



HMS Majestic

Counterfactuals!

Counterfactuals are past conditionals or, more simply, “what if” statements about the past. They alter some aspect of the past in order to set the stage for a “what might have been” argument. I use only “minimal rewrite” counterfactuals. They entail small plausible changes in reality but do not violate our understanding of what was otherwise possible.

Perfidious Albion

“Horrid folk! They are Russia’s eternal enemy. They are cunning, powerful at sea, and insolent everywhere. All nations hate England, but it suits them to tolerate her.”

Eugene Politovsky, Engineer-Constructor
Second Pacific Squadron

“I should only have engaged the Russians at Tangier... with four of my battleships, at a distance of from 5,000 to 6,000 yards. It appeared to me that this would only be chivalrous, under the circumstances.”

Vice Admiral Lord Charles Beresford
Commanding the Channel Fleet

Location: Atlantic Ocean, near the Strait of Gibraltar, 2 November 1904, 0700 hours.

Operational Situation: Upon arriving at the Skaw on the morning of 20 October 1904, Admiral Rozhdestvenski had intended to spend the day coaling. But after receiving several reports of Japanese torpedo-boats operating in the English Channel, which were believed to be true, Admiral Rozhdestvenski decided it would be safer to cut his coaling operations short and to split his fleet into six divisions, sending each in succession and at considerable intervals, through the English Channel. In advance of the heavy divisions he sent three destroyers with their tender. They left the main body at 1600 hours, and were soon followed by four others and their tender, both divisions

proceeding at 12 knots, with orders to make for Cherbourg, and after coaling to carry on for Algiers and Suda Bay. Then at 1630 hours, he sent the light cruisers *Svyetlana*, *Zhemchug*, and *Almaz*. At 1700 hours, Admiral Enkvist set off with two heavy cruisers *Dmitri Donskoi* (flag), and *Aurora*, escorting the repair ship *Kamchatka*. These four divisions were to keep in direct contact with each other and form a screen 25 nm ahead of the battle-ships. To maintain the interval Admiral Felkerzam got under way at 1930 hours with the second battle division, consisting of *Oslyabya*, *Sisoi Veliki*, *Navarin*, and the armored cruiser *Nakhimov* as well as the transports. Finally, at 2200 hours, Admiral Rozhdestvenski followed with the First Division and the transport *Anaduir*, leaving a second interval of 25 nm.

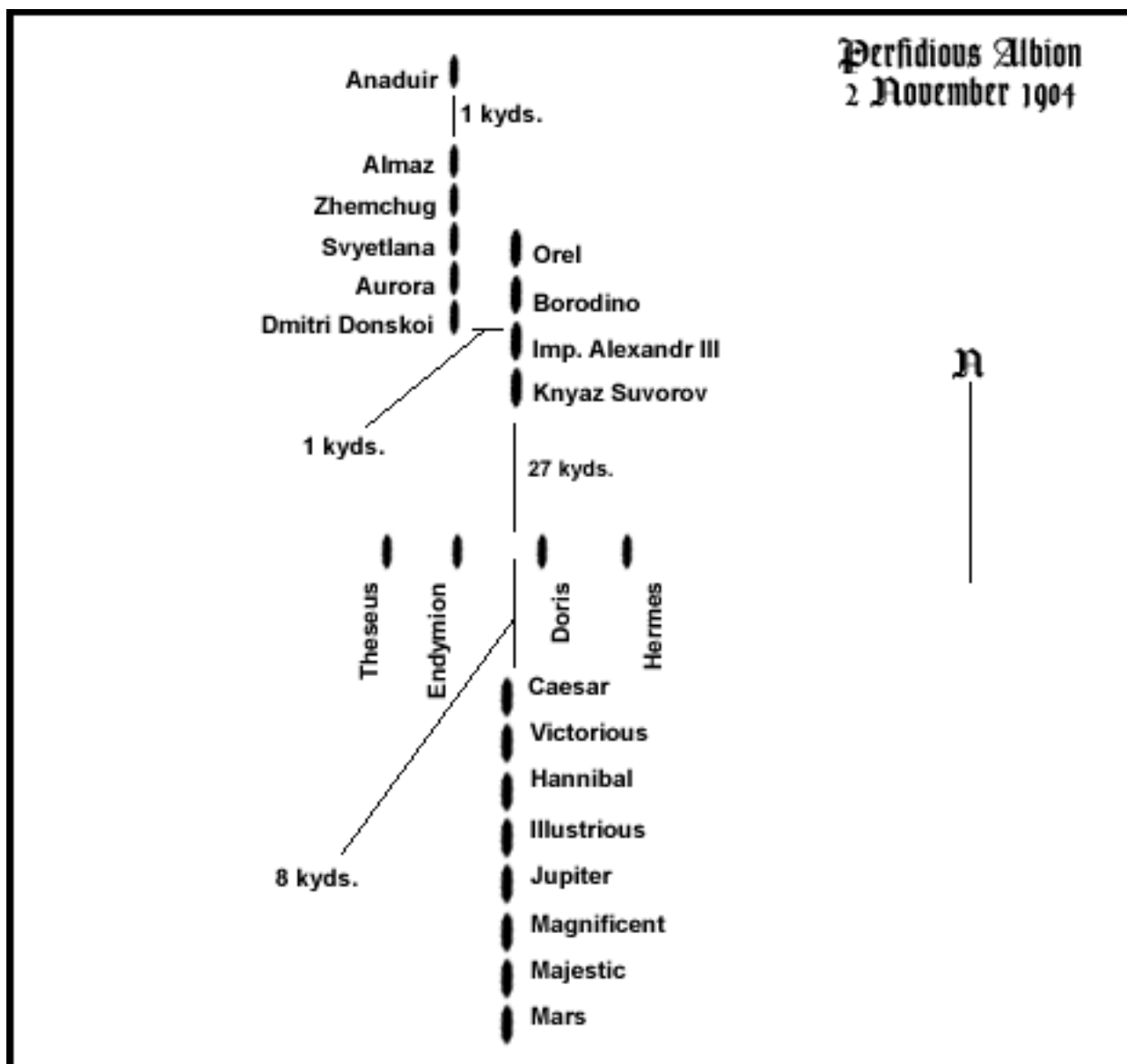
The night was foggy, and true to form the Russian screen lost contact with each other, but in spite of their apprehensions all went well, except that *Kamchatka* had engine trouble. As the day dawned Admiral Enkvist realized that *Kamchatka* had dropped behind the whole fleet, so he ordered half speed for the rest of his division so that *Kamchatka* could catch up. Not knowing about this situation Rozhdestvenski held on with his division, and by noon the two were within six nm of each other.

