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German Odysseys of the First World War

By

David Terence Hillman

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of History

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Abstract

DAVID HILLMAN German Odysseys of the First World War.
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This thesis examines the journeys of four separate German military units away from the European theater and forced to operate without aid or allies in the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans, as well as in Africa. Each group had a clear goal to accomplish, to strengthen the German war effort from abroad, either by disrupting, evading, or diverting Allied personnel and war materiel. To accomplish this, each group required cunning, discipline, deception, and strong leadership. These odysseys, although more aptly compared to Xenophon's *Anabasis*, demonstrate the global nature of the First World War, the deterioration of international good will and chivalry towards one's adversaries between 1914 and 1919, and the success of unconventional strategies in evading overwhelming enemy forces while away from the Eastern or Western Fronts. This thesis specifically examines the journeys of the SMS *Emden* in the Pacific and Indian Oceans from the summer of 1914 to November 1914, her landing crew through the Indian Ocean and Middle East from November 1914 to May 1915, the SMS *Seeadler* from her conception in the summer of 1916 to August 1917, and the *Schutztruppe* in German East Africa from 1914 to 1918. The leaders of these groups were Karl von Müller, Hellmuth von Mücke, Count Felix von Luckner, and Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck respectively.

Introduction

The First World War is often characterized only by the land war in its European theater, and does not always cover the global nature of the conflict. This is despite the longest naval battle and the largest naval battle ship-for-ship occurring during this war, and the direct conflicts that took place from southern Africa to east Asia, as well as along the major shipping routes in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. While the Central Powers in Europe and the Middle East may have been surrounded by the Allied Powers, Germany possessed both the second largest navy in the world then, and colonies from modern Samoa to Togo, although only recently acquired by 1914. As a result of the sudden escalation of international tensions in Europe between 1st and 23rd August 1914—when the Russian, British, French, and Japanese Empires began to declare war on the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires—these German groups had to fend for themselves to a varying level of success and international attention. However, the attention paid to these groups abroad works to show the polarization of the two sides over the course of the war, demonstrating the lost sense of this being a ‘civilized war’ and the increase of chauvinist feelings in the populations.

When the state of war was declared, the Imperial German Navy’s East Asia Squadron under Maximilian von Spee was stationed at the German colony of Kiautschou in China, specifically at the coastal city of Tsingtau, where weeks prior joint German and British naval celebrations had taken place. The Squadron planned to sail across the Pacific to the Americas while disrupting Allied trade, then into the Atlantic to Germany to help the German High Seas Fleet defeat the Royal British Navy in the North Sea, but

they were defeated at the Falklands, with hundreds of casualties. However, the SMS *Emden*, under Karl von Müller had been detached to enter the Indian Ocean to begin commerce raiding to keep the British Navy occupied and confused at the start of the war.

The men of the *Emden* were aware that their old ship was likely to be defeated in a battle with a more modern enemy ship, as she was nine years old at the time, but were excited by the chance to prove their value to the German war effort by hurting British trade and prestige. The *Emden* captured over thirty ships—causing loss of material, investment, and insurance costs estimated in the millions of pounds. Their success and strict adherence to the then prevailing rules of war gained the attention of the German and neutral press, as well as the Allied papers, with one British paper claiming that they hoped the *Emden* would be sunk, but that not a single man from the crew should be killed because of their contribution to naval history. Defeated by the Australian Navy on 9th November 1914, when thoughts that the Great War may be over by Christmas still circulated, the international outpouring of respect for the crew and Captain of so successful a commerce raider continued for weeks, aided by the mystery of the ship's landing crew, who had escaped capture and gone missing in the Indian Ocean.

In truth, the landing crew under Hellmuth von Mücke had commandeered the *Ayesha*, an old British sailing ship, and made for a neutral Dutch port nearby with the hope of escaping defeat or imprisonment. When they discovered that the *Emden* was destroyed and that German East Africa was surrounded, they opted to return to Germany through the Ottoman Empire, which had joined the Central Powers by then and offered the best chance of accessing Europe from the east. To avoid the British and French navies, the landing crew had to make the *Ayesha* appear like an incompetent fishing

vessel, and later the German steamer *Choising*—with whom they met en route to the Red Sea—as a neutral Italian ship. In February of 1915, word spread to Germany from the Ottomans that the *Emden*'s landing crew had arrived at Yemen to the excitement of the German and neutral papers, but skepticism from the Allies.

The war continued into 1916, when the inconclusive Battle of Jutland in the North Sea failed to give either the British or German navies the satisfaction of total victory over the other. The situation at Jutland resulted in an unbroken British starvation blockade of Germany, and the resumption of unrestricted U-Boat warfare against the Allies in the Atlantic. With the cost of the war increasing and coal supplies dwindling, the German Admiralty chose to deploy a captured windjammer disguised as a Norwegian commerce ship to slip through the blockade and raid in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The ship, named the SMS *Seeadler* by her Fregattenkapitän Count Felix von Luckner, was provided with false Norwegian letters, books, photographs, nametags, and twenty seven Norse speaking German sailors to complete the illusion, as well as a hidden area for thirty seven additional crew members and room for up to four hundred prisoners.

Despite delays and having to adapted to new issues as they arose, the *Seeadler*'s disguise worked, and it was able to run the blockade on Christmas Day 1916, beginning to raid the shipping lanes of the Atlantic as sailing ships had in wars for centuries beforehand. The Captains of the captured ships were fooled into drawing close to help the old windjammer, only to discover that it was a member of the Imperial German Navy once within range of her guns. Although the women aboard the captured vessels were scared of what the dastardly 'Huns' would do to them once aboard, they reported later that their captors were the epitome of considerate treatment, especially the Captain, who

often dined and entertained the growing ‘Captain’s Club’ as the *Seeadler* moved south to Cape Horn for the Pacific.

Of the Germans abroad, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and his *Schutztruppe* in the German East African colony were the only unit in the Imperial German forces to successfully operate from August 1914 to after the war ended in November 1918. Knowing that a war between the European superpowers would leave the German colonies in Africa exposed, von Lettow’s goal was to divert Allied war material away from the European theater, where the fate of the German colonies would ultimately be decided. Through the use of guerilla tactics and proper training, the *Schutztruppe*—who numbered far fewer than their British, Belgian, and later Portuguese adversaries—were able to adapt to Allied efforts to entrap them, operating in the colony until the end of 1917. When trapped on the southern border with Portuguese Mozambique, von Lettow chose to avoid a conclusive final battle that his force would lose and instead left the German colony, leading to the Allied and neutral papers claiming success in Africa until they realized that they would be forced to continue sending men and supplies to east Africa to find the *Schutztruppe*.

The treatment of the *Emden*’s exploits by the global press during the opening days of the war stands in stark contrast to the opinions held about von Luckner and von Lettow in 1917 and 1918. The short war that had been planned for by the European governments and expected by many in Europe proved naïve, and the result was increasingly agitated populations as starvation blockades, deadly U-Boat warfare, constant death notices, and the use of less humane weapons escalated. The examination of the *Emden*, *Ayesha*, and *Seeadler* work to show how the chivalrous nature of successful odysseys gained attention

for how they contrasted the war in Europe from 1914 to 1917, while the *Schutztruppe*'s odyssey in Africa illustrates the scale of the anger at the end of the war, and the difference of opinion over Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's legacy.

Chapter I: The SMS Emden in the Asiatic and Australian Theaters¹

When Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated by Serbian nationalists in Sarajevo on 28th June 1914, a series of previously established war plans were retrieved by the European superpowers in preparation for a conflict.² The German Empire had begun building up its naval power in the opening decade of the century to compete with the preeminent British Navy in case of such a struggle, leading to a German-British naval arms race that culminated during the war.³ In order to control their expenses, the German government started by constructing economical light cruisers that were named for and co-sponsored by German cities, leading to the production of ships such as the SMS *Karlsruhe*, *Königsberg*, and *Emden*.⁴ These three ships ultimately acted as independent commerce raiders in the Caribbean, western Indian, and Pacific and Indian Ocean respectively in the early days of the conflict.⁵ The SMS *Emden*'s journey became the most well-known across the globe for the method with which her Fregattenkapitän (Senior Commander) Karl von Müller conducted warfare, her success as a commerce raider, and the actions of the landing crew after her defeat. Deep in hostile waters and cut off from allies, the story of the *Emden* was

¹ "Victory Medal: Definition of Theaters of War; An Army Order," *The Shanghai times (1914-1921)*, 3rd November 1919, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/1324944700/4BD77DFC5B094F80PQ/8?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th October 2020).

² John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 3-4.

³ Alison Graham, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2017), 75.

⁴ Gene Zimmerman, "Gallant Last Cruise of the Raider Emden," *Sea Classics* 31, no. 11 (2008), 42-9.

⁵ Dan van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War: The Amazing Story of Captain Karl von Müller and the S.M.S. Emden* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 199-200.

surprisingly well known from the rural communities of Yemen to the streets of Dublin, New York, and Berlin.

Two weeks after the assassination, the news from Sarajevo reached Tsingtau—the capital of Germany’s coastal Chinese colony Kiautschou—but colonial life only paused briefly, to mourn the death of Franz Ferdinand, before returning to inter-European comradery abroad.⁶ The general feeling of European colonists in Tsingtau was that the events taking place half a world away were trivial to their daily lives, although there were those within the German leadership abroad who stayed keenly alert to news from Berlin. German naval plans stayed the course until 7th July, when the *Emden* was ordered to abandon her trip to Shanghai and remain in the bay at Tsingtau.⁷

Colonial governor Alfred Meyer-Waldeck and Vizeadmiral (Vice Admiral) Maximilian von Spee of the German East Asiatic Squadron had been preparing for these orders from Berlin for weeks, if not months, and began to arrange for the conflict just as the armies in Europe were doing.⁸ Once the 1890 Austria-Hungarian cruiser *Kaiserin Elisabeth* was brought to Tsingtau, the public began to suspect that tensions were rising to a concerning degree. However, while still in a state of peace, von Spee had von Müller provide him with “a careful review of all German naval units in Asia, their precise locations, and their state of preparedness... he moved his squadron to the Eastern Carolines without public announcement and asked von Müller to arrange the quiet shift of a few gunboats operating on the rivers in China.”⁹ Since Kiautschou was uniquely

⁶ Edwin Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2001), 33.

⁷ Wes Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider: The Destruction of SMS Emden* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 10-2.

⁸ Charles Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtau: World War I in Asia* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1976), 22-3.

⁹ Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtau*, 26-8.

controlled by the Imperial German Navy instead of the German Colonial Office, von Müller was temporarily put in charge to protect the main city as hostilities between Russia and Germany accelerated.¹⁰

To avoid being trapped by any number of potential foreign enemies—not unlike the SMS *Königsberg*'s later fate in the Rufiji Delta of German East Africa for nine months from 1914 to July 1915—von Müller chose to sail the *Emden* out of Tsingtau's harbor on 31st July.¹¹ The news of the German-Russian state of war and the Kaiser's call for the full mobilization of the German Army and Navy reached the crew of the *Emden* via wireless on 2nd August, and many expected the English and French to soon join Russia against the Central Powers.¹² After the news was given to the men, the crew of the *Emden* cheered at the chance to show their ability in practice and bring pride to the Kaiser, including the officers Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant Commander) Hellmuth von Mücke, Marine-Zahlmeisterapplikant (Deputy Paymaster) Franz Bordeaux, and Leutnant zur See (Sub Lieutenant) Prince Franz Joseph von Hohenzollern, nephew to Kaiser Wilhelm II.¹³ Among their tasks would also be the training of the new recruits that had arrived from Germany in February 1914.¹⁴

The *Emden* came upon its first prize of a fruitful career near the then-neutral waters of Japan, the newly constructed and wireless-capable Russian mail steamer *Rjasan*. Oberleutnant (Lieutenant) Julius Lauterbach, who was instrumental in training

¹⁰ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 22.

¹¹ Prince Franz Joseph von Hohenzollern, *Emden: My experiences in S.M.S. Emden* (London, England: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1932), 4-7.

¹² Hellmuth von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider: Two Accounts of the S.M.S. Emden During the First World War by One of its Officers* (East Yorkshire, England: Leonaur, 2012), 13-5.

¹³ Franz Bordeaux, *Bordeaux Diary and Papers Concerning the Ship Emden, 29 July 1914– 3 January 1915* (New South Wales, Australia: State Library, 2013), 5-6.

¹⁴ Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtau*, 10-1.

the prize crews of the *Emden* and ultimately escaped capture and returned to service in Germany in October 1915, was sent to board the *Rjasan* and stop its wireless signaling after the *Emden* fired a shell across her bow.¹⁵ ‘Prize crews’—the name given to the group of sailors tasked with boarding the ‘prize ships’ taken by a commerce raider—had to quickly board and secure the newly captured ship, even more difficult and important during the First World War because wireless communications made calling for help simpler and quicker than at any point during the nineteenth century.

Captain Austin of the *Rjasan* was initially cold to the prize crew until Lauterbach reminded him that they had been speaking German and drinking beer together in Tsingtau two weeks prior. This worked to warm relations between captors and prisoners, and began the rumors of the *Emden*’s chivalrous and gentlemanly conduct in commerce raiding that spread internationally during the war.¹⁶ It also demonstrated the sudden shift that the European colonists and militaries experienced from their co-operative and intermingled lives of general ease to adversaries in a bitter war within a brief period of time.

Given the speed and abilities of the ship, as well as the dangerous conditions lifeboats endured in the stormy weather, von Müller chose to risk returning to Tsingtau to drop off the passenger-prisoners and fit out the *Rjasan* as an auxiliary cruiser. While en route to Tsingtau, the wireless operators aboard the *Emden* discovered that the British had joined the Russians and French in war against Germany, complicating matters of resupply and dominance on the seas.¹⁷ After arriving at the colony to find no enemy ships

¹⁵ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 42.

¹⁶ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 42-3.

¹⁷ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 14-6.

nearby, and waiting for hours as the *Emden* and *Rjasan* were led through the newly-mined harbor, von Müller began full preparations for naval warfare.¹⁸

As temporary protector of Tsingtau, he took stock of the German merchants in the bay and selected the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* as a raider and the *Markomania* as a coal supplier for the *Emden*, while waiting for the *Rjasan* to be fitted with the guns and name of the slower auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran*.¹⁹ With the message that the *Emden* was to meet von Spee and the Squadron at the Marianas Archipelago, coal, food, soap, cigarettes, alcohol, ammunition, and all other essentials were loaded onto the ships, while all non-essential items that may cause additional damage to the crew in a fight were removed on 6th August.²⁰ By the end of the day, the *Emden* was prepared to meet the Squadron at Pagan and left Tsingtau, whose governors knew that with Britain as adversaries in the war—and Japan being the close allies of the British—an attack on the colony would only be a matter of time.²¹

Arriving at Pagan, von Müller met with von Spee and the Commanders of the Squadron to discuss their plan to cross the Pacific and to disrupt British and Allied shipping around South America.²² Having realized that a war with the international naval powerhouse that was the British Empire would leave the German Squadron without friendly ports in which to repair, restock, or hide if damaged, von Spee established the land-based *Ettapes* around the Indian and Pacific oceans. The *Ettapes* were usually administered by a mid-ranked officer of the Imperial German Navy and covered

¹⁸ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 15-7.

¹⁹ Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtau*, 41-2.

²⁰ Robb Robinson, “Wes Olson, The Last Cruise of a German Raider: The Destruction of SMS Emden,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 32, no. 2 (May 2020), 521.

²¹ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 39.

²² Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 61.

“communications, intelligence, coaling and supply... although so much of the Far East was under the control of Germany’s enemies, there was also plenty of neutral territory, including China, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines (then American) and other islands under the United States flag such as Guam and Hawaii.”²³ von Spee intended to use the *Ettapes* in neutral territories to resupply and evade the numerically and technologically superior British Navy, since the rules of war dictated that acts of aggression within neutral waters was strictly forbidden.²⁴

After hearing the plan, von Müller suggested keeping a ship in the Indian Ocean while the rest of the Squadron sailed east in order to tie additional British personnel and war material away from the European theater.²⁵ As an older ship that was as well gunned, armored, or fast as the other members of the Squadron, the *Emden* was a sensible option for what would likely be a suicide mission in the Indian Ocean, or ‘the British lake’ as some then referred to it.²⁶ Just as Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck of German East Africa understood the German military’s role abroad, von Spee realized that the war would ultimately be decided on the battlefields of Europe. All that the German Navy could do was try to tip the scales in Berlin’s favor by keeping Allied soldiers, money, and weapons stuck in subsidiary theaters for as long as possible.²⁷

In the German Navy, this was referred to as the “fleet in being” theory, which held that the simple existence of the growing German Navy posed enough of a threat to British shipping and power that it could preoccupy a sizable portion of their resources,

²³ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 34.

²⁴ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 53-4.

²⁵ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 62-3

²⁶ Zimmerman, “Gallant Last Cruise of the Raider Emden,” 42-9 & 64-5.

²⁷ Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa: The East Africa Campaign of the First World War by the Most Notable German Commander* (East Yorkshire, England: Leonaur, 2010), 9.

even if not actively damaging the Allied forces.²⁸ This theory was also held by Fregattenkapitän Max von Looff of the *Königsberg*, whose entrapment in the east African Rufiji River Delta continued to keep British ships and sailors away from Europe in the longest battle in naval history. von Spee understood that the disruption of British shipping in the Indian Ocean would take pressure off of the Squadron in the Americas, aid the German war effort, and severely damage the prestige and confidence of the British Empire if successful.²⁹ The day after the meeting, when the Squadron set sail for the Americas, von Spee had the message “*Emden* detached, wish you good luck!” signaled to the jubilation of the *Emden*’s crew, who could now show the world what they were capable of, and relish in their successes as a naval unit independent from the rest of the Squadron.³⁰

One of the unique difficulties of an odyssey at sea was the issue of resupply, not just of food, daily essentials, and—for a commerce raider—ships to transfer passengers onto for transportation back to land, but also feeding the ship’s constant need of coal, as most naval ships during the First World War required. The start of the *Emden*’s journey to the Indian Ocean was through the Dutch East Indies, which made the evasion of detection necessary, and thus commerce raiding could not yet begin.³¹ The result of this handicap was that the food supply on the *Emden* and *Markomannia* began to lose variety, becoming a daily variant on dried beef, dried vegetables, and rice. Living in a post-*Potemkin*-mutiny world, the officers of the *Emden* understood the need to properly feed the crew:

²⁸ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 21.

