

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Decorative picture frame made by a German prisoner of war in Australia during WWI

Date

1914-1918

Medium

Timber

Dimensions

Overall: 260 × 200 × 15 mm, 152 g

Name

Picture frame

History

SMS EMDEN (1908-1914) was a 'Dresden class' light cruiser of the Imperial German navy, named for the city of Emden on the Ems River. Her raiding cruise in the last

months of 1914 has become one of the most legendary stories from the annals of the naval history of World War I. The EMDEN's crew raided Allied shipping in the Indian Ocean, causing chaos in commerce and sinking or capturing twenty three merchant vessels and two Allied warships. In terms of sheer daring and tonnage of Allied shipping sunk or captured, the exploits of EMDEN's crew were the most successful of the entire Imperial German navy. The conduct of her officers and men and the various fates they experienced are the stuff of adventure stories replete with proverbial derring-do. The cruiser was run aground in November 1914 by her captain (Karl von Müller) to prevent sinking, after engaging HMAS SYDNEY off the Cocos-Keeling Islands. The cruiser SMS EMDEN was ordered in 1905 as a replacement for the obsolete SMS PFEIL. The cruiser's keel was laid at the Imperial yards in Danzig; she was the last ship in the Imperial navy to be fitted with a 3-cylinder triple expansion reciprocating engine. Her sister ship, SMS DRESDEN, was fitted with steam turbines. EMDEN was launched in May 1908 and upon completion in 1909 started sea trials in the Baltic, during which she was also honoured by a request to escort the German Imperial yacht HOHENZOLLERN. On 12 April 1910 she departed from Kiel bound for Germany's East-Asian colonies via South American ports. Several days after arriving in Montevideo, the EMDEN sailed to Buenos Aires to participate in celebrations of the centenary of Argentinean independence. Continuing her journey, the EMDEN made two more stops for coal along the South American coast before visiting Tahiti and finally arriving at Apia in German Samoa, where she met up with the cruiser SMS SCHARNHORST, the flagship of Germany's East Asia squadron. After finally arriving in Tsing Tao, the capital and main port of Germany's Chinese colony, EMDEN saw her first action against the 'Sokehs' rebels on the island of Ponape in the

German Caroline Islands in January 1911. Subsequently she was despatched on flag-flying cruises in Pacific and South East Asian waters, visiting Hong Kong as well as ports in China and Japan. In May 1913, EMDEN's famous commanding officer, 'Korvettenkapitän' (Commander) Karl von Müller, joined the cruiser's complement. Von Müller's innate gentlemanly demeanour and sense of honour earned him the respect of friend and foe alike, standing in stark contrast to the image of the "blood-thirsty, baby-killing Hun" Allied propaganda had initially depicted of the German enemy. During the Second Chinese Revolution, von Müller was ordered to take the EMDEN to the Yangtse River to put down a Chinese revolt. In August 1913, EMDEN, with several British and Japanese warships, bombarded a rebel Chinese stronghold into submission. After another visit to Japan in company with SMS SCHARNHORST, EMDEN visited Shanghai and eventually returned to Tsingtao for an engine overhaul. Upon the outbreak of the First World War, EMDEN raided Allied shipping in Tsuchima Strait, capturing a Russian mail ship; but was subsequently ordered to join the East Asia squadron off Pagan in the Northern Marianas. Operating under command of Vice Admiral Maximilian, Graf von Spee, the German East Asia squadron attempted to outrun the various, much heavier Allied warships arrayed against it and make for Germany via Cape Horn. However, von Müller persuaded von Spee to agree to his plan to distract the Allies by detaching his cruiser -accompanied by a supply vessel and a collier- from the home bound German China-squadron and giving it permission to raid Allied shipping at will in the Indian Ocean. By doing so they would draw the RN's attention to an effective and dangerous 'commerce-raider' disrupting British merchant shipping and commerce in and around the Indian Ocean. In the following 3 months the EMDEN -disguised as a British 'Town class' cruiser (actually as HMS YARMOUTH) by the addition of a fourth (false) funnel- under von Müller achieved a reputation for seamanship, daring and gallantry unparalleled by any other German crew or navy captain. The EMDEN's successes were of extreme concern to the Admiralty in London -where Winston Churchill presided as First Sea Lord- and also to the Australian and New Zealand governments; to such an extent that troop transports from Australia were suspended as well as merchant shipping on various 'runs' - e.g. Bombay to Aden and Colombo to Singapore. By the end of October 1914 no fewer than 60 allied warships were pre-occupied with the hunt for the EMDEN in the Indian Ocean. Von Müller was scrupulous about avoiding casualties among civilian non-combatants. For instance, having taken fourteen prizes and raiding shore installations by the end of September 1914, the only non-combatants killed by the EMDEN's guns were five locals who died in Madras during a shore bombardment of British oil tanks. During a later daring raid on Penang EMDEN subsequently sank the Russian cruiser ZHEMCHUK and the French destroyer MOUSQUET. Thirty-six French survivors from the MOUSQUET were rescued; and when three died of wounds a few days later, they were buried at sea with full honours. The remaining Frenchmen were then transferred to a British steamer, NEWBURN, which was stopped by the German cruiser, but not attacked, to take on board and transport the French prisoners to Sumatra in the neutral Dutch East Indies. On 9th November 1914 the EMDEN was off the Cocos-Keeling Islands, intent on attacking the radio and telegraph facilities there and to rendezvous with a collier and supply vessel to take on board stores and coal to fuel her own requirements; while waiting for the supply vessel, a well-armed shore party of nearly 50 men under 1st Lt. von Mücke - EMDEN's first officer and 2-ic- landed on Direction Island to destroy the radio-station and cut the submarine cables between Australia and Colombo and Mauritius and Batavia. Faced by the large numbers of armed men in the shore party, the station's civilian operators offered no resistance, however before the shore party could wreck the radio- and telegraph system, one of the operators managed to get an

