

The Greatest Sea-Battle Chase in History

Sink The Bismarck!

- Yaakov Astor

It was an all-out battle between super-weapons of incomparable size and power, followed by the most dramatic hunt-and-destroy operation in naval history. The entire British fleet was sent after one ship—the Bismarck, pride of Nazi Germany, symbol of the Master Race itself. She was, indeed, the greatest battleship the world had ever seen, with the potential to alter the course of the war on her own. Could she be stopped before she broke out into the Atlantic Ocean to sever the lifeline bringing food and supplies from the United States to Britain?

June 8, 1989

Robert Ballard—famed explorer who discovered the wreck of the *Titanic* at the bottom of the ocean in 1985—is on the hunt for another famous sunken ship, the pride of Nazi Germany, the *Bismarck*. He actually began the search in July 1988, but his first expedition proved unsuccessful. A second expedition was mounted in late May 1989.

By June, he and his crew were beginning to grow skeptical that they would ever find it. They had already combed an area of some 200 square miles....

It takes three hours to lower *Argo*—Ballard's two-ton deep-sea camera

sled—three miles down below the surface to the dark cold where no sunlight penetrates. Tethered to the research ship *Star Hercules*, *Argo* has already made countless sweeps over the ocean floor. Day after day, Ballard and his crew stare at the screens which flash nothing but a mind-numbing litany of blue emptiness.

"After seeing a million miles of mud, you're going to find it hard to keep your mind on the job," Ballard told his crew. "It's a lot like driving a car at night on a straight empty highway. Easy to get hypnotized."

Ballard does not even know if the wrecked ship is intact enough to be recognizable. It is not merely like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack, he says, but

a needle "in a haystack, at night, in a blizzard, with nothing more than a flashlight."

By the tenth day of fruitless searching, the monotony is getting to the crew. Morale is low. Secretly, many doubt they will ever find the sunken ship.

At around nine o'clock in the morning, on June 8, Ballard is in his cabin viewing a video monitor that allows him to see everything his team is watching in the main control room. Time is running out. In four days they will have to return home. Who knows if there will be enough funding to come back for a third try. Ballard is not one to panic, but the search is turning into a real marathon....

Suddenly, a big white shape looms into the view of *Argo's* camera as it moves about 15 feet above the ocean floor in an area that slopes steeply downward.... Then he sees the gun—no, two gun barrels jutting from a turret.

"We've got it!" he yells so loud that it is heard two corridors away.

Ballard and his team have finally found *Bismarck's* remains 15,700 feet below, at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

A Mountain of Steel

Imagine a single ship so powerful, so monstrous, that it is capable of changing the course of a world war. That was Nazi Germany's *Bismarck*, a mountainous piece of steel and military technology—the embodiment of Hitler's vast ego.

Built in secret, she was 830 feet, almost as long as the *Titanic*. Yet, unlike the legendary ship once thought to be unsinkable, she was 30 feet wider and so heavily armored that she weighed almost *twice* as much. Despite her mass, she could make 32 knots (about 37 miles per hour), driven by engines generating 150,000 horsepower. Each barrel of her 15-inch guns weighed 250,000 pounds and could destroy a ship over 15 miles away! The side armor was an advanced formula Krupp steel 13 inches thick designed to resist the fury of torpedoes and the largest caliber shell.

German naval strategy of the time was ruthless. *Bismarck's* sole purpose was to



Artist's rendition of *Bismarck*, at the time the world's most fearsome battleship.



The launching of the battleship *Bismarck* at Hamburg in 1939.



Bismarck in port in Hamburg.

hunt the convoys in the icy North Atlantic and destroy the ships bringing food and supplies to beleaguered Britain, starving her into surrender. Sink the ships, kill the crews and take no prisoners.



Dramatic artist's rendition of the *Titanic* sinking. Right: Graphic illustration of the *Titanic* at the bottom of the ocean. Robert Ballard was first to discover the wreck of the *Titanic*. Would he succeed with the *Bismarck*?



Tethered to the *Star Hercules*, the two-ton deep-sea camera sled *Argo* begins its descent three miles down below the surface to the dark cold where no sunlight penetrates. Right: Artist's rendition of *Argo* finding *Bismarck*.

