

# Scuttling of the German Fleet in Scapa Flow (June 21, 1919)

## Abstract

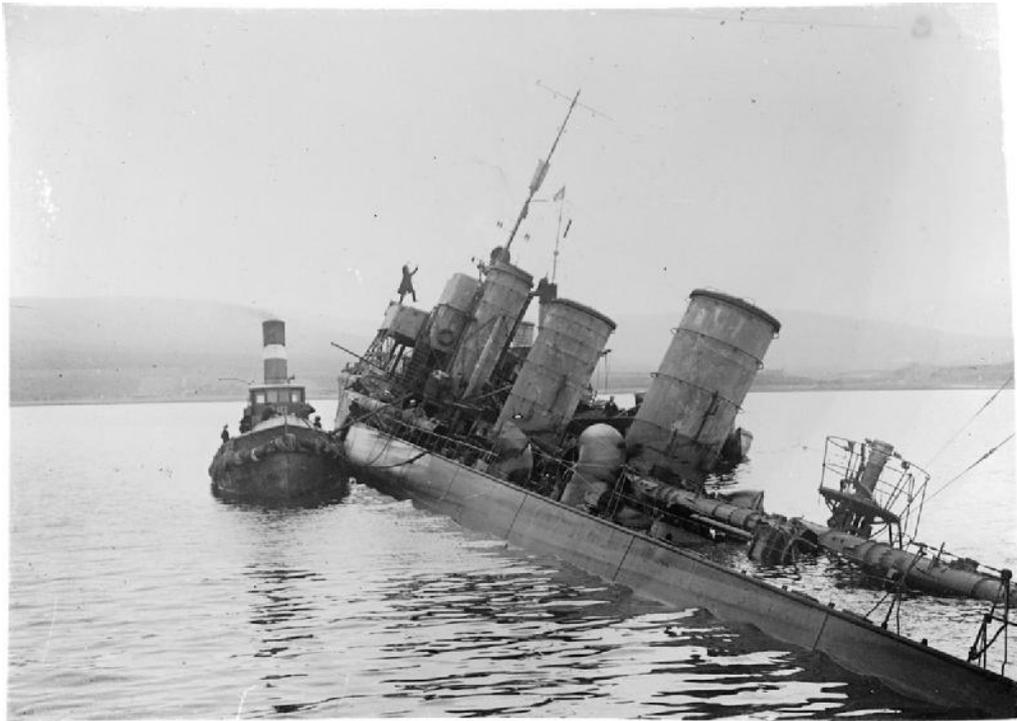
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The terms of the armistice that ended the fighting required that, besides the entire submarine fleet, 74 warships of the German high seas fleet be handed over to the Entente powers for initial internment at an allied naval base. Since most of the fleet was in the hands of the sailors' councils after the November Revolution, negotiations for the handover were initially difficult. Beginning on November 18, 1918, the battle fleet left Wilhelmshaven for Great Britain under the command of Rear Admiral Ludwig von Richter. All 74 disarmed ships were interned at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands with skeleton crews. The terms of the peace treaty, made public in May 1919, laid out a radical disarmament of the German navy and a division of its ships among the allies. To prevent the ships from going to the allies permanently, Reuter ordered their crews to sink them on June 21. This photograph shows crew members leaving their ship in a lifeboat after having opened all the ship's seacocks, hatches, airlocks, and torpedo tubes. A total of 52 ships were sunk this way. The men have their hands raised because the British ships guarding them are firing, not yet recognizing what has happened. Since sinking the ships violated the terms of the armistice, Richter and his crews were interned as prisoners of war until January 1920, after the Versailles treaty was ratified. The victorious powers also demanded considerable compensation for the lost ships.

This photo shows a tugboat next to the scuttled German destroyer G 102 in the bay of Scapa Flow. 52 ships were sunk out of a total of 74 ships in the Imperial Navy. Crew members opened seacocks, hatches, locks and torpedo tubes and then abandoned the sinking ships on lifeboats. As the destruction of military equipment violated the terms of the armistice, Reuter and his crews were taken prisoner of war and interned until they were able to return to Germany in January 1920 after the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. The victorious powers also demanded considerable compensation for the sunk ships.

## Source

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Source: Scuttling of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow: Tug alongside scuttled German destroyer G 102 at Scapa Flow, June 21, 1919. Royal Navy official photographer, Charles W. Burrows. Photograph SP 1631, Imperial War Museum, available online on Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tug\\_alongside.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tug_alongside.jpg)

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