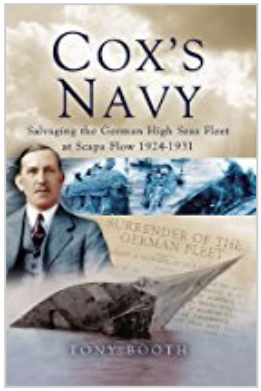

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Cox’s Navy: Salvaging The German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow 1924-1931

By Tony Booth

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On mid-Summer's Day 1919 the interned German Grand Fleet was scuttled by their crews at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands despite a Royal Navy guard force. Greatly embarrassed, the Admiralty nevertheless confidently stated that none of the ships would ever be recovered. Had it not been for the drive and ingenuity of one man there is indeed every possibility that they would still be resting on the sea bottom today.

Cox's Navy tells the incredible true story of Ernest Cox, a Wolverhampton-born scrap merchant, who, despite having no previous experience, led the biggest salvage operation in history to recover the ships. The 28,000 ton Hindenberg was the largest ship ever salvaged. Not knowing the boundaries enabled Cox to apply solid common sense and brilliant improvisation, changing forever marine salvage practice during peace and war.

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Cox’s Navy: Salvaging The German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow 1924-1931 By Tony Booth Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review
'A masterful and fascinating book.' -- *Wolverhampton Express & Star, United Kingdom*

'It's a super book, a gripping read.' -- *Len Deighton*

'With each page, the reader becomes immersed in the subject, the time period and the characters.' -- *The Orcadian, United Kingdom*

About the Author
Tony Booth is a former sailor who has studied this extraordinary operation in unprecedented detail. He lives in the Channel Islands --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

On Friday, 2 December 1932, eighteen months after Cox had finished working at Scapa Flow, he was invited by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers to give a lecture to its members on how he managed to conceive and execute his unique salvage operation. The very same Institution whose more respected fellows were some of the so-called ïexpertsÍ who had once scoffed at CoxÍs salvage ideas. The temperature had been unusually mild for December. Rain had drizzled over a grey London all day and got much worse as night fell. As the Institution members and their guests sat down, an odour of stale, damp clothing soon filled the room. With a few rough notes for reference and a large number of lantern slides to support the success of his unorthodox salvage ideas, he now stood like a victor at the front of their auditorium. A little before eight oÍclock, all the members were seated and hushed. As the lights dimmed, the first lantern slide projected a grainy black and white image of a cold, drab place where the land, sea and sky merged into only slightly varying shades of grey. The view recreated an atmosphere not unlike the London weather the members and guests had just experienced. But in the middle of the grainy image they could all see two massive, black floating docks. Cox began his lecture, ïEight years ago I was finishing the breaking up of two battleships, which I had purchased from the British Government, when the suggestion was made to me that I might make an attempt at lifting the German fleet which had been sunk in Scapa Flow. As I would shortly be without work to do, I turned over the idea in my mind, but, considering I had never lifted ships before in my life, the project was somewhat ambitious...Í

The full impact of ïsomewhat ambitiousÍ never really came across in CoxÍs dry almost clinical account of how he went from amateur boat lifter to salvage expert during his eight years in the Flow. His previous experience of selling Western Front debris and breaking up two decommissioned warships had taught him enough about bringing scrap metal to a ready market at a good profit. All he needed now was to learn the salvage profession, which at that time counted very few experts, and for which the technical guiding rules had not yet been laid down. The only information available came from a few ships, which had been raised under similar conditions, but as Cox was soon to learn, applying precedents too firmly would only lead to disaster. He had to take what he could from others and tailor-make his salvage operation to suit the constant unknown quantities which dogged him until the day he left the Flow.

Early twentieth-century salvage was similar to sixteenth-century medicine. Quackery and bad techniques dominated the business. By the end of the First World War so much high quality metal lay scattered around the sea beds of Europe that shortages began to affect post-war progress. As European economies began to

recover, the demand for raw materials grew dramatically and the cost of replacing the millions of tons of steel forged into the war effort was weighed against salvaging ex-war metal. Talk of raising the Cunarder, Lusitania, spurred on some of the more imaginative ideas.

At about two oĺclock in the afternoon of Friday, 7 May 1915 the Lusitania was approaching the end of her transatlantic cruise from New York to Liverpool. She was sighted by the submarine U-20 about fourteen miles off Cobh in Southern Ireland. Unfortunately for Cunard the LusitaniaĺŚ silhouette was listed in JaneĺŚ Fighting Ships and was also designated a Royal Naval Reserve merchant cruiser in BrasseyĺŚ Naval Annual. Both British publications were standard issue for all German U-boats. Kapitanleutnant Walther Schwieger ordered one torpedo to be fired at the target. It travelled 700yds at about 9ft below the surface well out of sight of the LusitaniaĺŚ bridge watch. A few minutes later the torpedo hit her starboard side just behind her foremast, but two explosions were heard. The second explosion is thought to have been 5,600 cases of American ammunition recorded in her manifest, and destined for the Western Front. Aboard the Lusitania, Captain William Turner, tried to make for the nearby Irish coast, but eighteen minutes later she sank 310ft to the bottom of the Atlantic, taking more than 1,200 men, women and children with her.

By half-past-two that same afternoon the prestigious Cunarder was nothing more than 31,550 gross tons of high-grade scrap metal.

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