1914 | **2014**

WORLD
WAR ONE
⬛B⬛B⬛C

1918 | **2018**

How did Orkney host two enemy navies in World War One?

Video transcript – Aftermath

When the war was ended with the armistice agreement, the German navy surrendered and the crews were ordered to sail to Scapa Flow.

In Versailles negotiations were underway to decide the fate of the ships. The British wanted to destroy them, while the Americans, French and Italians wanted to share them out between the winning nations, or at the very least deny them to the British. But the decision was taken out of their hands.

When the German fleet of 70 ships arrived in Scapa Flow it was 19 miles long and was flanked by 100 British ships, an awesome display of naval power.

German commander Admiral Van Reuter resented the ignominy his government had brought on him, and in a note to his ships' Captains said:

'It is my intention to sink the ships only if the enemy should attempt to obtain possession of them without the assent of our government. Should our government agree in the peace terms to the surrender of the ships, then the ships will be handed over, to the lasting disgrace of those who have placed us in this position.'

So, at 10am that morning he gave his ships the order to re-hoist their German ensigns and scuttle the ships.

By the end of the day 52 ships had sunk, including all but one of the sixteen battleships. In the confusion, nine German sailors were killed by the British who thought that the sudden rush of German lifeboats towards the beach was an attack. These were the last casualties of the First World War.

Although the scuttling took the British by surprise, British Admiral Wemyss later said:

"I look upon the sinking of the German fleet as a real blessing. It disposes, once and for all, the thorny question of the redistribution of these ships."