emergency radio message out, reporting the presence of the EMDEN. This signal was picked up by the RAN's cruiser HMAS SYDNEY, which detached itself from a convoy that happened to be nearby and very soon appeared on the scene to investigate. The EMDEN was caught unaware and in the ensuing engagement -being by then the most hunted German raider in the world, with up to 70 allied warships searching for her- the German cruiser was relentlessly shelled by the SYDNEY's superior firepower. After receiving more than 100 hits, Von Muller beached his stricken vessel on North Keeling Island. HMAS SYDNEY then immediately left the scene in pursuit of the EMDEN's supply ship, and when it returned the next day, von Müller, with the rest of his surviving crew, many of them wounded, were captured and eventually taken to Malta via Colombo. EMDEN's crew had suffered 131 killed and 65 wounded, from a total complement of 360. The SYDNEY's casualties were much lighter, with only 4 dead and less than 15 wounded. During the SYDNEY's absence in pursuit of the supply ship, von Mücke and his shore party seized the Cocos Islands' 120-ton, three-masted copra-carrying schooner AYESHA and made for neutral Padang on Sumatra, where they were able to rendezvous with a German merchant vessel. Von Mücke's party made their way to Turkey by way of the Red Sea and the Arabian peninsula. They eventually reached Germany and received a heroic welcome in May 1915. Although still a prisoner of war, von Müller was awarded the Iron Cross First Class by the Kaiser; as did every other surviving officer who had served in the EMDEN. 50 of EMDEN's petty officers and ratings were awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. Von Müller was later relocated to England while his men remained on Malta as prisoners of war. In October 1918, von Müller was released as part of a prisoner exchange. Returning home, he was presented with the 'Pour le Merite' (Blue Max) medal and promoted to the rank of full captain (Kapitän zur See) He later retired due to ill-health and died suddenly on March 11th, 1923. As a special mark of honour, the German government later allowed all of the EMDEN's surviving officers and men to hyphenate their name by adding as a suffix the word 'Emden' to their surname; this honour is upheld to this day, witness the numerous 'X-Emdens' amongst German citizens still extant; most notably the Kaiser's nephew Prince Franz-Jozef von Hohenzollern-Emden, who had served in SMS EMDEN as a junior officer. The wreck of the EMDEN on North Keeling Island is a protected site under Australia's 'Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976' A personal narrative of the 'Battle of Cocos' by one of HMAS SYDNEY's sailors can be read at: <http://cocossydney.blogspot.com/2008/08/7.html>