

SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SEA POWER CENTRE AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 7, AUGUST 2003

BEFORE GALLIPOLI - AUSTRALIAN OPERATIONS IN 1914

On 4 August 1914 the British Empire declared war on Imperial Germany and Austro-Hungary, and Australia immediately began to contribute to the Empire's war effort. The First World War was to have an indelible shaping influence on Australian society and culture. Regrettably, the undeniably heroic actions of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) in the opposed landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915, the subsequent bitterly fought Gallipoli campaign, and the national mythology that grew from it, have overshadowed the earlier successful actions of Australian forces in the war. This is a great pity, as late 1914 witnessed some notable Australian firsts – the first land operation of the war, the first amphibious landing, the first joint operation, the first coalition operations, the first offshore military expedition planned and coordinated by Australia, the first bravery decoration of the war, the first combat casualties of the war, the first RAN warship lost, and the first enemy warship sunk.

On 7 August 1914 the British War Office requested that Australia seize the German colonies in Nauru, the Caroline Islands and New Guinea. The primary reason for this request was to prevent enemy wireless stations from passing information to the German East Asiatic Squadron of the Imperial German Navy, commanded by Admiral Graf von Spee, that might hinder British efforts to bring it to battle. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) acted swiftly to eliminate the enemy threat to the Empire's shipping. On 11 August the destroyers *HMAS Parramatta*, *HMAS Yarra* and *HMAS Warrego*, covered by the light cruiser *HMAS Sydney*, prepared to launch a torpedo attack on the German anchorages in Simpsonhaven and Matupi Harbour, New Britain, but found the enemy squadron gone. Landing parties were placed ashore at Rabaul and Herbertshöhe to destroy the wireless station, but when it was learned that the station lay inland it was clear that an expeditionary force would be required. Meanwhile, the battlecruiser *HMAS Australia* was scouring the Pacific for Von Spee's squadron. Von Spee was aware of the threat, recording in his diary on 18 August that 'the *Australia* is my special apprehension – she alone is superior to my whole squadron.'

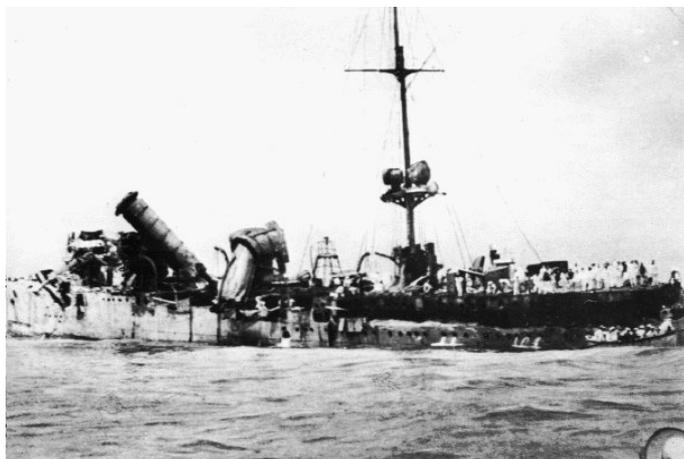
On 29 August 1914, in Australia's first coalition operation, a New Zealand Expeditionary Force of 1400 troops landed at Apia, Western Samoa, covered by the guns of *Australia*, and the cruisers *HMAS Melbourne*, *HMS Psyche*, *HMS Pyramus*, *HMS Philomel* and the French *Montcalm*. With no troops to defend the islands, the German Administrator surrendered on 30 August. The wireless station and harbour facilities were thereafter denied to Von Spee's squadron.

The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) began recruiting on 11 August, consisting of a battalion of 1,000 infantry and a small battalion of 500 naval reservists and time-expired RN seaman. The force left Sydney on 19 August aboard the transport *HMAT Berrima*, a liner requisitioned from P&O, after a period of training near Townsville. The force sailed for Port Moresby to await the arrival of supporting RAN vessels. On 7 September the force, now including *Australia*, the cruisers *Sydney* and *HMAS Encounter*, the destroyers *Parramatta*, *Warrego* and *Yarra*, and the submarines *HMAS AE1* and *HMAS AE2*, sailed for Rabaul. Meanwhile, on 9 September *Melbourne* landed a party on Nauru to destroy the wireless station, whereupon the German administrator promptly surrendered. On 11 September a force consisting primarily of naval reserve personnel was put ashore at Kabakaul to seize the wireless station located inland at Bitapaka. The landing force experienced strong initial resistance, and was forced to make small group attacks through the thick jungle to outflank the enemy. The wireless station was captured and destroyed. This attack resulted in Australia's first combat casualties of the war—four sailors of the landing force and an attached Army doctor—Able Seaman Walker (he served as Courtney but was re-buried under his real name by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), Able Seaman Williams, Able Seaman Street, Able Seaman Moffatt, and Captain Pockley (Australian Army Medical Corps). The other fatal casualty suffered during the operation was Lieutenant Commander Elwell, Royal Navy. On 12 September a combined Navy and Army force was put ashore at nearby Herbertshöhe, while another landing force seized Rabaul. On 14 September *Encounter* shelled German positions at Toma, the first time an RAN vessel had fired on an enemy and the RAN's first shore bombardment. The German resistance, comprising 40 reservists and 110 native troops, was no match for the ANMEF, covered by the 12" guns of *Australia*, and the acting Governor surrendered all of German New Guinea on 17 September 1914. Subsequent operations occupied Bougainville and the New Guinea mainland colonies unopposed. The Governor's steam yacht *Komet*, captured on 9 October 1914, was subsequently commissioned into RAN service as *HMAS Una*. The campaign was an overwhelming success, rapidly achieving all objectives set by the War Office. A RAN reserve officer, Lieutenant Bond, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the first Australian bravery award of the war. In a tragic footnote, *AE1* disappeared without trace with all 35 personnel on board, the first unit of the RAN to be lost on operations. On 26 September *Sydney* completed Australian operations