²⁹ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 41-2.

³⁰ von Mücke, *The Kaiser’s Raider*, 25.

³¹ Bordeaux, *Bordeaux Diary*, 22-3.

As regards the men's food, it was our first consideration to procure the best for them, and to obtain fresh meat at every opportunity, e.g. from the supplies of the ships we captured later. The respect and preference given to the men in the question of food is, of course, natural, as they have more manual work to do than the officers, and therefore in greater need of and better claim to good nourishment. Adherence to this principle of care for the men's food was richly rewarded by the fact that we had few cases of illness during our cruise.³²

Once raiding finally began along the British fishing ships, fresh food became so abundant that some passengers from the scuttled prizes aboard were surprised by the 'barnyard' appearance of livestock and coal dust on the decks on the increasingly famous *Emden*.³³ This included four 'war cats' that were born in the officer's sleeping-quarters one night and named after the prize ships captured by the *Emden*, who were looked after by those crew members off duty at any given point.³⁴

The necessity for everyday essentials besides food, such as soap or alcohol, were also satisfied through commerce raiding, although only in accordance with the rules of war as to avoid unnecessary expenses for Germany or bad publicity for the German Navy.³⁵ For instance, on 9th September when the *Emden* stopped a ship only to discover it was the neutral Greek *Pontoporus*, but the cargo was coal destined for Britain, it was "legitimate contraband under the international rules for cruiser warfare." In order to avoid having to find a port and spend hours coaling from the *Pontoporus* to the *Emden* or *Markomania*, von Müller hired the Greek Captain to follow the *Emden* for coaling until the supply of Bengal coal ran out.³⁶ This was a quick and fully legal solution to

³² von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 45-6.

³³ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 49-50.

³⁴ Bordeaux, *Bordeaux Diary*, 30-1.

³⁵ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 50-1.

³⁶ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 49.

disrupting enemy trade, upholding the rules of war, and assuring the *Emden*'s own supply of Indian coal. However, the *Pontoporus* followed the *Emden* for quite some time as Indian coal—of which it held 6,600 pounds—was the least clean-burning coal, requiring daily cleaning of the engines and producing massive black clouds of smoke that could give away the position of the ship.³⁷ This was only to be used as the better Chinese coal from the Shantung region ran out, and only until a better supply—ideally Welsh coal—could be captured. This finally occurred in late September when the British *Buresk* was caught with 6,000 pounds of Cardiff coal, and was ordered to follow the *Emden* going forward.³⁸

Later, on 12th September when the *Emden* found the ship *Kabinga* flying under the British flag but carrying goods destined for then-neutral America, its sinking would place the expense of the cargo on the German government.³⁹ The solution to the issue that best helped von Müller was having these and some entirely neutral ships act as receptacles for the prisoners from the prize ships. Not only did this free crew members from guard duty and cut down on food consumption, but by accommodating the prisoners and treating them well, their stories upon return to shore boosted the public perception of the German Navy.⁴⁰ This was not the only reason why von Müller treated prisoners well and released them, but it did help build the myth of the *Emden* as a chivalrous raider dead-set on obeying the rules of war and civility around the Indian Ocean, as proven by the ‘three cheers’ given by former prisoners aboard the *Kabinga* when it was set free.⁴¹

³⁷ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 70.

³⁸ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 44-5.

³⁹ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 90.

⁴⁰ “When the *Emden* Raided Penang,” *The New York Times*, 20th December 1914, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1914/12/20/issue.html> (accessed 25th September 2020).

⁴¹ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 86-7.

Coaling was a difficult and time-consuming activity, but necessary for the success and survival of any ship at war, so the officers became innovative with creating incentives and evading the enemy while in the act. Since hundreds to over a thousand pounds of coal may need to be transferred from the *Markomannia* or other coaling ships to the *Emden*, the crew was broken into teams that could work while the others rested. Thus, it became easy for the officers to incentivize the crew by making it a competition of who was the fastest and most effective coaling team, the winners of which would receive extra beer and cigar rations.⁴² Still, coaling at port was difficult as enemy patrols were increasingly scanning the British shipping routes, coasts, and shoals for the *Emden*—as was her goal. This was at the behest of the local governments, with the government of New Zealand threatening to resign if their troop transport ships did not receive an escort on their way to Europe.⁴³

While it slowed the productivity of the coaling teams, even though it could only be done during clear weather and damaged the sides of the ships, the German light cruiser did something that many members of the British Admiralty thought impossible or preposterous: they coaled at sea.⁴⁴ This process was fairly damaging to the ships involved as their sides banged against one another and the dropped bags of coal dented the *Emden's* deck—which resulted in the *Emden's* only casualty before her final fight, the leg of Torpedoobermatrose (Leading Torpedoman) Possehl.⁴⁵ However, the ability of the *Emden* and her supply ships to coordinate meeting points and then maintain radio silence at all times meant their tracking was all the harder for the Allied navies, who were

⁴² Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 70-1.

⁴³ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 97.

⁴⁴ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 73.

⁴⁵ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 200.

increasing their presence in the Indian Ocean considerably, and ultimately earned the *Emden* the respect of the British Admiralty.⁴⁶

To further increase the number of Allied ships sent to the Indian Ocean required grand action from the *Emden*, and so von Müller decided to raid the Indian port city of Madras, which had massive oil tanks within range of their guns. The action took place on 22nd September, and upon arrival the entire city was illuminated to the surprise of the *Emden*'s crew given the state of war, making the targeting and destroying of the oil tanks and military facilities much easier.⁴⁷ Trying to cast doubt about Britain's true strength over the population of India, von Müller specifically avoided damaging any residential or non-militarily significant targets in the hopes that this may encourage the people of India to rise against Britain, robbing the Empire of valuable resources and personnel for the European theater.⁴⁸

The local papers spoke about the attack for days and acknowledged the success of the *Emden*'s action at Madras over the British Navy, which was supposedly the world's foremost naval power since the battle of Trafalgar, worrying local British officials about a panic.⁴⁹ The night the raid occurred, the people of the city and surrounding area "were hurrying down to the beach in every possible way that they could... once they realized what had taken place, and for a couple of hours afterwards crowds of excited people were busy hurrying to and fro [*sic*] trying to glean information and discussing the situation."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 178.

⁴⁷ Bordeaux, *Bordeaux Diary*, 44.

⁴⁸ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 66-8.

⁴⁹ "The *Emden*'s Frolic," *The Times of India*, 25th September 1914, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/231558576?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th September 2020).

⁵⁰ "Emden's... Shells Dropped... A Passing [Bombardment]," *The Times of India*, 24th September 1914, <https://search.proquest.com/hnptimesofindia/docview/250679065/AB47A7A404D94604PQ/1?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th September 2020).

The destruction of the oils tanks could have been worse had the wind been travelling differently, but it still cost the Burma Oil Company nearly 1.9 million liters of kerosene, British-based insurance agencies hundreds of thousands of pounds, and acted as a major blow to Britain's global prestige as the Admiralty was forced to shut down shipping routes less than a day after having declared them safe again.⁵¹

With the successful raid on Madras completed, the *Emden* moved away from the Bay of Bengal to resume commerce raiding, resupplying, and with luck have a chance to clean and repaint the ship's camouflage grey since the scraping while coaling at sea had damaged it.⁵² This was all possible at the harbor of Diego Garcia in early October, an island owned by a British oil company that only received news via mail every three months. As such, the owner of the company came out to receive the German ship—the first that he had seen since 1889—and ask them for the news of the world. He received answers about “world manoeuvres” and the death of Pope Pius X, but no direct reference to the state of international Anglo-German relationships.⁵³ Naturally, when the British Navy arrived at Diego Garcia later to see if the *Emden* had been spotted to the bewilderment of the men on the island, the British newspapers ran wild with the amazing story while the Admiralty fumed.⁵⁴

After their stay at Diego Garcia, commerce raiding was resumed west of the Maldives while moving towards Penang for yet another daring harbor raid, although this was made easy by the prize ships' Captains asking questions such as “how did you learn

⁵¹ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 101; Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 42 & 48.

⁵² Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 15.

⁵³ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 132-5.

⁵⁴ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 78.

of the new and secret course laid out for merchantmen?”⁵⁵ Hearing that there were Russian and French vessels at Penang, a critical point on shipping in the area, von Müller believed that a quick assault at dawn could prove devastating to the Allied ships. In order to trick the other ships in the harbor, von Müller employed a fake fourth funnel conceived and built by von Mücke to make the *Emden* look British.⁵⁶

The *Emden* arrived in the Penang harbor on 28th October with the fourth funnel up and the war flag lowered until moments before her torpedoes—of which Franz Joseph von Hohenzollern was the officer in charge—were fired on the Russian cruiser *Zhemchug* at 5:18 am.⁵⁷ The destruction of the *Zhemchug* was swift and completed within minutes, exacerbated by the lack of leadership after a large portion of the officers and crew abandoned ship at the very start of the attack.⁵⁸ No small part of the *Emden*'s success came from the enemy's Captain, who “was not aboard at the time; having ordered the torpedoes disarmed, the ready ammunition stowed except for the twelve rounds, and the fires out in all but one of the sixteen boilers, and having failed to set extra watches or darken ship.” The failure was so severe that a later naval court in Vladivostok stripped the Captain and First Officer of their decoration, their ranks, and their status as members of the Russian nobility.⁵⁹

While the *Emden* was unable to do too much damage to enemy commerce in the harbor during her brief period there, von Müller did halt a ship on his way out to explain why the *Emden* had not stopped to pick up Russian survivors and offered his apologies

⁵⁵ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 57.

⁵⁶ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 75-6.

⁵⁷ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 172-3.

⁵⁸ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 62.

⁵⁹ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 90.

for firing at a civilian ship.⁶⁰ Afterwards, the *Emden* spotted the French destroyer *Mousquet*, which was quickly fired on and defeated, although it continued to return fire briefly afterwards, and the Captain—having lost his legs in the attack—ordered his men to lash him to the bridge so he could honorably pass with his ship.⁶¹ The story of Penang spread across the world, with American newspapers such as *The New York Times* publishing firsthand accounts of the battle in December about von Müller’s conduct, since his “refusal to sink [sic] unarmed vessels while the crews were on board, his refraining from bombarding the town, his stopping to pick up the crew of the *Mosquet*... at once made him ‘that gentleman, the Captain of the *Emden*.’ On all sides you heard ‘I hope they sink the *Emden*, but it will be a shame if any of her crew are lost.’”⁶² The article was published a month after the *Emden* was sunk and demonstrated the fascination audiences around the world had with a modern light cruiser conducting itself with gallantry, which was coming rapidly to an end on the European continent during the First World War.

With a successful career raiding, the bombarding of the oil tanks at Madras, and now the obliteration of a Russian cruiser and a French destroyer, von Müller chose to move along from Penang to west of Sumatra, towards the British wireless station on Direction Island.⁶³ The importance of long-range wireless stations was understood by all sides going into the conflict, allowing information from Windhoek and Tanga in Germany’s African colonies to reach Berlin, or for the British Navy in the Indian Ocean

⁶⁰ “When the *Emden* Raided Penang,” 20th December 1914.

⁶¹ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 53; Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 136.

⁶² “When the *Emden* Raided Penang,” 20th December 1914.

⁶³ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 200.

to communicate to London through South Africa.⁶⁴ Since Germany had so few wireless stations abroad that could withstand British attacks for long, von Spee had begun outfitting German merchant vessels with ‘Telefunken’ wireless transmitters.⁶⁵ By doing so, the issues caused by a lack of fixed wireless stations could be offset by communicating through traveling—albeit shorter ranged—‘stations’, which would have to be hunted down by the British Navy.

In contrast, the British Marconi transmitters were on relatively few merchant vessels at the time, and since the *Emden* operated independently of the Squadron and Berlin, it need not break radio silence while still listening for merchant chatter to locate prizes and evade Allied warships.⁶⁶ This proved especially helpful to the *Emden* since the British Admiralty had captured a copy of the German Navy’s codebook earlier in the war, however while “justifiably concerned about possible leaking of its ability to read German signals, the [British General] Staff were indeed less willing to pass things on than perhaps they should have been.”⁶⁷ The ability to listen in on foreign communications, which revealed information about changes in shipping routes and the identities of coded British Navy call signs, without giving away their own position was a large part of the reason why the *Emden* was so successful at commerce raiding.

The *Emden* arrived at Direction Island, the north-eastern most island of the Keeling Island group, on 8th November, but delayed the attack until 9th November while von Müller waited for the *Buresk* and their new coaler *Exford* to meet him at a designated

⁶⁴ Franz Bordeaux, *The Emden Sydney Fight, 9-10 November 1914* (New South Wales, Australia: State Library, 2013), 1.

⁶⁵ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 34.

⁶⁶Ibid., 68.

⁶⁷ Robert Gaudi, *African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (Caliber, NY: Berkley, 2017), 6-7; Geoffrey Till, “The British Naval Staff in the First World War,” *The Journal of Military History* 74, no. 2 (2010), 618-9.

point. He was also waiting for the HMAS *Sydney* to leave the area by listening to its weakening radio signal, although the call sign 'NC' led the *Emden's* crew to assume it was the HMS *Newcastle*.⁶⁸ The British wireless station on the island was responsible for three underwater cables that linked South Africa, Australia, and the Dutch East Indies, so von Müller planned to disable the station and have his wireless team aboard message over the airwaves to block out an SOS from the island.⁶⁹

Kapitänleutnant von Mücke was put in charge of the mission, as von Müller thought that a bombardment of the station could be easily repaired if the cables were not properly broken up, and put together his landing party of fifty of the *Emden's* nearly four hundred man crew. In addition to the men "von Mücke commandeered all four of the *Emden's* portable machineguns... he also selected twenty-nine rifles and twenty-four revolvers. The men took the guns apart, cleaned them thoroughly, oiled them, and broke out new boxes of ammunition."⁷⁰ The Germans expected the station to be prepared for such an undertaking as theirs and anticipated having to go up against nearly a hundred men, but only fifty from the crew could be spared at the time.⁷¹ While the landing crew was taking the wireless station, destroying the cables, and detonating the transmitting tower, more *Emden* crew members were spread across the *Buresk*, *Exford*, *Pontoporros*, and Marine-Zahlmeisterapplikant Bordeaux was put on the *Markomannia* with his journal.⁷²

⁶⁸ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 62-3

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-5.

⁷⁰ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 144.

⁷¹ von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 79-80.

⁷² Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 248.

On the morning of 9th November 1914, over three months after the *Emden* had first left Tsingtau, the attack on Direction Island began while the *Emden's* wireless operators tried to signal over the station's call for help. However, the Australian light cruiser *Sydney* caught part of the message about a strange ship and was sent to investigate the issue. The *Sydney* was detached from the nearby Australian convoy that was escorting the New Zealand troops en route to the European theater, the very same escort that the New Zealand government had demanded out of fear of the *Emden's* antics in the Indian Ocean.⁷³ Since the ability to triangulate the location of wireless messages was not discovered until later, the convoy's wireless operators signaled one another at reduced strength, which appeared to the *Emden's* operators as over two hundred miles away, instead of the actual fifty.⁷⁴ When the *Sydney* approached over the horizon it was originally mistaken for the *Buresk*, which had been called in by the *Emden* once the harbor was deemed safe, and thus not regarded as a threat until it was too late to recall the landing squad.⁷⁵ All that von Müller could do was to leave the harbor and clear the decks for their final battle.

The conflict lasted about an hour and a half, from 9:38 am to 11:11 am, despite von Mücke's account in 1917 that it lasted most of the day, which he would not have known since he was unable to see the majority or end of the conflict from his location.⁷⁶ The *Sydney* was built in 1911, five years after the *Emden*, and had the advantages of

⁷³ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 103

⁷⁴ Kegan, *The First World War*, 260; Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 68.

⁷⁵ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 207-8.

⁷⁶ "First-hand report of battle: Stoker Henry Nielsen describes when his ship HMAS Sydney destroyed German cruiser SMS Emden," *The Observer*, 8th November 2014, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/1621188626/CEDDFC26C56C4CEDPQ/7?accountid=14637> (accessed 11th October 2020); von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider*, 80 & 83.

larger and longer ranged guns, plate armor, and a faster top speed.⁷⁷ However, the range-finders on the *Sydney* failed to accurately utilize the longer-ranged nature of their guns at the start of the conflict, allowing the *Emden* to fire successfully into the *Sydney* and disable her automatic aiming devices, although the plate armor prevented further significant damage before she sailing out of the *Emden*'s range.⁷⁸

What followed was a scene of carnage as the *Sydney*'s range-finders began to find the mark, taking out the communication channels and tubes near the start of the battle and pummeling the *Emden* with dozens of shells over the course of the entire conflict.⁷⁹ The men of the *Emden* continued to fight as they were torn apart by wood and metal shrapnel with each hit, leading to cases after the battle where seventeen year old boys had to choose between either having their arms amputated, or never seeing their mothers again.⁸⁰ In the case of the engine stokers and von Hohenzollern—a torpedo tube officer—the early hits destroyed their ventilation systems. The result was that stokers had to work overtime in 152°F heat while toxic fumes began to fill the air, and von Hohenzollern and his men continued to stand ready for action even as the water level rose above their knees.⁸¹ Had it not been for the torpedo hatch, the Kaiser's nephew and his men may well have drowned in 1914 after the armored hatch had become damaged and unusable.⁸²

While the Imperial German Navy and its officers held that having the ship go down honorably was always the correct course of action, von Müller realized that this would mean little since only a single gun was still operational, and most of the gun-crews

⁷⁷ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 105.