During the day, which continued to be foggy, nothing suspicious was reported by the advanced divisions; but at about 2045 hours, *Kamchatka* reported that she was being followed by torpedo-boats. According to Commander Semenoff, who was aboard *Knyaz Suvorov*, the message was not taken very seriously on board the flagship. But when after *Kamchatka* got a reply from the Admiral she asked him to indicate his position. This aroused Rozhdestvenski’s suspicion. Could this be some trick of the enemy? The requested information was not sent. *Kamchatka* would have to be content with a warning to keep clear of the English coast. At 2200 hours, Admiral Rozhdestvenski ordered Admiral Enkvist, who was thought to be some 25 nm ahead, to close *Kamchatka*. The order was acknowledged, and an hour later Rozhdestvenski contacted *Kamchatka* once again to find out if she could still see torpedo-boats, the reply was that she could not.

At around 2300 hours, Admiral Felkerzam came across the Hull fishing fleet, consisting of about 30 to 40 vessels, working the Dogger Bank. Recognizing them for



Damage inflicted by the Russian Fleet
Cassell & Company



what they were Felkerzam altered course so as to pass north of them. He did not, however, notify the First Division of their presence. Shortly before 0100 hours, as *Knyaz Suvorov* approached the same area, a green rocket was spotted, which was the fishing "Admiral's" signal for throwing the trawls. Immediately after sighting the rockets the officers of the watch thought that they could make out on the starboard beam "the shape of a small vessel very low" moving at high speed about 4,000 yards away. The searchlights, which were now pointed in the direction of the sighting, confirmed their suspicions. Admiral Rozhdestvenski gave the order to commence firing, and the rest of the division rapidly joined in. Aboard the flagship a quartermaster reported he could see another torpedo-boat to port, and the port guns quickly opened fire. But by this time it was clear to the officers on the bridge that they were in the mist of a fishing fleet. Rozhdestvenski quickly ordered the guns to cease fire, and altered course away from them. Still the firing continued for about ten minutes, till suddenly it was seen that close by in the direction where the firing had been the

heaviest Admiral Enkvist's flagship, *Dmitri Donskoi*, was signaling her identity. The discovery sent Admiral Rozhdestvenski into a rage, for three hours earlier Enkvist's division had been ordered to fall back on *Kamchatka*, which was far to the rear of the fleet. Orders were immediately repeated with all the fury that he could muster to cease fire, but it was not before *Aurora*, the other cruiser of the Enkvist division, had been hit five times and her chaplain mortally wounded, that the fleet ceased firing. In the fishing fleet two men were killed and six wounded, one trawler was sunk and five damaged.