against the German Pacific colonies by destroying the German wireless station at Angaur in the Palau Islands.

While these operations were in progress other RAN vessels were contributing to the war effort by capturing German merchant shipping. *HMAS Pioneer* captured the steamers *Neumunster* and *Thuringen* off WA; *HMAS Protector* the steamer *Madang* off New Britain; and the launch *Nusa* the steamer *Siar* and the schooners *Matupi* and *Senta* off Kavieng.



Wreck of SMS Emden at North Keeling Island – Nov 1914

On 1 November 1914 the first ANZAC convoy sailed for Egypt from Albany, WA. The escort comprised the cruisers *Melbourne*, *Sydney*, *HMS Minotaur* and the Japanese *Ibuki*. On the same day as the Australian Government received notification that the Empire was at war, Von Spee had detached the light cruiser *SMS Emden* from the East Asiatic Squadron for independent operations in the Indian Ocean. By early November *Emden*, under Captain von Müller, had sunk or captured 22 ships, thoroughly disrupting shipping operations, forcing up insurance premiums, and drawing warships away from other theatres. On 9 November 1914 *Emden* landed a shore party at Direction Island to destroy the cable station. The operators managed to get off a warning signal before the station was closed down. The message was picked up by the convoy and *Sydney*, commanded by Captain Glossop, was detached to intercept. Better armed, faster and more manoeuvrable, *Sydney* caught the German cruiser by surprise, forcing von Müller to abandon his landing party. Despite a fierce resistance the outcome was a foregone conclusion—the Australian ship pounded *Emden* into a burning hulk, and von Müller drove his ship up onto North Keeling Island to save his remaining crew. *Sydney* suffered four killed and eight wounded, *Emden* 115 killed and 80 wounded. *Sydney* then intercepted *Emden's* collier *Buresk*, which scuttled herself as the cruiser approached. The 50 strong landing party from the *Emden*, led by Lieutenant Commander von Muecke, seized the station's schooner *Ayasha* and escaped, eventually reaching Germany after various adventures.

The destruction of the *Emden* freed the shipping routes of the Indian Ocean from raiding warships. However, the German East Asiatic Squadron remained at large, a

continuing threat to shipping in the Pacific Ocean. On 1 November 1914 Rear Admiral Cradock, commander of the North American station, encountered Von Spee's squadron off Coronel. In a battle fought in deteriorating weather conditions the old armoured cruisers *HMS Monmouth* and *HMS Good Hope* were sunk with all hands by the armoured cruisers *SMS Scharnhorst* and *SMS Gneisenau*, and light cruisers *SMS Dresden*, *SMS Leipzig* and *SMS Nürnberg*. The blow to British naval prestige could not be ignored, and the Admiralty redoubled its efforts to hunt down Von Spee. The battlecruisers, *HMS Invincible* and *HMS Inflexible*, under the command of Vice Admiral Sturdee, were detached from the Grand Fleet to lead the hunt. *Australia* was ordered to the American Coast, rendezvousing on 29 November with the Japanese cruisers *Asama*, *Idzumo* and *Hizen*. On 8 December Von Spee decided to raid the British coaling station at Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, in preparation for his return to Germany. Unfortunately for him, Sturdee's force was already anchored in Port Stanley. When Von Spee's ships were sighted Sturdee raised steam as quickly as possible and set out in pursuit. *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, *Leipzig*, *Nürnberg* and the colliers *Baden* and *Santa Isabel* were sunk by *Invincible* and *Inflexible*, the armoured cruisers *HMS Carnarvon*, *HMS Kent* and *HMS Cornwall*; the light cruisers *HMS Glasgow* and *HMS Bristol*; and the auxiliary merchant cruiser *HMS Macedonia*. *Dresden* and the supply ship *Seydlitz* were the only German vessels to escape the battle. *Seydlitz* was interned in Argentina and *Dresden* scuttled herself when run to ground at the Chilean island of Mas a Fuera on 14 March 1915. With the major German threat in the Pacific and Indian Oceans now eliminated, Australia's newer warships could be reallocated to the Atlantic and Mediterranean theatres of operations, while lightly escorted ANZAC troop convoys could sail unmolested to Europe and the Middle East.

In the last five months of 1914 Australian forces, particularly the RAN, participated in a series of successful actions which, at the cost of ten dead, assisted in sweeping the Indian and Pacific Oceans clear of enemy warships and seizing all German colonies in the South Pacific. In comparison to these actions, the land campaigns of World War One would provide Australia with a harsh introduction to modern warfare – one that would scar and shape the nation.

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