⁷⁸ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 152.

⁷⁹ "First-hand report of battle," 8th November 2014.

⁸⁰ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 168.

⁸¹ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 109.

⁸² von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 211-2.

were already severely wounded or dead.⁸³ Instead, he believed that the best course of action for the ship's crew was to run the *Emden* aground on the nearby reef and hopefully save the remaining men. John Glossop, Captain of the *Sydney*, fired a few more shells into the *Emden* to 'silence its last gun that continued to fire', before turning his attention to the *Buresk*, the *Emden*'s prize-turned-coaling ship captained by Lauterbach. He had been watching the battle for an opportunity to intervene and help the *Emden*, but having found none retreated. Not wanting the British to capture the *Buresk*, the crew began the process of sinking their own ship before leaving for the *Sydney* as prisoners of war.⁸⁴

The crew of the *Emden* was in a far more precarious state. When they first ran aground, von Müller had allowed members of the crew to abandon ship and swim for the nearby beach; harder than it sounded as many died when the waves battered them against the jagged coral or sucked them under. The remaining crew set to work putting out the fires as the doctors administered morphine to those most severely injured, and as the officers began disabling the guns, flooding the magazines, and destroying the code books to make them unusable before the *Sydney* returned.⁸⁵ It took the *Sydney* four hours to return to the *Emden*, during which time the captured prize crew leader Kapitänleutenant der Reserve (Lieutenant Commander of the Reserve) Klöpffer had informed Glossop that von Müller would never surrender, ultimately leading to a fatal miscommunication between the crews of the winner and the wreck.⁸⁶

⁸³ Holger Herwig, "Review: From Imperial Splendour to Internment: The German Navy in the First World War," *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 2 (May 2016), 457-8.

⁸⁴ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 158.

⁸⁵ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 228.

⁸⁶ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 139.

Upon returning, Captain Glossop noticed that the German war flag was still flying and signaled to ask if the *Emden* were still an enemy combatant or not, as the rules of war declared that a ship remained hostile until the flag was brought down. The signalman of the *Emden* replied that they had no codebook and could not understand the message, but both sides claim to have never received a response to their original messages.⁸⁷ Having heard that the von Müller would not surrender, and seeing that the German war flag still flew, Glossop ordered a second round of shelling on the wrecked ship, restarting the fires and killing more crewmen. Realizing the mistake, von Müller ordered his runner Arthur Werner to take it down and fly the white flag. He climbed the mast—all the while shells whizzing past and blowing the *Emden* to hell—and managed to take down the flag.⁸⁸ It was burned by order of von Müller to keep it from becoming a trophy of the three year old Australian Navy, who had just scored their first major victory over an enemy that day.⁸⁹

The battle had ended, but since night was falling and trying to transport the injured from the *Emden* or the beach to the *Sydney* would be difficult enough with proper light, both crews had to remain where they were for the meantime, during which several additional men died.⁹⁰ Glossop did care about his adversary, and sent a personal letter to von Müller asking for permission to help the Germans in any way possible, and over the course of the following day they were brought to the *Sydney* where the doctors of both ships began several continuous days of surgery.⁹¹ The crew of the *Emden* were now

⁸⁷ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 112-3.

⁸⁸ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 142.

⁸⁹ Emma Wynne, "Battle of the Cocos Islands," *ABC Premium News*, 9th November 2014, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/1621885753/CEDDFC26C56C4CEDPQ/1?accountid=14637> (accessed 11th October 2020).

⁹⁰ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 159.

⁹¹ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 158-163.

prisoners of war, and although treated very kindly by the men of the Australian Navy while aboard, they would reside in abysmal conditions in a prison on Malta until repatriation in November 1919, five years later.⁹² All the crew, that is, except for those that had been on Direction Island during the battle, and who had disappeared during the night while the *Sydney* and *Emden* were at the reef.

The end of the *Emden*'s adventures did not stop the public's continued interest in her exploits and daring, with articles involving first-hand accounts of the Madras and Penang raids coming out for weeks and months after she was beached.⁹³ While the *Emden* had only operated for the first three months of the war, her engines "had made ten million revolutions, and we had put thirty thousand nautical miles behind us, with a coal consumption of 6,000 tons."⁹⁴ During that time the crew had intercepted over thirty ships, they had re-coaled at sea and in unaware enemy harbors, utilized new wireless technology to narrowly evaded their pursuing adversaries, and caused millions of pounds of damage and insurance expenses to British trade and insurance, as well as irreparable harm to its prestige.⁹⁵ With all of that, the public of Germany, neutral, and even Allied nations were bound to be interested in the crew and Captain of such a ship, even after their imprisonment.

After the battle concluded, the *Sydney* signaled to the British escort—uncoded—that the *Emden* had been sunk, and news traveled quickly to Britain and Australia. The *London Times* expressed joy that the *Emden* had finally been sunk, but also claimed that

⁹² von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 291-2.

⁹³ "When the *Emden* Raided Penang," 20th December 1914.

⁹⁴ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 199.

⁹⁵ R.K. Lochner, *The Last Gentlemen of War; The Raider Exploits of the Cruiser Emden* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 284.

they hoped von Müller would enjoy a long life and visit London, so that they could celebrate his success and bravery as a nation filled with those who appreciate daring additions to the history of sea warfare.⁹⁶

The news quickly reached the Allied nation of Australia as well, where a letter from a stoker aboard the *Sydney* was published in *The Morning Bulletin* on 6th January 1915. It recounted the experience of the battle, and included a word about the *Emden*'s landing crew, and how the day after the battle, the *Sydney* "landed an armed party at Cocos and found out that the German landing party had cleared out in a schooner they had commandeered."⁹⁷ Despite this escaped group of German sailors, the destruction of the *Emden* by the HMAS *Sydney* brought considerable joy to the people of Australia because it was the first victory of the newly-formed Australian Navy.

In Germany, the news of the *Emden*'s final battle was mourned, but its wildly successful career commerce raiding and the raids on Madras and Penang were celebrated in German newspapers for weeks. Emden's city council wrote to Kaiser Wilhelm II to express how "deeply grieved by the destruction of Your Majesty's glorious ship [they were]... and by the large number of casualties which must be mourned by that sinking."⁹⁸ In return, the Kaiser gave his condolences to the families of the crew members of the cruiser, and promised the city of Emden that the Imperial German Navy would build a stronger *Emden II* to honor her success and service, which was completed and launched in 1916.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Lochner, *The Last Gentlemen of War*, 284

⁹⁷ "First-hand report of battle," 8th November 2014.

⁹⁸ Lochner, *The Last Gentlemen of War*, 285.

⁹⁹ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 220-1.

Newspapers in neutral nations had also lamented the end of the *Emden's* adventures in 1914, with the Norwegian *Aftenposten* in Oslo praising the intelligence and far-sightedness of von Müller to accomplish what he had given the odds stacked against him.¹⁰⁰ However, nine months after the battle in May of 1915, the German journalist Emil Ludwig wrote two articles for the German paper *Berliner Tageblatt*—which was then used in newspapers for interested publics around the world—after meeting von Mücke in Al Ula, Arabia to outline his journey. The articles recaptured the interest of nations around the world, and in America the articles included photographs of von Müller and von Mücke, as well as an artist's rendition of the *Emden*, and a map of the landing crew's journey after encountering the *Sydney*.¹⁰¹

The news of the landing crew's return had restoked interest in the *Emden's* tales. America was still neutral at that time, but the public had an interest in matters of naval warfare then since Britain was supposed to be the global seafaring power. Even so, German raiders such as the *Emden* in the Indian and Pacific, as well as the *SMS Karlsruhe* and *Prinz Eitel* in the Atlantic, continued disrupting and evading the British seemingly everywhere. In some cases, German ships even stayed in then-neutral American ports such as Hampton Virginia for periods of weeks to repair and continue their missions.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Lochner, *The Last Gentlemen of War*, 285

¹⁰¹ Emil Ludwig, "The Wanderers of the Emden: Their Epic Tale," *The New York Times*, 29th May 1915, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/05/29/100156743.html?pageNumber=4> (accessed 25th September 2020).

¹⁰² Mark St John Erickson, "Daring German Sea Raiders Bring World War I to Hampton Roads," *TCA Regional News*, 26th April 2015, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/1675658953/31D2A29538AC4BB8PQ/1?accountid=14637> (accessed 23rd February 2021).

As unrestricted submarine warfare began, and after years and millions of lives were lost on the battlefields of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the ideas of chivalrous warfare and respecting a noble enemy began to dry up. Allied opinion of the German Navy soured, with America entering the war partially because of the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German U-Boat (*Unterseeboot*), but von Müller and the crew of the *Emden* were not demonized like the rest of the German military. The Australian and the British-owned Chinese newspapers continued to write about the noble and powerful crew of the *Emden* in order to increase the reputation of their own navies that had defeated it.¹⁰³ Instead, the Allied failures in German East Africa, and to a much larger extent the destruction on the Western and Eastern Fronts had replaced the nationalist zeal globally, and the crew of the *Emden* was slowly forgotten.

While the men of the *Emden* were suffering in a ghastly and severely undersupplied prison camp in Malta, *Kapitanleutnant* von Müller was suddenly relocated after he had become vocal about the camp providing his men with basic human necessities.¹⁰⁴ It was reported in a Canadian newspaper that he was repatriated from Holland to Germany in October 1918 as his health had been deteriorating from a bout of malaria he had picked up serving on the 1892 German light cruiser SMS *Seeadler* in German East Africa before the war, which eventually caused his death in 1923.¹⁰⁵ However, even at that late stage of the war, the German people and German

¹⁰³ “Men Rescued from the *Emden*,” *The Shanghai Times (1914-1921)*, 6th May 1918, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1324810395/E89888A171E94D3EPQ/7?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th September 2020).

¹⁰⁴ von Hohenzollern, *Emden*, 286.

¹⁰⁵ Randel Gray, ed., *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1906-1921* (London, England: Conway Maritime Press Ltd., 1986): 147; “German Commander of *Emden* is Free,” *The Globe (1844-1936)*, 9th October 1918 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1351745035/250F4207BD5C4855PQ/11?accountid=14637> (accessed 18th January 2021).

government—with exceptions—saw von Müller as a war hero, and awarded him Germany's highest military honor, the Order *Pour le Mérite*.¹⁰⁶ His death was mourned in the Weimar Republic as the loss of a man who had served dutifully and upheld his position with honor, prioritizing the lives of his crewmembers over the German Navy's expectation of never giving up the ship.

The journey of the *Emden* was celebrated in several different ways, including decorations such as the Iron Cross First Class or Iron Cross Second Class for all of the crew members, the Kaiser commissioning the *Emden II* with Iron Crosses to signify the courage of the original, and two or three further 'Emdens' over the following forty years and three governments.¹⁰⁷ Even after the city of Emden decided to stop this practice, the people of Germany and Australia continued to honor the legacy of their navies during the First World War at the site of the *Emden*'s final battle. In 2014, representatives from each government came together with the descendants of both crews to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the battle. While they were there to mourn the loss of life in a truly global conflict, they took solace in the fact that today the two governments hold friendly relations and collaborate to make the world a more peaceful place to avoid any similar conflict in the future.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 184-5 & 187.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 193-8.

¹⁰⁸ Wynne, "Battle of the Cocos Islands," 9th November 2014.

Chapter II: The Crew of the SMS *Ayesha* in the Pacific and Middle East

As the men aboard the SMS *Emden*'s broken decks prepared for their final night of freedom before five years of imprisonment, the *Emden*'s landing crew set sail for the Dutch East Indies port of Padang.¹ The landing crew was led by Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant Commander) Hellmuth von Mücke, the First Officer to Fregattenkapitän (Senior Commander) Karl von Müller, and was composed of fifty men, including fully “armed men with machine guns and demolition charges, and two wireless operators who could identify the right kit to destroy... *Leutnants* Schmidt and Gysling, thirty seamen (all ‘nine-year men’ careerists, who hoped to one day be promoted to petty officers or further), and seventeen technicians.”² The destruction of the *Emden* by the HMAS *Sydney* while the landing crew was away provided the crew with a new mission in the war, different from the *Emden*'s task to disrupt Allied trade in the Indian Ocean; to uphold the fleet-in-being theory, thus diverting Allied resources from the European theater. Not wanting to become prisoners for the remainder of the war, the landing crew chose to return to the service of the German Empire by any means necessary, utilizing scant resources, guise, cunning, and discipline to rejoin the German Navy regardless of any obstacles.³

¹ Anthony Zarb Dimech, “Centenary of the First World War’s end. Prince Franz Joseph of Hohenzollern and the S.M.S. Emden,” *The Malta Independent*, 7th August 2018, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/2084237950/CEDDFC26C56C4CEDPQ/9?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th January 2021).

² Chris Sams, *German Raiders of the First World War; Kaiserliche Marine Cruisers and the Epic Chace* (Croydon, England: Fonthill, 2015), 118.

³ Hellmuth von Mücke, *The ‘Ayesha,’ Being the Adventure of the Landing Squad of the “Emden”* (Boston, MA: Ritter & Company, 1917), 17.

The first job of the squad was to neutralize the British long-range wireless station on Direction Island, which was of vital Allied importance by connecting Batavia (Dutch East Indies), Perth (Australia), and Mauritius (west of Madagascar) via underwater cables.⁴ The guns of the *Emden*, while dated compared to other naval vessels at the time, were more than enough to stop the station's wireless messaging, but von Müller decided against this to save ammunition and in the hope that a quick surprise attack at dawn could take the station before they had the chance to react.⁵ On 9th November 1914, von Mücke and his men set about demolishing everything related to wireless operations, and unfortunately a seismograph after misidentifying what it was. Through it all, the British stationed there were forthcoming with information, and a certain level of friendliness was displayed when the British asked the Germans to topple the radio tower away from the tennis courts and were obliged.⁶

However, the destruction of the underwater cables was a more difficult task, requiring they be located, dredged up, chopped apart, and then brought far enough out into the harbor so that they could not be easily retrieved and repaired after the landing crew departed. Only two of the cables, and none of the hidden backups, were destroyed by the time the *Sydney* approached the island, responding to a signal from the station that got through the German wireless jamming.⁷ While von Mücke and his men tried to return to the *Emden* they were too late, withholding fifty valuable men from the *Emden's* already light crew at the time, and were forced to go back to the island and prepare for

⁴ Hellmuth von Mücke, *The Kaiser's Raider: Two Accounts of the S.M.S. Emden During the First World War by One of its Officers* (East Yorkshire, England: Leonaur, 2012), 95.

⁵ Sams, *German Raiders*, 118.

⁶ Edwin Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 1966), 146-7.

⁷ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 7-8.

the *Sydney's* return after fighting the *Emden*. While the well-armed Germans may have been able to repel a landing by the *Sydney's* crew, the ship's guns would have quickly defeated them as they were even better than the *Emden's*, so von Mücke thought of alternatives to death or imprisonment.⁸

The answer was a “three-masted schooner anchored in the lagoon. The 97-ton *Ayesha*... had been employed on the food run to Batavia until a regular steamship service made the vessel redundant... upon returning to shore [von Mücke] ordered Leutenants Gyssling and Schmidt to take a party to the schooner and prepare her for sea.”⁹ While the ship was old and the hull fairly rotten, it was the best chance that the *Emden's* landing squad had for evading death or imprisonment, and so they prepared the ship for a run to Padang. The British, who initially tried to explain to the Germans that this would fail, eventually came around to the challenge and actively helped by showing where exactly “provisions and water were to be found, urging them to take the freshest supplies. They brought pots and pans, water, oil lamps, old clothing, and blankets to the schooner. They provided pipes and tobacco. They were also generous with advice, particularly concerning the course to follow.”¹⁰ Since the little ship was built for a crew of five to six men and not the fifty that were to take it over one thousand seven hundred nautical miles, the supplies and information provided by the British was crucial to the initial success of the smallest ship in the Kaiser's Navy.¹¹ That night, the crew of the SMS *Ayesha* sailed west out of the harbor, to indicate that they were off to help Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in

⁸ Dan van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War: The Amazing Story of Captain Karl von Müller and the S.M.S. Emden* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 127-8.

⁹ Wes Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider: The Destruction of SMS Emden* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 145.

¹⁰ R. K. Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War* (Annapolis, MD: naval Institute Press, 1988), 219.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 220.

German East Africa, while actually sailing over the horizon and then for the German consul at Padang.

Life aboard the *Ayesha* was difficult despite having far more crew members than were necessary to operate the ship. Firstly, the *Ayesha's* top speed was eight to nine knots, unlike the *Emden* which often cruised at eighteen and could achieve twenty when needed. This did provide an opportunity for the older officers, who had learned to operate a sailing ship in their early careers, and former fishermen among the crew to teach the rest the ropes, so they learned “to set sails, and—more important—to mend them. The *Ayesha's* canvas was old and rotten, and von Mücke was afraid to put much strain on it, so they traveled slowly and conservatively.”¹² There was also the issue of drinking water when it was discovered that three of the four tanks were contaminated by salt water. The solution was to have the crew gather sails and funnel rainwater into receptacles for later use, which worked well enough and gave the crew an opportunity to bathe on deck when it rained.¹³

The crew made do with what they had for everything. The ship's cooks used some of the iron ballast in the hold—used to weigh a ship down into the water when the hold was empty, as was the case with the *Ayesha*—to increase the size of the cooking surfaces and prepare meals for everyone. Most of the men slept in the hold under a sail at first, and thus began to busily “work at making hammocks out of old ropes which they untwisted, out of twine, and out of old sail cloth torn into strips... these hammocks were swung wherever a place could be found for them, and afforded the occupants relief from the

¹² Edwin Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2001), 172.