Tactical Situation: By 25 October the Russian fleet was clear of the Channel. Admiral Rozhdestvenski had put into Vigo for coaling. His light cruiser division, owing to a breakdown, had to stop at Arosa Bay just north of Vigo, and the rest of the fleet was heading for Tangier.

The British public, having received news of the attack on the 24th, was outraged. The Russian Fleet was not to be allowed to escape. This Bear, this great, lumbering, stupid, cruel Bear, grabbing whatever it could lay hands

on was not going to get away with this outrage! Trafalgar Square was filled with protesting crowds; the Russian Ambassador was attacked as he left his embassy. Deputations were sent to Parliament, to Downing Street and the Admiralty. The British government tried to keep tempers in check, but after receiving no satisfaction from Saint Petersburg, the decision to go to war had been made on the 29 October. The days of negotiation had led nowhere. On that day operational orders went out to all British Commanders-in-Chief. "Sink or capture the Russian Fleet."

During the negotiations the British Fleet had not been idle. Three battleships, an armored cruiser and 22 destroyers had been detached from the Mediterranean Fleet to join Vice Admiral Lord Charles Beresford's Channel Fleet based at Gibraltar. Lord Beresford, aware of the Russian division at Tangier, worked out a bold plan. On the night of 30 October 1904 a flotilla of British destroyers entered Tangier harbor. They did not deliver a torpedo attack; they did deliver an invitation. Admiral Felkerzam, along with his division, was invited to join the British Channel Fleet at Gibraltar. The message went on to list the forces arrayed against him should he decline. Felkerzam, not a well man, was overwhelmed. On the morning of 31 October the Second Division of the Second Pacific Squadron set sail for Gibraltar under the close escort of three British battleships, one armored cruiser, and 22 destroyers. Admiral Beresford immediately set sail for Vigo with the remainder of his fleet.

Rozhdestvenski received news of this humiliation by noon of the same day. He would not stand for this. Does Britain fancy herself the ruler of the world? He would show them. He would not be deterred from his mission. He sent orders to the cruisers at Arosa Bay to join him off Vigo by noon on the 1st of November, and then prepared his squadron for battle.

Rozhdestvenski planned to head south round the tip of Africa before the British could trap him. But if it came to it, he would fight. On the morning of 2 November 1904, a lookout sighted smoke on the horizon. The game was up. As he reported his sighting to the Admiral he could hear the angry officer mutter under his breath, "Perfidious Albion!"

Environment: Sea State 2, clear, visibility 80%, wind 045° at 8 knots.

Russian Forces: Second Pacific Squadron, First Division – VADM Rozhdestvenski, *HIRMs Knyaz Suvorov: Knyaz Suvorov, Imperator Alexandr III, Borodino, Orel* (Borodino class OBB).

First Cruiser Division – RADM Enkvist, *HIRMs Dmitri Donskoi: Dmitri Donskoi* (Dmitri Donskoi class CR), *Aurora* (Pallada class OCR), *Svyetlana* (Svyetlana class CR), *Zhemchug* (Izumrud class OCR), *Almaz* (Almaz class PY).

Transport: *Anaduir* (Anaduir class AP).

Russian Orders: Our mission has not changed. We must relieve our embattled fleet at Port Arthur. Head south and



The Russian attack on the Hull Fishing Fleet

round the tip of Africa. We will try to avoid the stinking British, but if they attempt to block our advance engage and destroy them.

Russian Victory: *Decisive:* Sink or damage at least 50% three or more British battleships than you lose. *Tactical:* Avoid the British squadron and continue on with your mission to relieve Port Arthur. You are considered to have avoided the British squadron if at any time after initial contact you manage to stay out of visual detection range for three tactical turns.

British Forces: The Channel Fleet, Battle Squadron – VADM Lord Charles Beresford, *HMS Caesar: Caesar, Victorious* (flag of RADM Bridgman), *Hannibal, Illustrious, Jupiter, Magnificent, Majestic, Mars* (Majestic class OBB).

Cruiser Squadron: *Theseus, Endymion* (Edgar class OCR), *Doris* (Eclipse class OCR), *Hermes* (Highflyer class OCR).

British Orders: Intercept and destroy the Russian Fleet.

British Victory Conditions: *Decisive:* Sink every Russian battleship without suffering any loss of your battleships. *Tactical:* Sink every Russian battleship with the loss of no more than two of your own.

Setup: See map. The Russians setup on course 180°, speed is at the Russian player's discretion. The battleships are in line ahead with 500 yards between vessels. The cruisers are in line ahead 1000 yards off the starboard beam of *Imperator Alexandr III*, with 500 yards between vessels.

The British setup bearing 180° from the Russians at 27,000 yards, on course 000°. Speed is at the British player's discretion. The battleships are in line ahead with 500 yards between vessels. The cruisers are 8000 yards ahead of the battleships in line abreast with 2000 yards between vessels.

