

= Hugo von Pohl =

Hugo von Pohl ( 25 August 1855 ? 23 February 1916 ) was a German admiral who served during the First World War . He joined the Navy in 1872 and served in various capacities , including with the new torpedo boats in the 1880s , and in the Reichsmarineamt ( Imperial Navy Office ) in the 1890s . He eventually reached the rank of Vizeadmiral and held the position of Chief of the Admiralty Staff in 1913 . He commanded the German High Seas Fleet from February 1915 until January 1916 . As the commander of the surface fleet , he was exceedingly cautious , and did not engage the High Seas Fleet in any actions with the British Grand Fleet . Pohl was an outspoken advocate of unrestricted submarine warfare , and he put the policy into effect once he took command of the fleet on 4 February 1915 . Seriously ill from liver cancer by January 1916 , Pohl was replaced by Reinhard Scheer that month . Pohl died a month later .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early career = = =

Hugo von Pohl was born in Breslau , Prussian Silesia , on 25 August 1855 . He entered the Kaiserliche Marine ( Imperial Navy ) as a cadet in April 1872 . At the age of 24 , Pohl was promoted and given command of the sailing corvette SMS Carola . In the 1880s , he served with then @-@ Korvettenkapitän Alfred von Tirpitz in his so @-@ called " Torpedo Gang " , which advocated a greater emphasis on torpedo boats in the German fleet . Pohl took command of the spar torpedo vessel Ulan , an early , experimental torpedo boat , in 1882 . Two years later , in late September 1884 , he was involved in an experiment with new torpedo boat designs from Schichau , Thornycroft , AG Vulcan , and AG Weser ; Pohl commanded one of the Schichau boats . During the exercises , Pohl 's boat collided with the boat commanded by August von Heeringen . The former 's boat sprung a leak , while the latter 's rudder was damaged , but both safely returned to port .

By the 1890s , Pohl had been transferred to the Reichsmarineamt ( Imperial Navy Office ) , where he would again work with Tirpitz after the latter was appointed as the State Secretary of the Navy . In 1900 , Pohl was assigned to the fleet that was sent to China to help suppress the Boxer Rebellion . While in China , he commanded the protected cruiser SMS Hansa , which bombarded the Taku Forts . In May of that year , Pohl was promoted to Korvettenkapitän . He was promoted to the rank of Konteradmiral in 1906 . Thereafter he served as the commander of the reconnaissance forces of the German fleet . Pohl was promoted again , to Vizeadmiral , in January 1913 . That year , he was elevated to the nobility and , in April , became the Chief of the Admiralty Staff , a position he would hold for two years .

As Chief of the Admiralty Staff , Pohl was involved in the German deliberations during the July Crisis in the aftermath of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Serbian terrorists the previous month . Pohl , Helmuth von Moltke , the Chief of the German General Staff , and Theobald von Bethmann @-@ Hollweg , the Chancellor , met the Kaiser after the monarch returned from a cruise to Norway with the bulk of the High Seas Fleet . Pohl and the others were present at several meetings with the Kaiser , which ultimately produced the " blank check " Wilhelm II extended to Austria @-@ Hungary ; this decision ultimately helped to push Europe into the First World War by the end of the month .

= = = First World War = = =

At the outbreak of war , Pohl , along with Georg von Müller , the Chief of the Imperial Naval Cabinet , and Friedrich von Ingenohl , the commander of the High Seas Fleet , believed that since the war would be over quickly , the fleet should be preserved intact . Together , they agreed that the fleet should be restrained to provide local defense of the German coast , rather than seek a decisive battle against the numerically superior British Grand Fleet . Pohl argued that U @-@ boats should

be used to attack British merchant shipping . He pushed for fewer restrictions on the conduct of the commerce war beginning in late 1914 ; he further advocated abandoning the cruiser rules that handicapped the German effort , in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare . He presented his first plans for an unlimited commerce war in November 1914 , but these were rejected by the Kaiser and Bethmann @-@ Hollweg so as not to antagonize neutral nations , in particular the United States .

After the Battle of Dogger Bank , Pohl replaced Ingenohl as commander of the High Seas Fleet ; throughout his tenure as its commander , Pohl adopted a very cautious strategy in order to preserve the strength of the fleet . Pohl was a controversial choice to replace Ingenohl , in large part owing to his caution with the employment of the surface fleet . Two days after taking command , on 4 February 1915 , Pohl gave the order to use unrestricted submarine warfare against the Allies ; he had managed to convince Bethmann @-@ Hollweg by falsely promising him that U @-@ boat commanders could distinguish between enemy and neutral steamers , and thus avoid provoking the United States . The policy was short @-@ lived , however , as on 7 May 1915 , the U @-@ boat U @-@ 20 torpedoed and sank the passenger liner RMS Lusitania , causing a diplomatic crisis with the United States . To avoid drawing America into the war , Germany reinstated restrictions on the U @-@ boat fleet .

Aboard his flagship , SMS Friedrich der Grosse , Pohl conducted a series of short operations into the North Sea over the course of 1915 . None of these operations ventured outside of the southern end of the North Sea , and the fleet never encountered any British forces . Pohl became seriously ill from liver cancer on 8 January 1916 and was taken to a hospital ship . He was subsequently moved to Berlin for surgery . He was relieved of command due to his poor health on 23 January ; his replacement as fleet commander was Reinhard Scheer . Pohl died a month later , on 23 February . Shortly before his death , he was awarded the Order of the Red Eagle with oak leaves and swords for his command of the fleet . In 1920 , Pohl 's widow Ella published some of his papers in an effort to defend his reputation from postwar criticisms .