¹³ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 33-4.

rather violent motion of the ship.”¹⁴ Some things were irreplaceable however, including the single comb that the whole crew had to share, a razor blade that required skill and patience on the rolling waves, and their clothing that was quickly deteriorating to the level of old dishrags.¹⁵

The major issues occurred when storms or other ships came up over the horizon, giving the small, slow sailing ship little time to prepare for the encounter. During a larger storm, the sails had to be furled to keep them from being torn apart and stranding the men in waters filled with British, Australian, and other Allied ships all searching for the final group from the *Emden*. This fear was almost realized on 21st November, when “at 2100 a thunder squall swept in. Because of an operating error the mizzen topsail landed on the gaff arm and tore; now it hung useless. Salvage was impossible in the squall.”¹⁶ The storms could have easily stopped or even destroyed the *Ayesha*, which would have served the British Admiralty well as they and the French were desperately trying to find the crew members after being tricked that they were making for German East Africa or the SMS *Königsberg* along the African coast.¹⁷ The *Ayesha* managed to reach Pedang, and once in the territorial waters of the neutral Dutch on 27th November von Mücke had the German war flag raised to signify that they were members of the *Kaiserliche Marine* in accordance with the rules of warfare.¹⁸

After arriving at the harbor, the crew of the *Ayesha* had to strictly follow the rules of a warship, which meant that they could only stay in the neutral port for twenty four

¹⁴ Ibid., 28-30.

¹⁵ Sams, *German Raiders*, 189.

¹⁶ Lochner, *Last Gentleman of War*, 225-6.

¹⁷ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 135

¹⁸ Olson, *Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 186.

hours, could only receive those items from the port that would not ‘increase their fighting capabilities’, and could neither leave the ship nor allow anyone aboard without permission.¹⁹ While trying to move closer to the other German vessels in port—such as the *Choising*—questions of her status as a proper warship were raised. This came to a head when “the Dutch told Mücke that his ship would be treated as a prize. The ensuing row lasted all day, with the Dutch neutrality officer, a naval lieutenant-captain, sympathetic but the harbormaster, a Belgian by birth, doing his best for his embattled mother-country by trying to strangle the Germans in red-tape.”²⁰ The *Ayesha* was finally declared a warship with the help of the German consul, who also illegally smuggled supplies of chocolate, cigarettes, German newspapers, and other luxuries from the larger German ships to the *Ayesha*, with a letter detailing a rendezvous with the *Choising* near 3°20'S, 99°20'E.²¹

While en route to the meeting area, the *Ayesha* was first met by two German reservists who had seen her in the harbor and wished to join the crew, and since they were outside the territorial waters of the Dutch at the time von Mücke accepted them.²² The journey was relatively quiet, except for the 9th December when a freighter with no flag was spotted coming towards the *Ayesha*. When asked to identify themselves by the armed ship, von Mücke chose to act as an incompetent fisherman, and “took four signal flags that were close at hand, arranged them one above the other, tied knots in the two top flags so no one could tell what they were, and then hoisted the signal up the mainmast so

¹⁹ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 69.

²⁰ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 134

²¹ Lochner, *Last Gentleman of War*, 232

²² von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 77.

it was half hidden by the sails... [the freighter] turned away.”²³ The disguise had worked well to make them seem like incompetent fishermen, and the *Choising* was met near the rendezvous spot on 14th December. Due to poor weather conditions, the transfer of men, munitions, and materials had to wait until 16th December near the island of South Pagai.²⁴ The *Ayesha* was scuttled, but not without proper respects paid by the crew for the little ship that had carried them a total of one thousand seven hundred and nine nautical miles through storms and doldrums alike.²⁵

The *Choising* had been assigned by the German East Asiatic Squadron as a coaling ship for the *Emden* on 25th September, and was sent near Mozambique for the *Emden* if needed until fires in her holds of coal required that she leave. She went to Padang for repairs from 11th October to 9th December, when the German consul secretly messaged her the coordinates given to the *Ayesha*'s crew and the *Choising* left to take them on.²⁶ Information from the English papers thoroughly dashed the Germans' plans to join the SMS *Königsberg* or von Lettow in German East Africa, since the *Königsberg* was trapped in a stand-off up the Rufiji River Delta by Allied ships, and von Lettow had disappeared into the jungles to wage guerilla warfare.²⁷

While filled with problems of her own, which was significant given the extent of the fire damage, von Mücke planned to get the *Choising* to Hodeida in Yemen after reading in the newspapers that the Ottoman Empire had been fighting against the British. Since the Ottoman Empire offered the *Ayesha*'s crew a chance to return to service in

²³ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 185.

²⁴ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 188.

²⁵ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 89-91.

²⁶ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 237.

²⁷ Sams, *German Raiders*, 189.

Germany directly—and most other options were either sunk (the Squadron), stuck (the *Königsberg*), had fallen (Tsingtau), or were surrounded (German East Africa)—they set course for Constantinople. They held that if they could make it to Hodeida, which they believed had a railway that connected to Constantinople based on information from an old guidebook of the region, then it would be easy enough to get to the capital and then to reach Berlin.²⁸

Since the British and French navies were more than likely to be found in the area of the Suez Canal and Red Sea, especially while at war with the Ottoman Empire, von Mücke chose to disguise the *Choising* to slip past their blockades. As a slow, 1,657-ton freighter of the Norddeutscher Lloyd shipping company, the *Choising* would have to be repainted from its identifiable “black hull, white bulwarks, and ochre brown trimmings.”²⁹ With the use of a book of English ships and those that had been sold to foreign nations, the crew chose to disguise the *Choising* as the 1,700-ton Italian owned *Shenir* from Genoa, since Italy was still neutral until the end of 1915.³⁰ The most crucial part was the Italian flag, of which the *Choising* had none. Therefore, the crew sewed together “a strip of red, and a strip of white bunting... the men who had artistic ability... were soon hard at work painting Italy’s coat of arms upon the white strip... we added some yellow paint to a pot of blue... until the desired shade of green was produced, and then dipped the green part of the flag into it.”³¹

With the disguise complete, the crew set off for the Perim Straits near Yemen, celebrated a modest Christmas and New Year’s on the ship along the way, and arrived at

²⁸ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 94-5.

²⁹ Olson, *Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 188; von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 95.

³⁰ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 191.

³¹ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 97.

their destination on 5th January 1915, although without charts of the area. The French cruiser *Desaix* was seen near the harbor, so von Mücke chose to have the crew of the *Ayesha* take the rowboats to shore on the outskirts of Hodeida, in case it was occupied by the French, while “the *Choising* was blacked out and hugging the coast to avoid being silhouetted... [she] remained unseen by the British gunboats and was able to slip past and land outside Hodeida the following day.”³² After a tense meeting with the local Arabic troops, and realizing that the language barrier was going to be a regular issue for the German crew, the Kaiser’s profile was finally recognized on a German coin and the crew was invited to Hodeida with great celebration as the allies of the Ottoman Empire.³³

Still believing that the final stretch of their journey would be easy—and since the French were taking a greater interest in the *Choising*—von Mücke dismissed it to help coal the *Königsberg*, which had raided along the coast of east Africa and evaded the Admiralty for months, but was spotted up the Rufiji River Delta and caught in a stalemate with the British Navy.³⁴ However, von Mücke began to learn that the journey through the crumbling Ottoman Empire would not be as easy as he had thought for a combination of reasons. These included the civil strife and banditry along the roads, difficult climate and terrain, and the fact that the closest station on the Hejaz railroad to Constantinople was in Al Ula, several hundred miles up the Red Sea.³⁵ Meanwhile, the *Choising* was confiscated in 1916 by the Italian government when it declared war on the Central

³² Sams, *German Raiders*, 190.

³³ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 151-2.

³⁴ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 190.

³⁵ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 191

Powers, and was sunk on 15th May 1917 in a battle with the Austria-Hungarian torpedo-boat destroyers *Csepel* and *Balaton* in the Adriatic.³⁶

The longer the crew of the *Ayesha* stayed in Hodeida, the more that they began to realize that their Turkish hosts were trying to keep them there. It is likely that the Turkish officers in the city wanted to keep the Germans, who carried pistols, thirteen rifles, and four Maxim machine guns, to help them with the Arabic population that was beginning to revolt against their Turkish masters. The Turkish officers began to build special barracks, and offered money and Turkish uniforms to indebt the Germans into their service, and finally “Lieutenant-Colonel Kadri... told Mücke to his face that the detachment was now under Turkish command and demanded a report of events aboard the *Emden* and after, [but] the German had had enough.”³⁷ Informed that travel by land from Hodeida to Al Ula was impossible given the danger on the roads, and with the *Choising* departed, von Mücke chose to move east to the region’s capital Sanaa, where he was told the climate was better and that he may have a chance of travelling north-west to Al Ula. Leaving behind the doctor and those from the crew that were too sick with malaria contracted in Hodeida to travel, the crew of the *Ayesha* left for Sanaa on 27th January.³⁸

The journey to Sanaa was made on camelback, which was a harder experience to some than others among the German crew, particularly those who had never learned to ride horseback, let alone a camel through a desert. Bandits were occasionally spotted, as were the ancient castles of the Middle East among the mountains, but the journey itself was void of any major disturbances, although it had plenty of delays as the men fell off

³⁶ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 241.

³⁷ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 152-3.

³⁸ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 121-4.

and had to wrangle their animals. Many camels were needed for both riding and transporting food, water, the ammunition, and all other materials, thus professionals had to be brought, paid, and supplied for the journey as well.³⁹ It was at Sanaa, after a grand reception for the famous landing crew of the *Emden*, that they lost faith in their Turkish allies.⁴⁰ They discovered that “no camels or riding animals were available for the next phase of the journey, and that [they] were required to remain in the city to strengthen the garrison. [The] *Emden*’s first officer accepted that he couldn’t go on without transport, but... resolved to return to Hodeida as soon as everyone was sufficiently rested.”⁴¹ This would prove difficult however, since eighty percent of the crew became sick—decimating the quinine supply to combat malaria—and after the Germans had run out of money with which to procure supplies and transportation animals.⁴²

The solution came in the form of a retired Turkish general who, worried that the coming revolt by the Arabs would result in all his money being lost, gave it to the Germans in return for a receipt to be paid by the Imperial German government at the end of the war. When his heirs demanded that the receipt be redeemed in 1925, it became the issue of the new Weimar Republic since it was an official purchase by the imperial military, and not by von Mücke as an individual.⁴³ After two weeks in Sanaa the crew of the *Ayasha* travelled back to Hodeida, but with the intention of returning to sea via two zambuks—local sailing ships—that were secretly prearranged by von Mücke while en route with an anti-British Egyptian guide. Returned and reunited with the crew members

³⁹ von Mücke, *The Ayasha*, 126-9.

⁴⁰ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 154.

⁴¹ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 192.

⁴² Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 204-5.

⁴³ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 254.

that had been left behind to heal, the local leaders planned a feast that provided the perfect opportunity for the crew to secretly depart for the city of Qunfudhah up the Red Sea on 14th March.⁴⁴

To get there, each zambuk carried about thirty men, as they had some Arabic workers on board to help them sail the vessels, with the larger of the two being used for the sick and to house the majority of the medical supplies.⁴⁵ The other materials were all evenly divided in case one ship was captured or sunk as they passed through another British blockade between Qunfudha and their secret launching point just north of Hodeida at Yabana. When moving through the area where the blockade was supposed to be, the wind died down to reveal that von Mücke's zambuk was in the middle of the blockade's line and had no means of quickly moving forward.⁴⁶ Writing about the events of his travels on the *Emden* and afterwards in 1917, von Mücke claimed that he had chosen to leave near the end of the week as he "was sufficiently familiar with the English customs to know that gentlemen are disinclined to work during the week ends... and nothing did, in fact, come in sight during the entire day."⁴⁷ Once through the blockade, he describes the monotony of life on the zambuks eating different variants of mutton and rice, or occasionally fish that they got from local fisherman by trading goods.⁴⁸

The two ships continued to Qunfudhah, but the jagged coral reefs throughout the area were difficult to navigate, and eventually the larger of the two zambuks signaled that it was in distress. With night approaching, von Mücke's zambuk realized the severity of

⁴⁴ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 192-3.

⁴⁵ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 160.

⁴⁶ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 260

⁴⁷ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 143-4.

⁴⁸ Hoyt, *Last Cruise of the Emden*, 208-10.

the issue and set out their small canoes to collect the ill and bring them aboard the now very crowded smaller ship. Those who could not swim well, which did exist in the German Navy, donned life jackets and paddled to the ship, desperately trying to find it in the darkness. To help them, von Mücke lit a fire on the ship to keep the torches lit, fired off flares for them to follow, and had his men yell so that they could all be located in the darkness, regardless of if the enemy might hear them.⁴⁹ There were no casualties of the zambuk's sinking, and after diving the next day the machine guns, pistols, and some ammunition were able to be retrieved, but the medical stores were lost, and to fit everyone aboard the ship, provisions for only three days could be kept due to weight.⁵⁰

Purchasing a larger zambuk from some locals along the way, the crew reached Qunfudhah, and after resting sailed on to Leet on 24th March, where they discovered that the next city of Jiddah was entirely blocked off by the British.⁵¹ It was also in Leet that the crew of the *Ayasha* faced its first casualty, Matrose (Ordinary Seaman) Wilhelm Keil, who was buried at sea with all honors.⁵² After more feasts in honor of the landing crew of the *Emden*, von Mücke prepared to travel by land to Jiddah with about ninety camels to carry the crew, their food, water, ammunition, and to mount the four machine guns on with two in the front and two in the back in case of Bedouin raids, which were common in the area.⁵³ With them went a couple also travelling to Jiddah and several gendarmes—similar to local police officers—and for several long days of riding no issues arose. Eventually, they reached the dangerous stretch of the trail that was terrorized by a group

⁴⁹ von Mücke, *The Ayasha*, 151-3

⁵⁰ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 193

⁵¹ Sams, *German Raiders*, 192.

⁵² Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 262-3.

⁵³ von Mücke, *The Ayasha*, 162-5.

on the outskirts of Mecca that called itself 'Father of the Wolf', at which point the crew saw several Bedouins watching them from afar.⁵⁴

Since Bedouins were not known to fight during the day, and so few had been spotted the night before, von Mücke decided to go down the line of camels and inspect the crew while a day's march from Jiddah on 31st March, only for a long sharp whistle to signal the start of the crew's hardest obstacle during the journey home. Always prepared for a fight, the Germans brought down their camels carrying the machine guns and opened fire on the surrounding Bedouins while the others covered them with the thirteen German and thirteen Turkish rifles at their disposal. When the initial volley ended, von Mücke moved the crew forward to discover that they were surrounded by nearly three hundred Bedouins. Without orders being given, the German sailors fixed bayonets and ask their leader when he would call the charge.⁵⁵ Hellmuth von Mücke led the charge to the left of their position, followed by forward and ending on the right since the back had already been abandoned by the Bedouins, carving the Germans a 1,200-meter no-man's-land between the two parties with only a single German wounded from the whole ordeal.⁵⁶

Within view of the sea, von Mücke wanted to make for it so that they were not surrounded by the enemy, but the Maxim machine guns were impossible to operate on the move, so he organized the camels and men into columns to move forward while being less easy to hit. As soon as they tried to move however, the attack resumed, killing Matrose Rademacher, mortally wounding Leutnant Schmidt, and taking down one of the

⁵⁴ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 214-6.

⁵⁵ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 164.

⁵⁶ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 173-4

rear Maxim camels which thus stopped the entire crew's forward movement.⁵⁷ With night approaching, von Mücke had the men set up defenses, with the camels brought down mostly in the rear while the bags of coffee, jerry cans, and sand were used to create two walls, one exterior and one interior where the wounded and doctor were located. Trenches were dug within the walls to make motion safer, and areas established for the Maxims to operate for when the Bedouins attacked, but nothing could be done about exposure to the elements in these conditions.⁵⁸

A representative of the Bedouin forces came to the Germans' defenses and met with von Mücke to discuss a settlement after which the surrounded Germans would be allowed to pass to Jiddah. The ceasefire, done through the couple accompanying the crew until they defected to the Bedouins, had several requirements:

The demands were that we surrender all arms and ammunition, our camels, all our provisions and water. In addition we were to pay eleven thousand pounds in gold... [von Mücke retorted] 'In the first place we have no money; in the second, we are guests of the country—get your money in Djidda [*sic*]; thirdly, it is not customary with Germans to surrender their arms.'⁵⁹

The Bedouins' response was a renewed attack on the crew of the *Ayesha*, who similarly repelled the Bedouins with Maxim and rifle fire, but unfortunately the stoker Lanig died of his wounds due to the lack of medical supplies.⁶⁰ With no way forward or back, this was to continue for three days, and eventually the only remaining gendarme was sent at night to get help from Jiddah.

⁵⁷ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 195-6.

⁵⁸ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 221.

⁵⁹ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 184-5.

⁶⁰ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 165.

The water cans had been buried in the sand to prevent their being shot, and every man was given a small cup in the morning and at night to conserve the dwindling supply. Even still, the heat of the day could reach as peaks of 95°F, much worse in the direct sunlight, making the barrels of the guns literally blisteringly hot when touched.⁶¹ The sand was also an issue, with men having to shovel it out of the trenches almost constantly, while everyone had to deal with it entering mouths, ears, eyes, noses, and most importantly, the guns. Constant cleaning was required, and cloths were used to keep sand out of the muzzle of the guns between Bedouin attacks.⁶² Even then, the black beetles attracted by the rotting camel carcasses—whose putrid smell after baking in the sun and bursting open was not escapable—were by the thousands. Any time one was killed, another would appear, crawling over the men at all hours of the day and night, and particularly dangerous to the wounded as they carried tetanus bacilli with them, causing lockjaw.⁶³

The morning of 3rd April, von Mücke began to plan a break for Jiddah as water and ammunition were running out, which would have meant leaving the wounded behind, but by midday, the men of the *Ayasha* heard rifle fire in the distance while the Bedouins and Germans still picked at one another. Soon all firing stopped, and the envoy returned with a new offer that all “previous demands were withdrawn on the proviso that they now pay £22,000 in gold for safe passage. Von Mücke believed that a relief column from Djiddah [*sic*] was responsible for the distant firing, so stalled for time before eventually declining the offer.”⁶⁴ After the envoy departed, more volleys fell on the crew, followed

⁶¹ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 196.