Special Rules: Every 45 minutes (15 Tactical Turns) the referee or one of the players will roll a percentile dice. There is a 60% chance that a sudden gale will blow up. If this happens visibility is immediately reduced to 2% and

the sea state increases to 5. The Russians historically encountered a gale before rounding the tip of Africa.

Potential Outcome: The two fleets engaged at 5000 yards. The battle raged for three hours with both sides suffering heavy losses, but in the end a battered British Fleet was victorious. Vice Admiral Lord Beresford was hailed as the defender of British honor.

Admiral Rozhdestvenski went down with his ship, as did the hopes of the Russian Empire. The Tsar agreed to pay an indemnity for the damaged and sunken vessels of the Hull Fishing Fleet, thus ending the conflict with Great Britain. The war with Japan continued till the Russian defeats at Port Arthur and Mukden at which time Russia sued for peace. The Empire was falling apart. Revolution was in the air!

Admiral Felkerzam, upon his return to Saint Petersburg, was tried for treason. He was sentenced to hang, but cheated the gallows by dying of a stroke not three days before he was to be executed.

Best Book: *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, Vol. IV.

A Matter of Maggots

"What were a few maggots? It was excellent meat. The ship's senior surgeon, Honorable Counsellor Smirnov, had pronounced it of first quality. There was, he said, no justification for the complaints."

Richard Hough *The Potemkin Mutiny*

Location: The Black Sea, off Odessa, 30 June 1905, 1215 hours.

Operational Situation: At the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian Navy was ranked third in the world, after Britain and France. But this formidable array of battleships, armored cruisers, protected cruisers, destroyers and torpedo-boats was divided between the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific, a division of forces that would prove to be a tremendous handicap during the war. Not only were the distances between fleets immense, but in addition to the geographic separation, Russia possessed no bases between them. Because of this, Russia was in effect a second-class rather than a first-class naval power.

From its very inception the Russian Navy had always maintained a naval force in the Black Sea, but the lack of a powerful homogeneous squadron had been felt during the Crimean War, and even more so in 1877-78 during the Turkish War. It became clear that the only solution was to build up all three of Russia's squadrons in order to be able to meet an enemy on equal terms no matter where it was needed.

Turkey was the most probable future enemy; therefore, the Black Sea Fleet became the most important of the three squadrons to be reinforced. At the same time, to invest so much in a fleet confined to the Black Sea by the Treaty of Berlin signed in 1878 (prohibiting all but Turkish warships from transiting the Bosphorus) was extremely

extravagant. The Russian Admiralty did it anyway, and in 1882 put in motion a large naval expansion program for the Black Sea Fleet. The largest and most powerful warship to be built under this program was *Potemkin*.

Tactical Situation: The war with Japan has been one unbroken string of defeats. The people blame the Tsar and his corrupt government. Unrest has spread throughout the Empire. Riots in Saint Petersburg have been brutally crushed. The workers are rising up! The Empire teeters on the edge of collapse.

In the Black Sea there is unrest in the fleet. On 27 June 1905, a disturbance over some bad meat that had been delivered to *Potemkin* that morning while she was at Odessa, spread throughout the crew. The bitterness of the men towards their officers, who to them represented all that was wrong with Russia, soon turned into violence. By 1500 hours, the mutineers had control. The blood coated decks of *Potemkin* posed a terrible but triumphant picture.

News of the mutiny reached Sevastopol, headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, early on 28 June 1905. Vice Admiral Krieger, acting commander in chief for Admiral Chukhnin who was away at Moscow, at once ordered a conference of all the fleets' commanders aboard the flagship *Rostislav*. The situation was critical, and it was urgently necessary to take action against the mutinous *Potemkin*. If the uprising could be quickly suppressed, it might still be possible to prevent a major mutiny throughout the fleet.

It was decided that *Tri Sviteliia*, *Georgi Pobiedonosets*, and *Dvienadast Apostolov* would sail for Odessa immediately under the command of Rear Admiral Vishnevetsky. They were to reconnoiter, recapture *Potemkin* if circumstances were favorable, and then rendezvous with the rest of the fleet in Tendra Bay in two day's time.

Rear Admiral Vishnevetsky and his squadron arrived at Odessa on the morning of 30 June 1905. Alert lookouts aboard *Potemkin* had sighted the approaching squadron and it was decided to leave harbor and meet the loyalists at sea. As the range closed *Potemkin* hoisted the message. "Surrender or we will fire." It seemed to have the desired effect. The loyalist squadron turned and headed away. Rear Admiral Vishnevetsky had decided to await the arrival of his senior officer after seeing that *Potemkin* had no intention of going quietly.



Knyaz Potemkin flying the red flag