

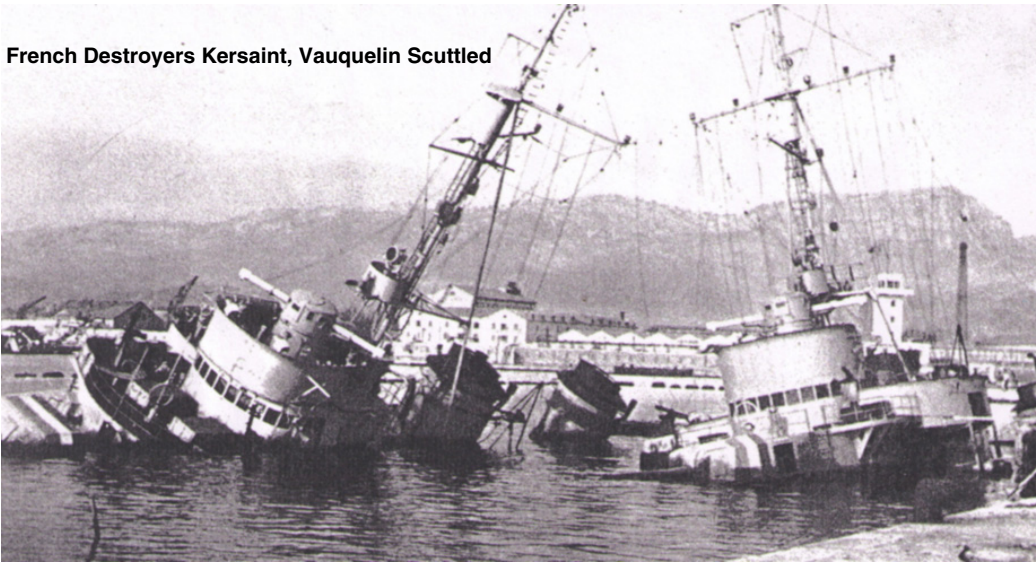
## Bizarre, Fascinating, and Wacky World War I & II Secrets. Tragedy of the Jinxed Fleet

The order was loud and clear over the intercom: "All hands, general quarters, all hands, general quarters. Man your scuttling stations! I repeat, this is no drill, man your scuttling stations! This is Admiral Jean De Laborde speaking, onboard your flagship, The Strasbourg!" This is a very shocking and dreaded order the French sailors hoped they would never hear. Now, no one but another sailor can understand nor appreciate the love a sailor has for his own warship. The World War II warship is not just a floating gun platform, but a complete floating city. A sailor eats, sleeps, mans his duty shift, and lives full time onboard his ship. The ship contains a cobbler (shoe) shop, a laundry with dry cleaning presses available. The ship also has a grocery store, uniform shop, and even an ice cream soda fountain! Most of the services are free, or with a terrific discount, for example, cigarettes are a nickel a pack, or a carton cost a whole fifty cents and for many sailors, his ship is the only home that he ever knows. He enlists at 16 or 17 years of age and stays onboard 30 years for a full retirement. It is indeed a thrilling feeling to stand with your feet wide apart and feel the deck roll beneath you. Better yet, take the wheel as helmsman and guide the ship across the trackless sea. You must use a compass to keep the ship on course.

The Strasbourg and her sister ship, the Dunkerque, are France's newest super battleships. They are about the same size as our United States battleship, the Mississippi. They were 703.8 feet long and 102.3 feet wide, the displacement 26,500 tons, yet the speed is 29.5 knots (around 34 miles per hour). The armament is very impressive: 8 EA 13 inch guns in two quadruple turrets, 16 EA 5 inch guns, 8 EA 37MM

anti-aircraft guns, and 32 EA 13MM anti-aircraft guns. The crew is from 1,381 to 1,431 men. These two warships are the French reply to Nazi Germany's "pocket battleships." The Strasbourg was a very beautiful warship, espe-

French Destroyers Kersaint, Vauquelin Scuttled



cially because she was the flagship of the Admiral Jean De Laborde. The French sailors are very disturbed and down-hearted. When the order to scuttle was heard, some sailors actually cried!

Scuttle means to sink your own warship! The scuttling parties had to go down into the bottom of the ship, below the waterline, at intervals there are water cocks (sea valves), these are opened to let in the sea water. Then, demolition charges are exploded in the gun turrets, powder magazines, and turbine engines. This makes the warship a total loss except for metal scrapping. The Commander in Chief of the French Navy Admiral Jean Francois Darlan, promised the British that his warships would be scuttled, to keep the Germans from using them. Now, the dreadful time has come to keep that promise.