⁶² von Mücke, *The Ayasha*, 193-4.

⁶³ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 269-70.

⁶⁴ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 197.

by silence and tension, with the men very carefully—and over the course of many hours—kneeling, standing, and checking the surrounding area for the Bedouins, who had vanished.⁶⁵ Two representatives of the Emir of Mecca arrived, followed by Abdullah, the second son of the Emir with seventy men with elegant clothes and supplies, and with no defensive capabilities whatsoever.⁶⁶

Abdullah claimed to have come when he got the news of the trouble a day away from Jiddah, and promised to escort them as allies to the city with a short rest in the middle now that they had dispersed the Bedouins. As the crew of the *Ayesha* left the remnants of their fortress, the Bedouins swarmed over it for anything left of value, making von Mücke incredibly suspicious of this son of the Emir. When speaking to Abdullah, he complimented the men's guns, who offered them to him for examination, revealing that none of the guns had been fired.⁶⁷ Whatever the case may be, they reached Jiddah to jubilation on the crowded streets, glad to put the past three days behind them.⁶⁸

In Jiddah, the sick and wounded were cared for while von Mücke discussed how he would get from the city to Al Ula by way of Al Wejh, the closest point on the—still incomplete—Hejaz railway. He was told that travel up the Red Sea would be impossible because of the British blockade, but after the Bedouin attack and von Mücke's unease with the son of the Emir, they devised a plan. He secretly purchased another zambuk while “news was spread that they would be travelling by camel to try and draw attention to the desert and away from the sea lanes. During the night of 8-9 April, they stole out of the harbour and proceeded by coastal shallows... They reached Serm Munnaiburra on 28

⁶⁵ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 198-200.

⁶⁶ Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, 271.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 271-3.

⁶⁸ Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, 227-8.

April, which lay 10 nm short of [Al Wejh].”⁶⁹ Once there, they chose to travel by land to the city and rested for two days before their final march through the mountain region owned by an unfriendly sheik to Al Ula.

Escorted by the sheik from Al Wejh, the crew of the *Ayesha* was determined to make it to the head of the railway regardless of anything or anyone in their way. Every night they set up defensive perimeters, even while still in friendly territory and while assured by their sheik that all would be taken care of by his men.⁷⁰ As they went, more and more of his followers joined them, always scouting the areas ahead and prepared to defend the Germans, who themselves were prepared for a fight, although the sheik of the following territory turned out to be preoccupied with a war to the north. In von Mücke’s conversations with the sheik from Al Wejh, he found the man very interested in German technology, particularly the range of the *Emden*’s guns over long distances and his binoculars, so von Mücke promised to send him a pair from Germany.⁷¹ On the final day to Al Ula, von Mücke rode ahead so that he could organize the arrival of his men and a train to take them to Constantinople as quickly as possible, although some parts would have to be marched along the road between stations. It was here that, on 7th May 1915, they met German reporter Emil Ludwig who asked von Mücke which he would prefer first, a bath or Rhine wine, and he responded, “‘Rhine wine.’ The decided answer.”⁷²

The *Emden* had been defeated on 9th November 1914, and her coaling ship *Exford*—with Julius Lauterbach aboard, who would later escape prison in Singapore and

⁶⁹ Sams, *German Raiders*, 195

⁷⁰ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 170.

⁷¹ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 215-18.

⁷² Emil Ludwig, “The Wanderers of the *Emden*: Their Epic Tale,” *The New York Times*, 29th May 1915, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/05/29/100156743.html?pageNumber=4> (accessed 25th September 2020).

return to Berlin by travelling eastward—was captured on 2nd December, revitalizing the media’s interest in the story of the *Emden* and her crew.⁷³ Speculation about the landing crew’s whereabouts continued, most strongly within the British Admiralty after they missed the *Ayesha* at Pedang by a matter of days. However, news from the Yemen region’s capital Sanaa arrived at Constantinople on 8th February, and the Ottoman government sent it directly to their German allies. The German government and people were amazed at the journey the landing crew had made, and expected them to reach the Hejaz railway by mid-February, leading to Emil Ludwig’s deployment to Al Ula to receive the increasingly-famous crew of the *Ayesha*.⁷⁴

The news began to spread, not only in Germany and neutral nations such as America at the time, but even within the British Empire and nation despite governmental attempts to censor such material. One article allowed through by the censors was from the Dublin newspaper *The Irish Times*—then still part of Britain—which spoke about the myths of the escaped German crews of the SMS *Emden* and SMS *Karlsruhe* in the Atlantic, whose crew had already secretly returned to Berlin:

“The child-like faith in the improbable which the German Government fosters, and its people develop with such docility, has its own revenges, and this is one of them. A little shaking of their implicit confidence and blind hero-worship will educate the German people towards the grand disillusionment which awaits them... Many earnest people at home were so profoundly shocked by our own bogus heroes that it is consoling to find that this kind of roguery knows no parties, even in wartime.”⁷⁵

⁷³ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 141-3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

⁷⁵ “Bogus Heroes,” *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*, 6th May 1915, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/515794413/B1DC9B79DC9D40A2PQ/3?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th January 2021).

The article, titled ‘Bogus Heroes’, was published on 5th May 1915, two days before Emil Ludwig received von Mücke and the crew of the *Ayesha* in Al Ula, and a few weeks before the news spread around the world that the small band had made it from the Cocos to Constantinople.⁷⁶

When the men reached Al Ula, they were able to bath, eat, receive proper medical care, and boarded the Hejaz railway for Damascus and Constantinople beyond. The journey to Constantinople was a new kind of challenge, the kind where they had to work through a feast at every stop and fit the gifts they were given by the German and Turkish populations of the area in their cars, previously filled with only tattered uniforms and their weapons from the *Emden*.⁷⁷ They were given new uniforms so that they would look presentable, and an opulent invitation-only feast was prepared for them by the German consul, with even the French delegation choosing to attend and congratulate the men, particularly on the Iron Cross that they had each been awarded by the Kaiser.⁷⁸ On Whitsunday, 23rd May, their train reached the head of the railroad at Haider Pasha, and with their tattered flag of the Imperial German Navy still flying, the men moved through the crowd to meet their superior officer, when von Mücke stated “I report the landing squad from the ‘Emden,’ five officers, seven petty officers, and thirty men strong.”⁷⁹

The tale of the *Emden* and her landing crew were not quickly forgotten, either by the people of Germany or the Allied and neutral nations during or after the war. In a cinema in Boston one year after the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*, but a year before America entered the war on the side of the Allies, German film reels were being shown to

⁷⁶ Ludwig, “Wanderers of the Emden,” 29th May 1915.

⁷⁷ Olson, *The Last Cruise of a German Raider*, 199-200.

⁷⁸ Ludwig, “Wanderers of the Emden,” 29th May 1915.

⁷⁹ von Mücke, *The Ayesha*, 222-3.

a fairly bored crowd. However, the entire theater suddenly stood up and began to cheer, at which point the author realized that “it seemed quite the natural thing that my own brogans should be joining in the tumult of applause... It was no shadow swashbuckler we were applauding, but—so complete the illusion—a very real hero of flesh and blood [von Mücke]... now young Ulysses marched off the quait at the head of his squad.”⁸⁰ While Boston had a large Irish population, and fairly anti-British at that, there was also a sizable German population, one whose members expressed views of pride in their former homeland, while also lamenting that ““if we only had more of the Mückes and not so many of the Hindenburgs... perhaps this war would not have made so many people hate the Germans.””⁸¹

The success of the crew’s journey was something that interested people across all political persuasions during the First World War, since, regardless of what side one was on, the feat that the crew of the *Ayasha* had accomplished was an incredible one that could have failed at any number of times. American audiences were especially interested in the tale, even after they entered the war against the Germans in 1917, and a book deal that von Mücke had made with a German company in 1915 was to be published in English in Boston.⁸² The deal was made with an American publisher before it entered the war, but well after public opinion of the German Navy had soured due to the unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic, showing that the story of this particular journey was still well regarded enough to be worth the investment.

⁸⁰ Lewis Freeman, “Mücke of the Emden,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (1857-1932) 117, no. 6 (July 1916), 826-7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 827.

⁸² Hellmuth von Mücke, *Ayasha* (Boston, MA: Ritter & Company, 1915), 1-4.

Reviews of the book after publication were still positive, describing in July 1917 how the English language version of von Mücke's *The Ayesha* was "an exceedingly interesting little book. It is interesting in the first place as a record of gallant and perilous adventure, in more ways than one a veritable wonder-voyage. And it is interesting as a personal narrative, for the gayety, humor, and briskness with which the story is told."⁸³ This was three months after America entered the war against Germany, and even when the conflict was well over, the American interest in his tale continued into the 1920's. After returning from the Ottoman Empire, every member of the crew reenlisted, many of whom perished before the end of the war, making von Mücke's account one of the only ones about the journey.

Afterwards, von Mücke entered politics to some success, obtaining a cabinet position in Saxony in 1929, but only in a split cabinet where he, a member of the NSDAP at the time, had to work together with the socialist and communist members.⁸⁴ He quarreled with each group he joined, including the "German National People's Party, and then the National Socialist German Worker's Party (the Nazis)."⁸⁵ The sale of his book and lectures in Germany and America provided him a certain level of financial independence, although not without controversy. At one such lecture in 1922, American veterans' organizations protested one of his speeches as they felt five years was still too

⁸³ "Notable Books in Brief Review," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 15th July 1917, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/99915641/FE71FA3830894ADAPQ/6?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th September 2021).

⁸⁴ "Saxony has New Cabinet," *The New York Times*, 21st July 1929, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1929/07/21/94168986.html?pageNumber=46> (accessed 26th September 2020).

⁸⁵ van der Vat, *Gentlemen of War*, 189.

soon for an enemy hero to be speaking to an American audience.⁸⁶ In many articles published in America over a course of twelve years, he was introduced as the leader of the famous landing squad of the *Emden*, implying that it was still somewhat remembered by 1930.

For the people of Germany, the crew of the *Ayesha* and their determination to evade capture or defeat was a sign of hope during the war. Having come from an already internationally famous and well-respected German commerce raider, the landing crew's trek from Direction Island seemed ludicrous to all outsiders, including the British of the wireless station, the Dutch at Padang, and the Turkish in Yemen. Regardless, the group continued across the Indian Ocean and up through the Middle East, much to the chagrin of the Allied navies searching for them and one particularly unlucky *Irish Times* newspaper writer. The men utilized the scant resources at their disposal well, whether it was a rotting sailing ship, a coffee sack and jerry-can fortress, or the Maxim machine gun, but relied most heavily on their ability to adapt to new situations. Most had never sailed before, but by the end had sailed thousands of miles between a late-nineteenth century English schooner and multiple Arab zambuks. They also learned to ride camels, subsist on a diet of rice and mutton, collect rainwater using sails, and overcome difficult climate, storms, and diseases.

The story of their adventure and arrival at Al Ula spread around the world and seems to have genuinely captivated the interest and respect of many people internationally. The Central Powers used them for propaganda to show that they could

⁸⁶ "Protest Muecke Lecture," *The New York Times*, 24th November 1922, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1922/11/24/98788638.html?pageNumber=23> (accessed 26th September 2020).

overcome any odds, the Allied nations had to admit—as they had for Karl von Müller and the late *Emden*—that this was an impressive feat, and the people of America seem to have been as impressed as the Germans were. While von Mücke’s right-wing political career dampened his personal prestige after the war, the journey of all fifty members of the *Emden*’s landing crew—who spent six months travelling with minimal external aid and surviving only day-by-day—was an incredible feat of determination, cunning, and resourcefulness, seen surprisingly more often during the First World War than one might expect.

Chapter III: The SMS *Seeadler* in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans

Almost one year after Hellmuth von Mücke and the landing squad of the SMS *Emden* celebrated the completion of their six month journey from Direction Island to Constantinople, the Imperial German High Seas Fleet and the British Royal Navy's Grand Fleet met for the largest battle in naval history. Both sides claimed victory after the battle because the British had suffered higher casualties—both sailors and ships—and the Germans had failed to break through the blockade of the North Sea. One result of this is that two separate names for the battle are used in each country today, the Battle of Jutland in Britain, and the Battle of Skagerrak in Germany.¹ In Germany, the morale boost from a successful battle with the world's greatest naval power was short lived as the blockade remained and the war seemed to have no end in sight while the Allies coordinated simultaneous pushes on the French Somme, Russian Poland, and Italian Isonzo.²

While artillery continued to bombard and tear millions apart, the dwindling domestic resources and blockade took their toll on the populations of the Central Powers, especially after the potato crop failure of 1916 resulted in Germans eating animal feed to survive the winter.³ To try to break the blockade, unrestricted U-Boat warfare was resumed by Germany—alienating supporters in neutral nations such as the United States—and the High Seas Fleet stayed near the northern ports to save the diminishing

¹ C. Douglas Maginley, "Skagerrak: The Battle of Jutland Through German Eyes," *Northern Mariner/ Le Marin du Nord* 27, no. 1 (January 2017), 100-102.

² John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 274-7; Marcus Faulkner, *The Great War at Sea: A Naval Atlas 1914-19* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 86-7.

³ Sam Jefferson, *The Sea Devil: The Adventures of Count Felix von Luckner, the Last Raider Under Sail* (Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2017), 20-1.

coal supply. As the British Navy starved Germany and German U-Boats began to starve Britain, the Germany Navy created additional commerce raiders in the Atlantic and Pacific out of domestic German shipping vessels. The plan was to divert British ships from the North Sea, but the Germans needed ships that could run the blockade, would succeed in raiding afterwards, and would not risk the limited coal stock.

One solution was a wooden, three masted windjammer constructed in Glasgow at the end of the nineteenth century named the *Pass of Balmaha*, which had been captured by a U-Boat in 1915 and whose crew was interned in Germany for the duration.⁴ In the age of dreadnaughts and biplanes, the *Pass of Balmaha* and all sailing vessels were becoming relics of the past, mostly hired by private companies because they could pass through storm-ridden areas such as Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope quickly, if they had an experienced Captain and crew. Sailing ships were also cheaper than a coal powered ship in stormy conditions since rougher waves required steam ships to use additional expensive coal stocks.⁵ Without coal and with a crew of only sixty four, the *Pass of Balmaha* was approved for a mission to run the blockade under the guise of a neutral Norwegian ship sending timber to Australia, although there were several in the German Admiralty that were against the idea in a war with submarines and torpedoes.

The first issue was finding a Captain for the ship, one who had experience with old sailing vessels, was an officer in the German Navy, and would be confident enough to attempt this strange undertaking. Count Felix von Luckner was the Kaiser's personal choice for the job. The story of Count Felix von Luckner's life through 1919 could fill

⁴ Ryan K. Noppen, *German Commerce Raider 1914-18* (Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2015), 43.

⁵ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 25-6.

several books, and with the help of Lowell Thomas it was in 1927 for English speakers to incredible success, although it included several of von Luckner's personal 'aggrandizements.' Lowell Thomas was a well-known author as a result of his articles from the First World War, when he was following T.E. Lawrence in the Middle East.⁶ While worthy of mention, the story of von Luckner's life before 1911 should be taken with a grain of salt as a result of his tendency to embellish his tales for the sake of entertainment, of which he was internationally renowned, giving speeches for decades after the First World War ended including a boat party in the Hudson in 1926.⁷ The accounts from 1916 to 1919 have been evaluated with information from documents, ship logs, and others' diaries to show a clearer version of von Luckner and his escapade during the latter half of the war.⁸

Felix von Luckner was the great-grandson of Nicolas Luckner, who created his own group of Hussars that fought well during the Seven Year's War and were later bought by the King of Hanover. After a disagreement between the two, Luckner became a Marshal of France, only to be executed during the French Revolution when he asked for his pay from the new government.⁹ His family did well, becoming Counts in Germany to the Kaiser, but young Felix von Luckner was terrible at studying and schoolwork, eventually running away to Hamburg to be like Odysseus and explore the seas. With help, he got a job cleaning pigs on a Russian vessel, and went from job to job around the world, most notably claiming that he spent time boxing in Australia, fishing in the

⁶ Lowell Thomas, *Count Luckner, the Sea Devil* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1927), 7-8.

⁷ "German Count Entertains," *The New York Times*, 1st November 1926, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1926/11/01/98520097.html> (accessed 12th February 2021).

⁸ James Bade, *Sea Devil: Count von Luckner in New Zealand and the Pacific* (Aotearoa, New Zealand: Steele Roberts Ltd., 2006), 7-8.

⁹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 11.

American north-west, cooking on a ship around the Falklands, learning Norwegian along the way, and eventually finding himself in Jamaica with no money and two broken legs.¹⁰ At that point, he saw the SMS *Panther* and, after meeting some crewmen who helped clean him up, he decided it was time to return to Germany, study diligently, and become an officer in the German Navy. With help from his uncle, he passed his exam and returned to his parents for the first time in eight years, showing he was alive and dressed as an officer no less.¹¹

Once in the service, Kaiser Wilhelm II had a dinner with Count von Luckner and his officers, and arranged for von Luckner to be assigned to the *Panther* on its voyage to the Cameroons—then a German Colony—after hearing his tales.¹² While there, von Luckner went big game hunting and met a girl that he planned to marry back in Germany, but this was postponed when the *Panther* returned for a scheduled crew rotation and was told to delay departure in July 1914.¹³ He was reassigned to the SMS *Kronprinz* of the König class battleships, an improved dreadnaught launched on 21st February 1914, which was renamed SMS *Kronprinz Wilhelm* on 27th January 1918, and scuttled at Scapa Flow on 21st June 1919.¹⁴

Aboard at the Battle of Skagerrak, von Luckner saw the HMS *Indefatigable* disappear after her magazine was hit, and while he did not speak about it as often as his other adventures, he did say that one could “see how its armoured body is torn in pieces and swirls into the air, like everything has been liquidized... The huge oil content of the

¹⁰ Edwin P. Hoyt, *Sea Eagle* (New York, NY: Allan Wingate, 1970), 31-5

¹¹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 82-4

¹² Smith Woodruff, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 75-6.

