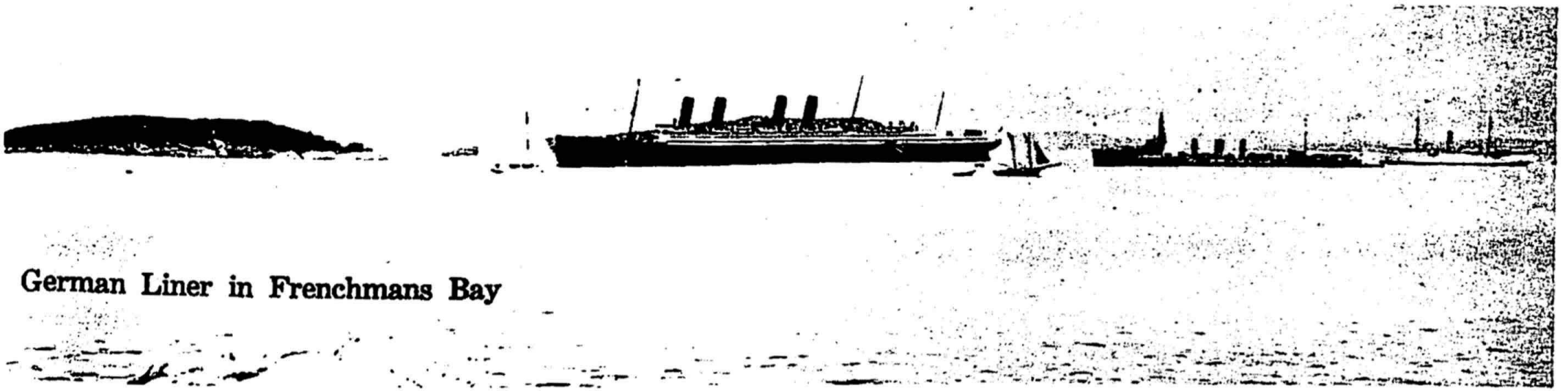
STRANGE VISITOR

The keeper of Baker Island Light in Frenchmans Bay would never forget the sight. First there had been the deep-throated blasts of a foghorn growing louder each time it sounded. Then out of the fog bank burst the towering bow of a giant ocean liner traveling at reckless speed. The huge black hull slipped quickly by the island and moments later only the wash of the wake on the rocks testified to the reality of the mammoth apparition.

Thus on August 4, 1914, only a few days after leaving New York for Europe, the mighty German steamship "Kronprinzessin Cecilie" returned to America with 1450 passengers and a cargo of several million dollars worth of gold bullion, no longer a proud queen but rather a hounded quarry fleeing two French submarines. A short time later she dropped anchor off Bar Harbor and her dangerous dash into the rockbound bay ended in safety.

Events leading up to the "Cecilie's" arrival in the Maine port were as confused as the Baker Island lightkeeper's thoughts must have been when he saw her race by. The ship was a scheduled liner plying between the United States and Europe. Late in July she had sailed from New York, her passengers planning to spend the summer abroad despite gathering war clouds. The voyage was uneventful until July 31 when, about 850



German Liner in Frenchmans Bay

miles from England, the "Cecilie's" captain received orders by wireless to turn about. He announced to the passengers that the ship was returning to America, that they had enough fuel and food and would land in some port "very far north."

Apparently the captain knew more than he told, for the next day the stacks were painted black and the ship's speed was increased. The great vessel raced on through a fog that night without reducing speed or showing a light. The passengers, growing fearful, sent a committee requesting that the speed be reduced. Their pleas were met for a time but a few hours later the ship was again dashing toward her unknown destination. On August 3, the day that Germany declared war on France, the "Cecilie" passed Halifax in the fog.

The next day a passenger, C. Ledyard Baird, a Bar Harbor summer resident, was asked to pilot the "Cecilie" into Frenchmans Bay. Her arrival naturally caused a great stir on land. Shore paths were crowded with sightseers and nearly everyone owning a boat made a fast dollar taking persons out to see the big ship close at hand. No one was allowed aboard, however.

Arrangements were quickly made to transfer the passengers by steamer to the Mt. Desert Ferry Station at Hancock where thy were placed aboard special trains for New York. A heavily armed guard transferred the gold from the "Cecilie" to another special train. Eye witnesses reported that even the train's engineer had a rifle across his knees.

"Kronprinzessin Cecilie" rode at anchor off Bar Harbor until autumn. Finally a crew arrived and took her to East Boston where she lay until America entered the war. When the proud German ship again saw service her "about-face" role was completed and she became an American troop transport.

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