allowed to be. As it was, he was a little bitter against the British in general.<sup>46</sup>

These might be taken as the words of an unusually moderate and forgiving man, but they were not. Captain Brown was simply a seafarer first, last and always, and the community of the sea was enough to give him an affinity even with "a rotter and a pig."

## NOTES

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1. The success of *Schamhorst* and *Gneisenau* in March 1941 is the major exception and even that was preceded by a refusal on 8 February to engage a convoy whose escort included the Royal Sovereign-class battleship HMS *Ramillies*, a slow and elderly vessel but mounting fifteen-inch guns.

2. When the action came, *Graf Spee* was penetrated just above the main armour belt by the six-inch shells of *Ajax* and *Achilles*.

3. P. Dove, *I was Graf Spee's Prisoner* (London, 1940).

4. William Frischauer and Robert Jackson, *The Navy's Here* (London, 1957), is an irritating book because it is obviously based on extensive written and oral recollections of many of the participants

or where they are.

5. *Ibid.*, 197.

6. Various numbers were quoted in press accounts. My guess is that the *Daily Mirror's* figure of eight (five killed by the boarding party, two in a skirmish on the ice, and one who died of exposure after falling in the water and being rescued by the RN) is correct.

7. This list has been laid out to resemble the ms., complete with its inconsistencies of punctuation, spacing, etc. HMS *Cossack* and Captain Vian were added later in pencil.

8. The Captain's name is missing, and I have not managed to find it. I believe, however, that it was J.J. Robinson.

9. Despite the fact that he was of Scottish extraction, he does write "England," not Great Britain.

10. This is confusingly worded: from version A it is clear that all three were having tea together and all left it together once the warship was hull

11. The latter part of this paragraph is somewhat expanded from version A, e.g., "Hitlers Swastika" has gained "dirty rag of a..."
12. Absent from version A.
13. Question mark in original: at this stage he seems to have thought the boarding party were probably marines, cf. "dressed as sailors" above.
14. Dove, *Graf Spee's Prisoner*, 39, maintained that, in the interests of preventing the ship being identified, the German sailors did not wear hatbands. But at the end of his book he describes leaving the ship with a couple of hatbands as souvenirs.
15. Version A explains that the boarding party had been replaced by a prize crew and that the officers and crew of *Huntsman* had been read a document promising the security of their lives and possessions provided they obeyed orders; Mr. Thompson translated it for the Indians.
16. This passage is absent from A. Dove has a similar story of meeting an old acquaintance. This mariner's grapevine was probably a significant factor in the surprising lack of hatred exhibited by most of the *dramatis personae*: the hatred only arose later, when the landlubbers of the press got involved.
17. A mixed-fibre canvas made from jute and hemp.
18. According to Dove, considerable numbers of chests of tea were taken aboard *Graf Spee*; the Indian carpets turn up all over the place, including one shown being carried ashore at Leith (see below).
19. From version A it transpires that three of them were Indians. We joke now about the "White Man's Burden" but Brown took it very seriously—see below.
20. The account in A is slightly more detailed. The radio incident is absent.
21. Which is scarcely surprising: *Altmark* was designed as a supply vessel, not a floating POW camp.
22. Dr. Tyrolt also came to be maligned later; the evidence of the diary is that he was a humane and conscientious man.
23. It is hereditary.
24. Version A mentions that Mr. Thompson had negotiated this arrangement with *Altmark's* Purser to put off the day when they might have to break caste.
25. Probably a polite way of admitting they had bungled the scuttling charges.
26. There is a fair bit of re-arrangement here, but the only significant change is that in version A: "Lt Smit Eckhart...informed us that our rations were the same as theirs (everyone got the same he said). Germany's war rations being daily: 2 oz potatoes 2½ oz sausage or cheese, 1½ oz sugar, ½ oz tea or coffee, 3 oz of rice or beans or peas, 4½ oz meats or fats and 17½ oz bread."
27. It is worth remembering that *Altmark* was primarily a tanker but also carried ammunition for *Graf Spee*. One can understand Dau's point of view.
28. Version A gives the calibre as three-mm, presumably meant to be three-cm.
29. While *Altmark* undoubtedly did carry concealed guns, S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea 1939-45* (3 vols., London, 1954), I, 153, suggested that it only had heavy and light machine guns. According to Frischauer and Jackson, *Navy's Here*, 68, target practice with automatic cannon was witnessed, and they also say that Captain Vian believed *Altmark* may have mounted six-inch guns. The space mentioned above might have been big enough to contain a 4.7-inch or similar, but surely not to handle its ammunition. And where were the rangefinders?
30. According to Dove, *Graf Spee's Prisoner*, 63, *Graf Spee's* boarding party bungled the laying of scuttling charges, just as they had done with *man*.
31. Question mark in ms. Since in other places margarine is specified, this questionable substance was presumably either inferior butter or superior margarine.
32. This meeting is not mentioned in A.
33. Dove, *Graf Spee's Prisoner*, 109, mentions this as well: one wonders how they got to know about such an error.

34. See the note about the injured electrician, below.

35. One of the few significant omissions from version A occurs at this point: there is an entry for 9 December which reads as follows: "When all prisoners intended to proceed to Germany in 'Altmark' were settled down Capt Dau called us all on the forecastle head deck to make a speech, during which time we were surrounded by armed guards & Machine Guns trained on us from the bridge. He spoke very bitterly, his English was not too bad; but the W was pronounced as V. As near as I can remember he said: ["I have called you all together to let you know you are all my prisoners, not because I want you, because I don't, but because we have no colonies [to deposit them in] but we will have soon. Here you are, and don't think you are going to win this war, because you are not. We are. I have done all I can for your comfort, jute bagging on the decks covered with Indian Carpets which we took from the 'Huntsman'"] Cheer from 2 or 3 of the prisoners. I believe they were the Huntsman's Quartermasters. Holding up his hand for silence he then said "I do not want anything like that here. It does not impress me one little bit." He then continued, but I walked away out of range of his voice & heard no more.

36. In fairness, version A does point out that this cabin was intended for two junior engineers.

37. Like Mr. Thompson and many of his colleagues in the Indian trade – but presumably unlike Dr. Tyrolt – he was fairly fluent in Hindi. There is a powerful irony here in that one of the "atrocities" later alleged was in the headline "A Leper Found

Locked Up With the Prisoners;" *Sunday Express*, 18 February 1940.

38. He was an amateur woodcarver of some achievement, but this also indicates that he had been allowed to keep some of his tools, or at the very least his pocket knife, in his sea chest; any of these were potential weapons.

39. A copy of this notice was taken from the ship and figured large in the British press attack on the "Hell Ship."

40. Yet again, one feels that such incidents were rather more harshly dealt with in the Stalags.

41. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 1940, this man was shot by one of his own officers for helping the prisoners escape. Perhaps.

42. Some accounts, such as that in the *Daily Telegraph*, have the *Altmark's* deck higher than the *Cossack's*. It is possible that both versions were correct at different points along *Cossack's* length.

43. An Indian Bosun.

44. With 300 ex-POWs aboard, Vian had no intention of hanging around for a counter-attack to be arranged and made the passage from Jössing Fjord in about eighteen hours, despite twice having to slow to destroy mines spotted for him by Coastal Command escort aircraft.

45. Sunday paper cited are the edition of 18 February; daily papers are of 19 February.