¹³ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 103-4.

¹⁴ Randel Gray, ed., *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1906-1921* (London, England: Conway Maritime Press Ltd., 1986), 147.

ship belches upward and spreads out, burning, over the water's surface. Into this burning sea are hurled the glowing last remnants of the ship, hissing as they land."¹⁵ He had seen the full force of the two navies, so when he was offered a position on the SMS *Möwe*—a commerce raider that mastered disguise on the high seas and had returned to Germany through the blockade—he agreed knowing the danger that he faced.¹⁶

However, while in a bar in Hamburg before it relaunched, he was given a letter to report directly to the Admiralty, who informed him that they were going to use a windjammer called the *Pass of Blamaha* to run the blockade and disrupt Allied shipping alone in the Atlantic and Pacific. Count von Luckner accepted in a manner as dignified as he could, but was ecstatic at the idea of being a commerce raider, and on a sailing ship like the ones he had served on for so many years as well.¹⁷ He went to the dock where it was being fitted with two, five hundred horse-power motors in case the wind was bad, diesel—which was far less critical to the navies of the world than coal—and room for sixty four crew members and four hundred prisoners in relative comfort.¹⁸

Espionage was an increasingly critical factor in strategic planning during the war, especially for the Germans after their naval code book was captured by the Allies at the very start.¹⁹ Count von Luckner chose to disguise the *Pass of Balmaha* as the *Malette*, a Norwegian ship that was docked in Copenhagen at the time and looked incredibly similar to his new command. In order to cover his bases, von Luckner took a train to Copenhagen, where he used the name Phylax Luedicke to pretend he was a shipyard

¹⁵ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 57.

¹⁶ Noppen, *German Commerce Raiders*, 36-9

¹⁷ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 39.

¹⁸ Gray, ed., *Conway's*, 185.

¹⁹ Robert Gaudi, *African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (Caliber, NY: Berkley, 2017), 6-7.

inspector and get a better view of the *Malette*.²⁰ Since the Captain and First Mate were away while the ship was being fitted with a donkey motor, von Luckner set out under cover of night, cut the ship loose while the guard to the Captain's quarters was asleep, and then snuck in after the guard left to secure the ship. After a frantic search, Luedicke found the real *Malette's* logbook under the Captain's mattress, then slipped out, helped retie ship, and disappeared into the night to return to his *Malette*.²¹

To keep things secret, von Luckner oversaw the renovating of the ship under the name von Eckmann, explaining to those fitting it with bunks and supplies that she was for cadet training, and trying to explain away the strange choice of ship to onlookers as budget restraints.²² His disguise and the ruse of the new wooden training ship worked well, save one nosy old sea Captain who took an interest in von Eckmann, especially after overhearing the mysterious officer collecting two letters for Count Felix von Luckner.²³ The old Captain, acting out of patriotic duty to the Empire, reported von Eckmann to the authorities, who first stopped him on a train to Bremen. They certified that von Luckner, who looked like von Eckmann, was the genuine article, but the idea of a spy in his hotel made von Luckner concerned that the mission had been compromised by the Allies.²⁴ He was then arrested in Hillman's Hotel, only to convince the authorities that he was von Luckner, then arrested again in a restaurant which caused such a scene that the police had to protect him from the diners who wanted to kill the spy as they left.²⁵

²⁰ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 42-3.

²¹ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 42.

²² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 40-1.

²³ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 38.

²⁴ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 49-50.

²⁵ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 115-6.

One call to the German Admiralty later and all was sorted out, and the old sea Captain chose to stop bothering von Eckmann. Nevertheless, the work on the *Pass of Balmaha's* crew and cover story were just beginning. The Norwegian *Malette* was only supposed to carry a crew of twenty seven, so von Luckner and the Admiralty set out to find twenty six additional Norwegian speaking German sailors. These sailors were selected and sent home to keep them from talking to one another about their yet unknown mission while “letters were fabricated, not just one or two letters, but correspondence covering the entire time that each man was supposed to have been with the ship. The forgeries were done by women in the confidential levels in the Admiralty and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”²⁶ In addition to the letters, the easily accessible bunk area for the ‘Norwegian’ crew included photographs of ‘loved ones’ stamped to real businesses in Norway, books, paintings, foods, logos, navigational instruments, and even shirt tags, all made to look worn and beaten by years of traveling at sea.²⁷ The rest of the crew, as well as the potential four hundred prisoners, were to be housed behind a secret compartment in von Luckner’s private rooms in the ship, so that in case of a search by the British they could remain hidden, and scuttle the ship if the ruse failed.²⁸

When all the preparations were finished, the new *Maletta* registered its true name with the German Navy as the commerce raider SMS *Seeadler* (*Sea Eagle*) before being brought out of the harbor, loaded with fake Norwegian timber, and the entire crew brought aboard and informed about their mission. However, the German government sent a message for them to wait until the U-Boat *Deutschland* returned with an important

²⁶ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 52.

²⁷ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 373-4.

²⁸ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 9.

shipment from the United States, delaying the *Seeadler's* departure for three weeks, at which point the true *Maletta* had already departed Copenhagen and gone through the British blockade.²⁹ Attempting to find another, similarly structured ship, von Luckner rewrote other names until the logbook was damaged by the erasing. This would have been a dead giveaway to the British, so he ordered the ship's carpenter to break and repair her as if she had gone through a nasty storm, and for all the men to drench everything in sea water.³⁰ Renamed the *Hero*—an entirely fictitious ship that would hopefully get through either unnoticed or without raising too much suspicion by not being in the British logs—the men of the *Seeadler* set out for Skagerrak and the Atlantic.³¹

They left on 21st December 1916, and the first hurdle was to evade the British minefield set to a depth of around twenty five feet below sea level to destroy men-of-war, not Scottish built sailing ships with a—still too close for comfort—draft of eighteen feet.³² After shifting the weight of the lifeboats and materials on deck, the *Seeadler* glid across the minefield without any issues, and under cover of a North Sea storm was able to pass through the first two of the three British blockade rings without being noticed. While moving north toward Iceland to evade the British around the Orkneys, the sails of the ship froze and the winds forced her to continue moving north-west towards the Arctic Ocean, where they could easily be trapped in pack ice until long after the war ended.³³ The situation deteriorated further as the “men in the hold, my fighting crew, huddled

²⁹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 123-5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 125-8.

³¹ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 10.

³² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 70; Noppen, *German Commerce Raiders*, 43.

³³ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 48-52.

together to keep from freezing. They were prisoners, for the waves and spray had swept over everything until our secret hatches were frozen as solid as concrete. My false Norsemen on deck slid about on the icy planks, and every man suffered from frostbite.”³⁴ Finally, on Christmas Eve a northern wind blew, and the *Seeadler* turned south-west, where they met by the HMS *Patia* on Christmas Day.

This was the moment that the Norwegian disguise was made for, so the twenty seven Norse speakers prepared for the show while the rest waited below deck for either the ‘all-clear’ or ‘scuttle’ signal to be given. Lieutenant Holland of the *Patia* was sent to inspect the ship’s papers, despite it being a holiday and the ship’s large Norwegian flags painted on the side, as was common for neutral nations to do, and he saw the damage from the *Hero*’s recent encounter with the storm.³⁵ Everything had seemingly been thought of by von Luckner, who had hung wet laundry, started chewing tobacco like a true Norse seaman, and masked the scent of the diesel engines—used to move westward while the sails thawed—by jamming a rag in the exhaust pipe for their kerosene lamp.³⁶ The only question he had not been prepared to answer while Holland inspected the logbook was what they had done for three weeks after ‘Copenhagen.’

Choking on his own tobacco at the question, von Luckner’s officer Leudemann quickly spoke up and answered that they had been told to be wary of a German commerce raider that was supposed to be running the blockade along with several U-Boats.³⁷ Stating his approval, Holland gave von Luckner a certificate of authenticity, stating that the ship was cleared by the British Navy, since he had not found the two 4.1

³⁴ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 133.

³⁵ Noppen, *German Commerce Raider*, 45.

³⁶ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 53-4.

³⁷ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 140-1.

inch guns or inspected the crew's backstories.³⁸ However, Holland told von Luckner to wait one hour for their signal to depart, leading to a crew member stating that 'all was lost', which was overheard by the fighting crew below decks. After working to keep the British from seeing the *Seeadler's* engine shaft propellers as they left, von Luckner returned to tell the men below that all was well, only to discover that "not only had the seacocks been opened... [but the] charges had been set to go off in eight minutes... It was half an hour before order was restored and the men below were set to work pumping out the hundreds of gallons of water let in to scuttle the ship."³⁹ While this was underway, the *Patia* signaled London via wireless for a confirmation on the fictitious ship *Hero*.

Luck was not in short supply, as the wireless station in London was closed for Christmas and all calls were being forwarded to Liverpool, where a confused employee signaled back that the *Hero* was not an issue and could be let through. This error was not caught by the British Admiralty for four days because the wireless operators in Copenhagen only reopened after an extended holiday break.⁴⁰ Sending the international signal "T-X-B" for "Continue voyage", the *Patia* departed, while the men of the *Seeadler*, German and 'Norwegian' alike celebrated Christmas and their success in running the blockade with gifts of cigars, brandy, and other goods provided by Mrs. Bertha Krupp.⁴¹

The *Seeadler* continued north-west to 43°W, 60°N on New Year's Day, when they turned towards the Azores and repainted the sides of the ship while abandoning their false lumber supply, which later convinced the British Admiralty that they were bound

³⁸ Geoffrey Bennet, *Naval Battles of the First World War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1968), 120.

³⁹ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 88-90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90-1.

⁴¹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 144-5; Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 53-4.

for German East Africa to aid Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.⁴² It was in the vicinity of the Azores on 9th January 1917 that they encountered their first prize, the British *Gladys Royle* carrying Cardiff coal to Argentina. When the *Seeadler* signaled for a proper time check while running the Norwegian flag, they used the engines to get within firing range before the men raised the German war flag, bared their weapons, and fired a shot across the *Gladys Royle*'s bow to show that she was to stop. However, the *Gladys Royle* continued towards the *Seeadler* to give it the proper time check it had asked for while raising her British flag, and only hove to after several additional volleys were fired. The British Captain Shewan then took a boat over to the Germans to establish what was going on, as both parties were thoroughly confused.⁴³

An older Captain who remembered the days when sailing ships did most of the shipping, Shewan saw the firing of a shot across another ship's bow as the old signal for a proper chronometer check. Beyond that, the Captain had simply not expected the Germans to have a three masted windjammer acting as a commerce raider in the Atlantic, although he was somewhat happy to see a sailing ship raiding during the First World War, as they had for countless wars before then.⁴⁴ After scuttling the *Gladys Royle* and its coal, which would have been incredibly useful to earlier German raiders in the Atlantic but had no value for a sailing ship with diesel engines, his crew was taken to their new quarters in the *Seeadler*, and Shewan to the soon to be Captain's Club room as von Luckner collected more ships along the way.⁴⁵

⁴² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 95.

⁴³ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 149-50.

⁴⁴ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 61-2.

⁴⁵ Chris Sams, *German Raiders of the First World War: Kaiserliche Marine Cruisers and the Epic Chases* (Croydon, England: Fonthill, 2015), 74.

The British Admiralty was aware that a ship called the *Seeadler* was supposed to have broken through their blockade, but they had not put together that it was the Norwegian *Hero*, since it would seem unlikely that the two were one and the same. Therefore, the *Seeadler* was able to benefit from the ignorance of Allied shipping in the Atlantic until her prisoner capacity filled, at which point von Luckner would be forced to release the prisoners—who would then tell the world about the *Seeadler*.⁴⁶ This meant that the prisoners could not know where the vulnerable parts of the ship were, and that they were to be treated very well to earn Germany a positive image abroad. It also meant that it was imperative they avoid stopping a neutral ship that would have to be immediately released under the rules of war, then revealing the truth of the *Seeadler*. They had attacked the *Gladys Royle* despite its lack of colors because of its distinctive British structure, and they ignored the second Allied ship they saw because it was a large passenger liner that would have filled their prisoner compartments too quickly.⁴⁷

The next step was to move south, either with the intention of crossing the Cape of Good Hope for the Indian Ocean or Cape Horn for the Pacific, but not before a brief stay along the shipping routes at the equator to hunt for unsuspecting Allied ships. It was there that they encountered the *Horngarth*, whose Captain Barton tried to run until his funnel was shot through, causing the only death from the *Seeadler*'s raiding—a sixteen year old boy who was laid to rest at sea when the *Seeadler*'s doctor Pietsch could not save him.⁴⁸ It was also Pietsch who discovered why Captain Barton had tried to run after he saw that the windjammer was German. Pietsch had met him while on the *Möwe*'s first raid, when

⁴⁶ “Asserts New Raider Carries no Torpedoes.” *The New York Times*, 4th April 1917, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1917/04/04/102328574.html> (accessed 12th January 2021).

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 151.

⁴⁸ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 13.

Barton and the other captured Captains all agreed to be released on parole, meaning they “had signed written promises that they would engage in no further war activity. Believing he had broken his parole, he thought the Germans would hang him from the yardarm... ‘Only direct combatant service was included under the heading of war activity. Therefore, we feel ourselves under no unhappy necessity of hanging [him].’”⁴⁹ The reputation of the Germans had been severely damaged by the start of 1917 from a combination of Allied propaganda, brutal actions by Hindenburg on the Western Front, and the renewed unrestricted submarine warfare. Any chance the *Seeadler* had of helping Germany’s image could be accomplished through chivalry and kindness towards their so-called adversaries, although it was often portrayed as the exception to the regular German activity in the presses.⁵⁰

The shipping lanes along the Equator were bountiful for an unsuspected commerce raider, and they captured British, French, and an Italian ship by requesting a chronometer check or generally moving within range before revealing their true flag and guns. The Captains’ Club became a hub of activity which von Luckner regularly partook in, and the single woman—newlywed wife of the *Perce*’s Captain Kohler—was treated with the upmost respect from all aboard, who she and the captured Captains interacted with during their walks on deck as per their parole agreement.⁵¹ While not having to worry about coal like the SMS *Emden*, *Königsberg*, or *Karlsruhe* before her, the *Seeadler* did take supplies of fresh food and water, which was always given to the prisoners of the ship first, although they were not in short supply while in the Atlantic. When the

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 155-6.

⁵⁰ Kenneth D. Rose, *The Great War and Americans in Europe, 1914-1917* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 15-7.

⁵¹ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 66-7.

prisoners were eventually released, von Luckner even paid the wages of each captured sailor for their lost salaries while aboard.⁵²

Only two issues arose during this time, the first of which was that the French Captains they had captured entirely despised their German adversaries as a result of the Western Front's Battle of Marne, First and Second Battle of Ypres—where the Germans first employed gas weaponry—the Battle of Verdun, and the Battle of the Somme.⁵³ The Captains of the French *La Rochefoucauld*, *Charles Gounod*, and the *Antonin* were all initially hostile towards von Luckner, who was pleased that he had prevented materials to aid the French war effort from arriving in Europe, including enough saltpetre to produce ammunition that could have killed thousands.⁵⁴ Two of the Captains grew to accept their temporary imprisonment and enjoyed the company of the other captured Captains, but Lecoq of *La Rochefoucauld* continued to investigate the forward magazines that he had been barred from walking around.⁵⁵

On 25th February the *Seeadler* came across the four masted ship *Viking* with no flag, only to discover after catching her, that she was a Danish ship carrying neutral cargo from Buenos Aires to Copenhagen, meaning that she had to be released under the rules of war.⁵⁶ It became necessary for the *Seeadler* to finally move on from the equator, but not before stopping the French *Cambronne* and informing the Captain that it would take over two hundred prisoners from the *Seeadler* to Rio de Janeiro. To give themselves additional time, the “Seeadler’s crew was busy aboard the *Cambronne*, removing her upper masts

⁵² Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 185-6.

⁵³ Rose, *The Great War and Americans*, x-xii.

⁵⁴ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 125.

⁵⁵ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 80.

⁵⁶ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 121-2.

and yards and jettisoning many of her sails. This was to ensure the French windjammer made exceptionally slow time on her voyage to Rio.”⁵⁷ Before the prisoners were transferred, Lecoq was caught sketching the forward magazines so he could show them to the authorities upon his arrival at port, putting von Luckner in a difficult and delicate position.

Count von Luckner took the sketches and allowed Lecoq to leave with the others before the *Seeadler* departed for the Pacific Ocean. Although, when they arrived, Lecoq was the only prisoner who the media picked up as having had a negative experience aboard the ship.⁵⁸ When interviewed, one prisoner from the *Seeadler*—later determined to be Lecoq—stated that the ship “carries no torpedoes and that her commander’s name is von Luckner... a bitter anti-American, frequently attacking the United States as an unscrupulous country whose only aim was the pursuit of wealth.”⁵⁹ The newspapers did include the more positive elements of the prisoners’ time aboard, such as how the “sailors had a band which played frequently and enthusiastically when the men were off duty. Their orchestra was composed of three mandolins, three violins, a flute and a bass drum.”⁶⁰ While the media’s assessments of the *Seeadler*—which had now finally been revealed to the public to the disadvantage of her crew—were somewhat mixed, the stories did well to remind readers of the *Emden* in the east under Karl von Müller back in 1914.

A pause was taken at the Falklands to commemorate the men of the German East Asiatic Squadron under Maximilian von Spee, who had been defeated by the British in 1914 and suffered hundreds of casualties. A ten foot Iron Cross was dropped to rest with

⁵⁷ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 81.