It is Friday, November 27, 1942 and the place is the large French Navy Base in Toulon, France. The Harbor is a mile long, and a half mile wide. The seaport of Toulon is also a strong fortress on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is just 20 miles from the seaport of Marseille, another strong

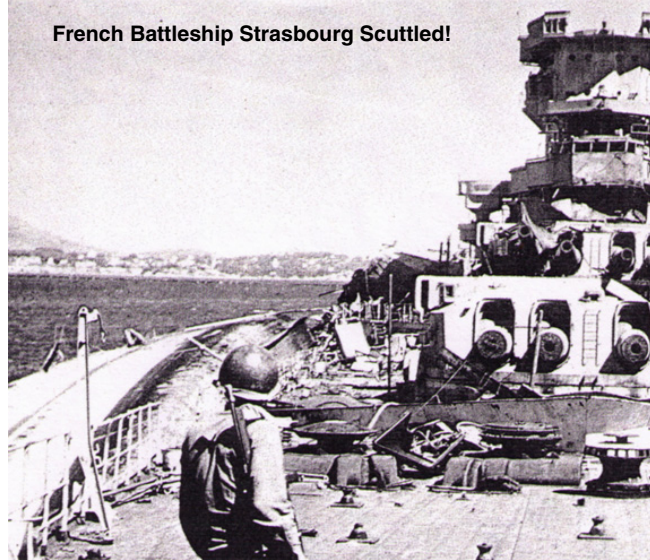
fortress. They are 120 miles from Spain, across the Gulf of Lion. After France fell, the Armistice stated the French Navy would be disarmed and confined to its harbors, but still under French control. However, as everyone knew,

armistices and treaties mean nothing to Hitler. He wanted the Nazi Germany Navy to seize control of the French warships and turn them over to his axis partner, Italy. Hitler issued an order on Thursday, November 19, 1942 and called it Operation Lila. German troops are to enter Toulon from the east and capture Fort Lamalgue, headquarters of Admiral Andre Marquis and the Mourillon Arsenal. More troops from the west will capture the main arsenal and coastal defenses. The troops will be the 7th Panzer Division, with four combat groups, and a motorcycle battalion from the 2nd SS Panzer Division. Meanwhile, German Navy warships will patrol outside the harbor, keeping French ships from fleeing. The attack began at 4:00 AM and about an hour later, the French flagship Strasbourg was surrounded. As the German soldiers and sailors prepare to board the warship, the officer in charge shouts, "Surprise! Surprise! Surprise Admiral De Laborde, you must turn your ship over to us immediately! There is nothing you can do that will keep us from claiming it for Der Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler!" The

Admiral shouted back gleefully, "Surprise! Surprise! Surprise! To you too! My warship was scuttled over an hour ago! Der Fuhrer will have to get along without it! The hold is about three-fourths full of water and the TNT charges will

explode any minute!" A German officer called out, "Admiral, my commanding officer sends word that you have his greatest respect." Then the Germans hastily retreated, as the sound of explosions came from different parts of the ship! Slowly the Strasbourg sank, on an even keel, to the bot-

French Battleship Strasbourg Scuttled!



tom of the bay. Finally, only the main mast and part of the super-structure still remained above the water.

Admiral Laborde, high and dry in the captain's cabin, refused positively to leave his warship, so the German commander, Johannes Blaskowitz, decided to leave him there, for technically, he had gone down with his ship. Finally, the

French Prime Minister, Henri Phillippe Petain, ordered him to leave with this message: I have learned at this instant that your ship is sinking. I order you to leave it without delay. So, the Admiral goes ashore to surrender, with a big smirk on his face.

The French submarine Iris dives and escapes to the seaport of Barcelona, Spain. The French submarine Glorieux escapes to the seaport of Oran, Algeria. Likewise, the French submarines Casabianca, Fresnel, and Marsouin all escape to the seaport of Algiers, Algeria in North Africa. Meanwhile, back in the seaport of Toulon, it is an incredible sight to behold. The towns-people are clapping and cheering, while the German troops are dismayed and dumbfounded! Despite their orders, all they can do is stand around and watch the spectacle. All over the large harbor, warship after warship is scuttled and blown up.

Here is the incredible list of the scuttled French warships: Battle cruisers

(battleships), Strasbourg, Dunkerque, and Provence. One seaplane tender: The Commandant Teste. Heavy cruisers: Duplex, Foch, Colbert, and Algeria. Light cruisers: Marseillaise, Jean De Vienne, and La Galissonniere. Destroyers: Casard, Aigle, Gerfaut, Lion, Linx, Mogador, Tigre, Tartu, Vauban, Vautour, Indomptable, Kersaint,



by Cecil Owen

Valmy, Vauquelin, and Guepard. Torpedo boats: Casque, Bison, Fourdroyant, Siroco, Mars, Palme, Hardi, Mamelouk, Bourdelais, Bayonnaise, Trombe, Poursuivante, and Cyclone. Submarines: Redoutable, Diamant, Sirene, Vengeur, Pascal, Acheron, Venus, Caiman, Alatee, Eurydice, Thetis, Naiade, and Espoir. Sloops (a sloop is just a little smaller than a torpedo boat): Eparagne, Chamois, Impetuese, Grant, Iberville, Yser, Curieuse, and Dedaigieuse. Also, 19 unnamed auxiliary ships, 1 school ship, 28 tugboats, and 4 cranes were also scuttled. Oil polluted the harbor so badly; it was two years before it was possible to swim there.

From the high hills around the bay of Toulon, people are provided with flames and fireworks for at least 10 days. General Charles De Gaulle, head of the French government in exile, heavily criticized the French admirals for not ordering the whole fleet to Algiers, but it would have taken almost 5 hours to work up a sufficient steam to move out. This was indeed one of the most fantastic, heart rending, and yet heroic deeds the French sailors achieved during World War II! This act certainly shortened the length of the war considerably! "Vive La France" (Long Live France) "Appareillage" (Set Sail)

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