⁵⁸ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 196-7.

⁵⁹ “Asserts New Raider Carries No Torpedoes,” 4th April 1917.

⁶⁰ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 86.

the men.⁶¹ Afterwards the *Seeadler* raced for Cape Horn, the tip of South America and entrance to the less well-guarded Pacific shipping lanes, before she could be cut off by the British Navy, which already knew of this from the *Viking* and assembled near the coast to catch them. Preparing for this, von Luckner chose to sail the windjammer further south, far beyond where anyone would expect the sailing ship to be from the coast due to the danger of icebergs and storms.⁶²

The journey required extra time, and the *Seeadler* was caught in an Antarctic hurricane when “suddenly, there came an even more ominous scrapping sound. The *Seeadler* quivered, and out blood fairly froze. We had grazed a submerged snout of ice... No matter who was captain. Everybody to the pumps. I took my place with the sailors in the hold, and we all fought to keep the water in check.”⁶³ With the pumps going as fast as they could, and with the combined power of both engines and all the sails put to use despite the destructive winds, the *Seeadler* managed to get past the British ships to their north and come out the other side only slightly the worse for the wear.⁶⁴

Entering the Pacific in April 1917, von Luckner had the men throw excess life vests and boats over the edge with the *Seeadler's* name on them, while the wireless operators sent out messages stating that the *Seeadler* had been sunk to deceive the British.⁶⁵ The wireless operators then discovered that the German government had sent the Zimmerman telegram, proposing that Mexico attack the then-neutral United States in return for their old territories, which still infuriated von Luckner during his interviews

⁶¹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 198-200

⁶² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 130-1.

⁶³ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 212.

⁶⁴ Halpern, *A Naval History*, 374.

⁶⁵ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 134-5.

with Lowell Thomas in the 1920's. The wireless operators also overheard that the United States had entered the war on the side of the Allies on 6th April, further erasing the number of neutral ports that would be available to the *Seeadler*, but allowing von Luckner to seek out American shipping as well.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, the sheer size of the Pacific Ocean and shipping lanes meant that the *Seeadler's* crew saw very few commerce ships during their four months operating in the Pacific. They caught three American ships, the *RC Slade*, *Monika*, and *AB Johnson*, whose stowaway Miss Taylor pretended to be the Captain's wife while aboard the *Seeadler* for fear of German brutality. After she met the men however, she thoroughly enjoyed her time on the ship, openly speaking with newspapers later about her courteous and polite captors.⁶⁷ While that was well, the weeks and months of inactivity meant unrest for even the most disciplined of crews after half a year at sea, as well as the thinning of supplies. Tempers ran high, and Captain Smith of the *RC Slade* claimed that once, while crewmembers were working "a sailor said: 'I hope she blows to hell with all of us on board.' The count [von Luckner] lying nearby in a hammock overheard. At the Saturday parade... the captain swore, raved, waved his arms and sentenced him to fourteen days in the brig."⁶⁸ Realizing the need of his men to walk on land and resupply fresh foods to prevent diseases like scurvy, von Luckner searched for an uninhabited island to land on, arriving at the French Society Island of Mopelia on 31st July.⁶⁹

While approaching the island the crew grew increasingly eager to finally stand on dry land, even if for only a few hours each, and especially after they saw the land that

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 216-218.

⁶⁷ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 149-53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁹ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 15-16

was to become their ‘island of the lotus-eaters’ Count von Luckner described the scene during their final approach, noting how “against the dark blue of the sea and the light blue of the sky, the sunlight seems to be drawing the green island out of the water, and the soft south wind carries the scent of flowers far out to sea... Here was a typical coral atoll—the kind you dream about.”⁷⁰ The coral may have looked beautiful, but it posed a legitimate threat to a wooden sailing ship, just as it had for von Mücke’s zambuks along the shores of the Red Sea. The *Seeadler* was anchored outside the lagoon while crews went ashore, discovering three Polynesian fishermen on the island who worked for a company in Tahiti by collecting turtles and giving them to a ship that came once a year.⁷¹ They were happy to have the company, and helped the Germans gather food to bring back to the *Seeadler*’s crew and prisoners for a feast, consisting of “turtle soup, broiled lobster, gull’s egg omellette [*sic*] roast pork, and fresh coconut.”⁷²

On 2nd August, von Luckner decided to take the majority of the crew to shore for a picnic, leaving his prize crew leader Leutnant Preis—aptly employed since his name translates to ‘prize’ in English—and a few others to care for the ship. A ship made in Scotland was not designed for travel in the shallows of the Pacific, and von Luckner was keenly aware that “harbours were often intricate and reef strewn, while strong currents added another dangerous challenge, particularly for a big ship, which was handicapped by its deeper draft and general unwieldiness on an area where manoeuvrability [*sic*] was often vital.”⁷³ Before leaving at nine in the morning, von Luckner consulted the American Captains about how best to tie up the *Seeadler*, and they informed him that as

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 225.

⁷¹ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 19.

⁷² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 140.

⁷³ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 107.

long as the trade winds did not slacken he could securely connect the ship to the reefs by way of cables.⁷⁴

Count von Luckner's storytelling after the fact led to confusion for historians about the exact nature of subsequent events, but the general consensus is that the trade winds slackened on 2nd August while von Luckner and most of the crew was away to disastrous results. With stronger winds pushing the *Seeadler* towards the reef it had been cabled to, the sails could not be unfurled fast enough and the motors' propellers were damaged beyond use before Preis could stop the movement, slamming it against the coral. Seeing the distress signals, von Luckner and his men returned shortly after they had left and spent the entire day trying to get the ship off of the coral to no success, officially calling off the effort before dark so they could salvage supplies and bring them to the island.⁷⁵ This information was complicated afterwards because von Luckner claimed the wreck had been caused by a sudden tidal wave, included in Lowell Thomas' book in English.⁷⁶ He corrected himself in his book *Ein Freibeuterleben* in 1938, but the Second World War obscured this, and the story was never directly contradicted by crewmembers publicly, but was found to be false in their diaries and reports seen decades later.⁷⁷

With the *Seeadler* wrecked, there was nothing to do except salvage everything they could—even the wireless, but not the heavy 4.1 inch guns—and create the German colony of Seeadlerberg. While the crabs, rats, and ants on the island were a nuisance, each was dealt with effectively as proper buildings were made to protect the men from the

⁷⁴ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 23.

⁷⁵ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 110-3.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 227-9.

⁷⁷ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 26.

elements, which the Americans were instrumental in producing.⁷⁸ The former prisoners and former crewmembers were all aware that the Germans were in charge, but generally worked together to build their Germantown and Americantown, as well as going fishing, reading the books that had survived the shipwreck, and spending their newfound leisure time together.⁷⁹ Everyone seemed quite content with their vacation in August 1917, while the Third Battle of Ypres eviscerated French, British, and German soldiers, Tzar Nicholas II had abdicated in Russia following the rise of the communists, and the Americans mobilized for the final repulse of the Germans the following year.⁸⁰ The only one not thoroughly content with life on the island, away from the bombs, gas attacks, diseases, and human suffering in Europe, was Count Felix von Luckner.

Having heard the stories of the *Emden's* landing crew returning to Germany in the *Ayesha*, von Luckner thought that he could emulate the journey. All that was available on the island were the *Seeadler's* lifeboats, so they “devised rigging and sails for our best lifeboat, mast, jib boom, main boom, gaff stays, and back stays... we loaded her with provisions for half a dozen men over a long voyage... She was eighteen feet in length and only about fourteen inches above water amidship.”⁸¹ The German Navy's new ship SMS *Kronprinzessin Cecilie* was to travel from Mopelia to the Cook Islands three hundred miles away, and if unable to find a ship to take there, on to Fiji about one thousand five hundred miles further. Count von Luckner chose five officers that he could rely on as they tried to take a ship big enough for the *Seeadler's* crew to resume raiding, while Leutnant Kling would be left in charge of Seeadlerberg with Leutnant Preis, with orders

⁷⁸ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 117-9.

⁷⁹ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 148.

⁸⁰ Rose, *The Great War and Americans*, xii-iii.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 239.

to hold out with the three months of supplies before using the other lifeboat to catch their own ship.⁸²

Neither party would see the other until well after the war ended, although the island of Mopelia was not the final stand for either. With his five officers aboard, von Luckner set off for the Cook Islands, arriving at Atiu after three days as a result of Leutnant Kircheiß's phenomenal navigational abilities given the circumstances.⁸³ They explained that they were a Dutch group sailing from America for sport, using Plattdeutsche to come off less like German officers, which succeeded in tricking the island's British resident.⁸⁴ There was no boat for them to take which would have worked well, so they set out from the island of Atiu to Aitutaki over a hundred miles away, where they were questioned by the more skeptical British resident agent Duncan and his Norwegian friend. Using a Norwegian cover story, they were able to convince the pair that they were not German, but the local population wanted proof, forcing von Luckner to threaten Duncan with the weapons on the ship before quickly departing.⁸⁵ From Aitutaki they traveled to Rarotanga, but fled when they mistook a broken ship for a battleship at night, and spent ten days travelling to Fiji, twenty degrees of longitude away.

The journey was brutal and threatened to kill the men, who were now suffering from severe scurvy after so long at sea without rest or proper supplies. It whitened their gums, swelled their joints, and loosened their teeth, causing excruciating pain while trying to eat their reserves of hardtack, and all while their blood turned to water and the

⁸² Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 150-1.

⁸³ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 32-4.

⁸⁴ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 246.

⁸⁵ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 36-8.

sea spray coated them in salt.⁸⁶ They finally arrived at a small British island with an unoccupied house they used to recover before moving on to Fiji. They left a note pretending to be British, still held in a New Zealand collection today, and sailed for the islands, where the locals suspected they were German and secretly reported it to the authorities via wireless.⁸⁷ Count von Luckner and his men were physically and mentally devastated from the scurvy, but managed to find a ship that could work well as the *Seeadler II*, hiring the Captain to take them aboard as Norwegian travelers. Their plan to wait until the ship entered international water and then don their German naval uniforms to take it properly were dashed when the police arrived, finally ending von Luckner's journey after two thousand three hundred miles of travelling in the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie*.⁸⁸

Count von Luckner and Kircheiß were separated from the others due to the incredibly hostile New Zealanders calling for their blood, as a New Zealand transport called the *Wairuna* had gone missing and was blamed on the *Seeadler*. In truth, the ship was scuttled by the raider SMS *Wolf*, but von Luckner had no way of knowing this, and the people of New Zealand were not interested in the words of a German anyhow as death notices from Europe continued to pour into their homes.⁸⁹ While von Luckner refused to give up the rest of his men on Mopelia, Leutnant Kling attempted his own version of von Mücke's journey, taking the French merchant *Lutece*—renaming it the *Fortuna*—and setting out for Chile, using the *Seeadler's* radio to signal ships in the area

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 260-3.

⁸⁷ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 166-8.

⁸⁸ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 41-3.

⁸⁹ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 154-6

to help the Americans on the island.⁹⁰ He emulated von Mücke well since, like the *Ayesha*, the *Fortuna's* hull was incredibly rotten. She was just barely able to get the men to Easter Island, where a rock in the harbor caused her to sink. They were stranded until 25th January 1918, when they were given passage to Chile and interred from 2nd March 1918 until their release on 9th August 1919.⁹¹

Count von Luckner joined a group of Germans already interned at the civilian prison on Motuihe island, which had so little security that the men were allowed to go to the local shops because Lieutenant-Colonel Turner trusted the Germans' parole not to escape.⁹² However, several of the interned from German Samoa had a plan and improvised tools—including a functioning sextant made by Walter von Zartorski—that Kircheiß and von Luckner joined.⁹³ His job was to speak with Turner, who agreed to let them put on a Christmas play about Jutland, which the men used as a cover to create sails, 'fake' explosives, tools, and preserved food for the journey.⁹⁴ They escaped using the only boat on the island after sabotaging the prison's wireless communications, and spent several days on the run before being caught resupplying at Cheesman Island by the steamer *Iris*. The people of New Zealand, who had hated von Luckner and the *Seeadler* up to that point, were so impressed by his actions and the incompetence of their own military, that he enjoyed folk-legend status for his cunning and bravery, and was even invited to give talks in 1938, although the rise of fascism in Germany hung over the

⁹⁰ Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 177-80; Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 284-5.

⁹¹ "Chile Frees Germans," *The New York Times*, 10th August 1919, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1919/08/10/118154695.html> (accessed 12th January 2021).

⁹² Bade, *Sea Devil*, 63-5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Count Luckner*, 296-7.

meetings.⁹⁵ Another escape plan was thought of, but the Armistice came and the men returned to Germany in June 1919.

With the war finally over, the men of the *Seeadler* had to adjust to the new Germany, which had been ravaged by food and fuel shortages, had lost a generation of its young men, and was saddled with the Treaty of Versailles placing the debt of the victors on the Weimar Republic's doorstep. With hyperinflation and military cutbacks, von Luckner eked out his living by publishing his memoirs and speaking about his life through the First World War, which were massive hits in Germany, and then in the United States with the help of Lowell Thomas. He toured the world in his ship *Vaterland* during the 1920's, visiting the United States and meeting prominent political figures, including an invitation to meet with the president.⁹⁶

Like many former Imperial German officers, von Luckner subscribed to the belief that Germany had not really lost the war, calling it a draw and participating in a demonstration in Halle—that Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck was notably absent from—in 1924, which resulted in a fight with a communist group, and left eleven communists dead.⁹⁷ He joined the Freemasons, barring him from the NSDAP, but Hitler and Goebbels saw the potential to use him as a propaganda tool, and both personally financed another global trip to spread fascism.⁹⁸ The secret Gestapo agent aboard von Luckner's new ship stated he was shirking his duty to praise German fascism, leading to Hitler's personal intervention. Count von Luckner stood trial before the Court of Honor on 5th July 1939,

⁹⁵ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 90-3; Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 196-200.

⁹⁶ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 195-6.

⁹⁷ "Eleven Reds Killed in Clash at Halle." *The New York Times*, 12th May 1924, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/05/12/104250703.html> (accessed 12th January 2021).

⁹⁸ Bade, *Sea Devil*, 116-8.

but the invasion of Poland soon afterwards ended the proceedings.⁹⁹ In 1945 he negotiated the surrender of Halle with the Americans to the agitation of the SS officers stationed there, and ultimately the people too when they were drawn into the German Democratic Republic after the war. He moved to Sweden with his wife Ingeborg von Egestrom, and died in 1966.¹⁰⁰

The SMS *Seeadler* was not the most successful German commerce raider of the war, the SMS *Emden* captured over thirty ships and the *Möwe* went on multiple raiding trips while returning through the British blockade. The *Seeadler* did not tie down as many Allied ships as the *Königsberg* or sink in battle like the East Asiatic Squadron, but it did have two major successes that benefit the German war effort. The first of these was the cargo it sunk, including saltpetre that could have killed thousands, sugar supplies bound for France, and American trade in the Pacific when they entered the war, altogether over one hundred thousand tons across sixteen ships, spiking insurance rates for the Allied nations.¹⁰¹

The other success was improving the image of Germany at a time when the war had galvanized the people of each side against one another, exacerbated by broken rules of war, the employment of starvation tactics, and the continued onslaught of artillery and breakdown of societies.¹⁰² Like the *Emden*, the *Seeadler* conducted its activities properly and treated her prisoners well, leading to a well-earned reputation, and serving as the underdog in neutral newspapers because it was an outfitted windjammer taking on a

⁹⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹⁰⁰ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 194 & 203-4.

¹⁰¹ Jefferson, *The Sea Devil*, 128; Hoyt, *Sea Eagle*, 192.

¹⁰² Simon Winder, *Danubia: A Personal History of Habsburg Europe* (New York, NY: Picador, 2013), 508-12.

world of cruiser squadrons, minefields, and coal power. The propaganda value was more than the Imperial German government had expected, and the international interest in von Luckner's accounts in German and English during the 1920's and 1930's was so strong that Hitler and Goebbels personally invested in a von Luckner world tour to try and spread their own messages. While von Luckner's later aggrandizements complicated the study of *Seeadler*, newfound sources and information have allowed historians to paint a more accurate account of events, which still prove to be an impressive feat of dedication, discipline, and adventure during the war.

Chapter IV: The *Schutztruppe* in the African Theater¹

At the end of the First World War, there remained only one German General who had not suffered a single conventional military defeat at some point, as a result of his preemptive mobilization for war in early 1914, and whose soldiers laid down their arms on 25th November 1918.² This General's fighting force had eluded the Allies so well that it became necessary for clause seventeen of the 11th November 1918 Armistice to assert that the surrender "of all German forces operating in East Africa [would be] within a period specified by the Allies" in order to give them time to find and inform their adversary that the war had in fact ended.³ While they had never been formally defeated, the force had been nearly entirely cut off from all exterior assistance at the start of the war. Even after their territory fell into British and Belgian hands and the group was driven out of the colony, they continued to operate as an independent force living off of given, stolen, and captured supplies, much to the agitation of the English-speaking world.⁴ General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck of German East Africa's *Schutztruppe* remains a complex figure in German, Tanzanian, and global history as a result of this conflict in east Africa.

¹ "Victory Medal: Definition of Theaters of War; An Army Order," *The Shanghai times (1914-1921)*, 3rd November 1919, <https://search.proquest.com/central/docview/1324944700/4BD77DFC5B094F80PQ/8?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th October 2020).

² "East Africa: Surrender of the Germans," *The Scotsman (1860-1920)*, 18th November 1918, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/483037303/457BDF551D27447CPQ/4?accountid=14637> (accessed 26th September 2020).

³ "Armistice with Germany," opened for signature 11th November 1918, *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0009.pdf>.

⁴ Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014), 143-4; "German Colonial Dreams," *The New York Times*, 10th September 1918, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1918/09/10/issue.html> (accessed 25th September 2020).

A war between the major European powers had long been expected by most on the continent, and the result was for each to prepare a variety of plans for any combination of combatant nations. Several of these, such as the French *Plan XVII*, or the German *Schlieffen Plan*, required speed on the European railways to knock out the enemy's capitals and end the war before the other had a chance to respond.⁵ The conflict in the African colonies, or for that matter any colonies, seems subsidiary in contrast to the plans that focused on creating a 'lightning war' in the European theater. This opinion was held by the German government, who did not incorporate the colonies into their planning by 1914 beyond possible naval raiding bases:

The raw-materials argument might have made more sense in [the] context of a war in which Britain was an unfriendly neutral, but the actual colonies produced only a few materials... that could be regarded as vital to the German economy.⁶

While Berlin may have not needed colonies to conduct their war effort, they had no intentions of turning them over to the Allied forces without a fight, and even had plans to expand their imperial holdings when they won the war, creating the continent-spanning super-colony of *Mittelafrika*.⁷

The task of defending the colonies in Africa during the war—which at the start included Togoland (Togo), the Cameroons (Cameroon), German South West Africa (Namibia), and German East Africa (Tanzania)—fell to the colonial governments and the *Schutztruppen*, the military 'protection forces' established to guard German colonies

⁵ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 35-37.

⁶ Woodruff Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 221.

⁷ "German Colonial Dreams," 10th September 1918.

from internal and external forces.⁸ While these colonies did belong to the German government, the colonists and colonial governments were not always as keen on going to war without exterior support and entirely surrounded by enemy forces.⁹ GEA governor Heinrich Schnee believed that the best course of action, given the German government's inability to aid or even communicate with him after the radio station in Windhoek, GSWA was destroyed, was to pursue neutrality for the good of the colonial population.

Following the orders of the German Colonial Office, Schnee converted all port cities into 'open cities' making them neutral, but effectively in favor of the British Navy, although supply ships for the German light cruiser and commerce raider SMS *Königsberg* continued to secretly operate in these harbors for the first few months of the war.¹⁰ This was an attractive option for the European population of GEA at the start of the war, and was done while Schnee appealed to "Walter Page, America's Ambassador in London, to broker a restoration of neutrality in all east African colonies in accordance with the 1885 Berlin Act."¹¹ However, the German colonial citizens' opinions swung against neutrality after the British bombarded the capital city of Dar-es-Salaam. This occurred after the British Navy sailed into the blockaded harbor and sank German ships accused of containing supplies for the *Königsberg*, which was true but unproven at the time of the scuttle.¹²

As the population of GEA turned against the British and other Allied forces, they began to agree with the opinions of *Oberstleutnant* (Lieutenant Colonel) Paul von

⁸ John Buchan, *The First World War in Africa 1914-1918: Togoland, South-West Africa, The Cameroons & East Africa* (East Yorkshire, England: Leonaur, 2018), 7-8.

⁹ Edwin Hoyt, *Guerilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany's East African Empire* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981), 16-18.

¹⁰ Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 15-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-3.

¹² Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 55-7.

Lettow-Vorbeck, commander of the *Schutztruppe* in GEA as assigned by the German High Command in 1913.¹³ From the moment he arrived, von Lettow prepared supplies, the active *Schutztruppe*, and reserve officers for a war between the European powers as he realized the geographical location of the colony between British Uganda, the Belgian Congo, British Rhodesia, Portuguese Mozambique, and the Indian Ocean could be an issue.¹⁴ He did not believe that GEA could conquer the surrounding territories, each with better equipped and numerically larger militaries, so his initial goal was to hold as much of GEA as he could for as long as possible, in case the war in Europe really did end before Christmas 1914.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the more important objective for von Lettow was to tie up as much Allied personnel and war materiel in his theater, since he held that “the fate of the colonies, as of all German possessions, would only be decided on the battlefields of Europe.”¹⁶ He knew that if the conflict in east Africa progressed, it would force the Allies to send increasing numbers of soldiers to root out the *Schutztruppe*. Eventually, von Lettow and the *Schutztruppe* would have to continue the war on foreign colonial soil, with only the supplies that they could scavenge or capture, which became the case in Portuguese Mozambique in 1917.¹⁷

As the Germans debated the role of the colonies in the overall German war effort, the lengthy east African campaign proceeded on the backs of two other groups. The first

¹³ Robert Gaudi, *African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (Caliber, NY: Berkley, 2017), 108.

¹⁴ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 11.

¹⁵ Edward Paice, *Tip & Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 14.

¹⁶ Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa: The East Africa Campaign of the First World War by the Most Notable German Commander* (East Yorkshire, England: Leonaur, 2010), 9.

¹⁷ Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, 222.

of these were the colonized populations of Africa. The British were able to use a collection of non-British colonial populations to fight in east Africa until later in the war, when mounting losses and fear of a major blow to Allied moral led to the use of more British troops. These groups included native police forces of their three colonies bordering GEA, Indian and Boer soldiers, and an international collection of British colonists forming the *Frontiersmen*.¹⁸ The Germans had to rely much more heavily on native east African soldiers, called *Askari*, to supplement their military presence even before the war, which was what led to the creation of the *Schutztruppe* in 1889.¹⁹

While there have been differing interpretations of what motivated sections of the native population of GEA to fight so diligently for the Germans—including ideas of loyalty to the Kaiser or settling personal scores using European weaponry—some contemporary scholars have tried a new approach. They find that the *Askari* joined the *Schutztruppe* to better their material and social status, and later in their service found the organization and comradery of military life more enjoyable than regular farm life. By the First World War, the *Askari* wanted to maintain the material wealth and lifestyle that they earned through the ‘small wars’ and Maji Maji Rebellion.²⁰ However, those native Africans that were not members of the *Askari* or colonial police forces often found themselves either pushed, or fully forced into service as porters of war material on both sides by the end of the conflict.

The choice of the Allies to participate in the east African campaign was not done out of national zeal, so much as it was the only option left after the *Schutztruppe*’s attacks

¹⁸ Michael Pesek, “The War of Legs: Transport and Infrastructure in the East African Campaign of World War I,” *Transfers* 5, no.2 (2015), 103-5.

¹⁹ Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 90-93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

on the neighboring colonies at the start of the war. While Governor Schnee had agreed to convert all coastal cities into ‘open ports’ and was courting the American Ambassador to enforce the Berlin Act, von Lettow had started to replicate the lightning war in Europe along GEA’s borders. He and his officers began by crossing the border into British East Africa (BEA) to attack the vital Uganda Railway—a massive undertaking that the British colony built between 1896 and 1901—to prevent swift mobilization by the British, and to harm the Empire’s prestige in the eyes of its BEA citizens.²¹ The *Schutztruppe* also attacked the port Lukuga of the then-neutral Belgian Congo on Lake Tanganyika in early August 1914 to maintain naval supremacy with their warship the *Hedwig von Wissmann*, and briefly invaded northern Portuguese Mozambique.²² With the threat to colonists and prestige, alongside the opportunity for the British to seize another colony after the war, grand scale intervention became a necessity.²³

Even as the motivation to defeat the German colonial forces was high, and the risk of their resupply from Germany almost nonexistent given British naval supremacy, the Allied side of the east African campaign was still unable to defeat the *Schutztruppe* for the entirety of the war. What should have been a quick and easy campaign—as was the fall of Togoland within days to the British, or the swift conquest of German Samoa, New Guinea, and Tsingtau by New Zealand, Australia, and Japan—instead involved hundreds of thousands of Allied personnel that could have been fighting in Europe.²⁴ An investigation of the Allied and *Schutztruppe* forces during the campaign reveals a variety

²¹ Vincent Harlow and E.M. Chilver, eds., *History of East Africa*, vol. II (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1965), 142-3.

²² Paice, *Tip & Run*, 22-3; von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 22 & 31.

²³ “German East,” *South China Morning Post (1903-1941)*, 10th September 1918, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1499293063/457BDF551D27447CPQ/16?accountid=14637> (accessed 26th September 2020).

²⁴ Daniel Steinbach, “The End of Germany’s Colonial Empire,” *Historian* no. 134 (2017), 30-33.

After Governor Schnee chose to pursue his public policy of neutrality, and von Lettow promptly invaded Allied territories, the British planned an invasion of the key city Tanga for early November 1914, located along the shore in north-eastern GEA. The city was central to the colony's two major railroads: the first was the Usambara railroad from Tanga to New Moshi, located near Mount Kilimanjaro at the colony's border: the second was the Ungabara railroad from Dar-es-Salaam to the port city of Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika.²⁶ In charge of the invasion was British Major-General Arthur Aitken, leader of the Indian Expeditionary Force 'B' (IEF 'B'), which was a collection of less experienced Indian units sent to east Africa in conditions so appalling that they were compared to those of the Middle Passage, with barely enough room to lie side by side below deck for all three weeks of their voyage.²⁷

While there were protests from the medical personnel and commanders—since the element of surprise was lost after the British followed the rules of war and informed the 'open port' of a coming military operation,—“Aitken decided to proceed immediately against the port of Tanga... without disembarking his force to recover from their voyage and reorganize.”²⁸ With the element of surprise already gone, Aitken had nothing to lose from stopping to let his soldiers acclimate to the land and new environment. His plan to invade Tanga at once can most likely be attributed to his belief that “‘The Indian Army will make short work of a lot of n—s,’ he said.”²⁹ An example of the racially-based thinking that inhabited the minds of many imperialists across Europe at the time, Aitken paid for his lack of planning or concern. The result of the British invasion of Tanga was

²⁶ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 11

²⁷ Gaudi, *African Kaiser*, 172-3.

²⁸ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 41-2.

²⁹ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 27.

the complete repulsion of British and Indian troops by the very African *Askari* that Aitken had discounted, and ultimately the operation had to be censored throughout the Empire to keep morale from plummeting.³⁰

This underestimation and belief in the inherent superiority that British Indian soldiers would have over the German colonial military set off a chain reaction of blunders throughout the invasion. The first of these was that the Indian forces which landed on the southern side of Tanga were repelled by the *Schutztruppe*, and the German commander on the field could see that the HMS *Fox* in the harbor “had fired about a dozen shots in the rubber plantation, killing only retreating Rajputs and Pioneers [both British troops], but now, two hours later, she began shelling Tanga itself.”³¹ Many of the Rajputs had never seen action before, but even the most experienced soldiers would be confused if they were fired upon for hours by both the enemy and their own naval support.

The *Schutztruppe*, recognizing that they could fully repel the invading forces, proceeded to return them to the beach at which they had disembarked. Realizing that the invasion had failed, it was decided that the British would immediately abandon nearly fifty wounded men, as well as “sixteen machine guns, hundreds of rifles, six hundred thousand rounds of ammunition, food and other stores, and coats and blankets enough to last them for the rest of the war.”³² Altogether, the British had done worse than to simply underestimate their enemy and fail to coordinate between their naval and invading forces, but rather had created an event that spread by word of mouth throughout the Empire,

³⁰ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 59-60.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

³² Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 48.

boosting German and GEA morale, and resupplying an enemy that was otherwise cutoff from external aid.

The lack of advanced military equipment held by the *Schutztruppe*, and low chance of resupply from the *Krupp* and *Howitzer* factories in Germany, made both the hit-and-run tactics and capture of enemy arms far more critical. When the war broke out in June 1914, “all askari [had] learned to shoot the Mauser M/71, a single-shot .450-caliber rifle that used black-powder cartridges famous for giving off clouds of black smoke and betraying soldiers’ locations. Askari regularly undertook strictly monitored target practice, with sharpshooters receiving special recognition and insignia.”³³

Realizing that the *Schutztruppe* would be severely outnumbered by enemy forces should a war break out, it became necessary to both train the *Askari* to be self-sufficient with the materials they had, and to instill in them a sense of superiority over the militaries of the neighboring colonies.³⁴ As such, when the war began the *Askari* were fully able to sharpshoot and then relocate to avoid detection—proven to the Germans and British at Tanga—and the best of which were awarded captured modern rifles as a more practical decoration for their service.³⁵

The Allied advantage of advanced machinery included hand grenades, mortars, and vehicles for transportation, although the last of these were in short supply due to the need in Europe. Additionally, motor vehicles were often not used due to the condition of the roads, especially during the abnormally aggressive rainy season of 1917.³⁶ The tools of war, however, were proven effective after a fairly routine *Schutztruppe* attack on a

³³ Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 101-2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁵ von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 14.

³⁶ Buchan, *The First World War in Africa*, 120.

King's African Rifles battalion at Kibata in 1916, when "the British brought... the Mills bomb, or hand grenade, which had made its appearance earlier on the Western Front, but had never been seen in Africa... when [the *Askari*] rose to attack with bayonet, they were mowed down by the grenadiers. They lost forty officers and men in that engagement."³⁷ While the element of surprise had been on the Allied sides for their first use of the grenade in Africa, the future success of modern weapons relied on proper training with the materials.

However, it was the proper training—or more accurately lack thereof—that was often the problem for utilizing new technology against the *Schutztruppe*, as was the case with the Allied mortar teams. When a frontal assault was conducted to push the *Schutztruppe* into a pincer movement, "the mortar crews were new and they did not quite understand their weapons. In this particular case they made the mistake of underestimating the range, so when the Gold Coast Regiment blacks attacked frontally, they were hit by the German machine guns and plastered by their own mortars."³⁸ While the British were supplying their troops in east Africa with effective equipment, the failure of the leadership and training at the campaign level made them worse than ineffectual. Later, the *Schutztruppe* began to adapt to grenade and mortar warfare, eventually capturing several the pieces and training units in their operation for their own mortar teams against the Allies.³⁹

The tactics of both sides was another underlying issue, and specifically it was the ability to adapt tactics that made the *Schutztruppe* so elusive over the course of the war,

³⁷ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 148.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁹ von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 159-60.

and the Allies so predictable. While the Allied forces in Africa had defeated the *Shutztruppen* of Togoland, German South West Africa, and the Cameroons by the end of 1916, it was noted early on that the GEA campaign “was the first time in history that a British Army had in a tropical wilderness encountered an enemy force officered by highly-trained Europeans. The combination meant that every advantage of terrain and climate would be used against us.”⁴⁰ Commander-in-Chief of British and South African forces in 1916, Jan Smuts continuously attempted the same tactic of flanking the *Schutztruppe* while keeping them busy through a head-on attack, albeit with the occasional fourth column for extra security.⁴¹ These attempts in an area where he, and at times even the Germans, had no accurate maps—due to historically uncooperative native groups, lack of infrastructure, and since the GEA was approximately the size of Germany and France combined—always ended in failure.⁴²

On one of the only occasions upon which Smuts’ encirclement of German commander Ernst Otto was completed, “Otto saw what had happened and gave the order: the Askaris were to scatter and make their way to the prearranged rendezvous, the banks of the Rufiji. The British came on... but the real Askaris got away once more... They all crossed, and Capitan Otto blew up the bridge behind them.”⁴³ The guerilla tactics of the *Schutztruppe*, who were also on their own turf for the majority of the campaign, were continuously effective against the European style of warfare that was not designed for massive, scarcely developed jungles in Africa. With only rare exceptions, the hit-and-run style and simple goal of keeping the Allies a step behind, rather than trying to defeat

⁴⁰ Buchan, *The First World War in Africa*, 118.

⁴¹ Moyd, *Tip & Run*, xxxviii.

⁴² “With Smuts in ‘German East’,” *The Field* 132, no. 3434 (19th October 1918), 363.

⁴³ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 149.

Allied forces in grand battles, were perfect for the *Schutztruppe*, and only when the British began switched to a war of attrition in 1917 by raiding grain supplies in southern GEA did von Lettow realize he had to leave the colony or face defeat.⁴⁴

Arguably more critical than any amount of tactical genius, modern weapons, or even quinine to prevent the infection of malaria in the European populations, were the porters who had to move everything through the jungles.⁴⁵ As the British pushed further into GEA, away from the few railways and into territory that even the Germans had rarely travelled through prior, their motor vehicles were increasingly ineffective in the mountains and jungles.⁴⁶ In order to transport heavy artillery, lodgings, food, medical supplies, and the personal effects of European, Indian, and African troops alike, the Allies continuously set up incentive programs and conscription schemes to keep their supply lines functional. However, as German snipers attacked supply lines, exhaustion and hunger set in, and the tse-tse fly and tropical diseases continued to kill and incapacitate thousands of porters every week, Smuts had to request the British government transport or conscript fifteen thousand new porters each month to stay at the same numbers.⁴⁷

The Belgian Congo was one of the most aggressive forces in Africa when it came to forcing native populations to act as its much-needed porters. The German and Belgian colonies had worked together to end the slave trade in east Africa during the turn of the nineteenth century, although King Leopold II's treatment of the people of the Congo was

⁴⁴ von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 203.

⁴⁵ Gaudi, *African Kaiser*, 218.

⁴⁶ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 366-7.

⁴⁷ Pesek, "The War of Legs," 109-10.

so brutal that the Belgian state took control of ‘his personal’ colony in 1908.⁴⁸ When the war broke out and Belgium’s government in absentia ordered the Congo to aid Allied forces in Africa, the Congo’s fifteen thousand strong paramilitary police *Force Publique* was mobilized to protect British Rhodesia against the *Schutztruppe*’s early actions there.⁴⁹ The Belgian Congo was less prepared for the war than either GEA or the British:

The high demand for porters put much strain on the weak colonial state and threatened to disturb its fragile relationship with local societies... [the] Belgians hoped to replace the deserted, dead, or unfit porters with men recruited in the occupied territories... Whole villages, including women and children, were forced to serve as porters for the troops.⁵⁰

Between the British and Belgians in east Africa, the majority of the porters had worked for the British, although the porters conscripted by the Belgians consistently had the numerically highest mortality.

The German colonial government knew that war in east Africa would likely mean the fall of the industrialized coastal cities, and thus control of the railroads would belong to the Allies. Severely limited heavy artillery would look—to most European commanders of the time—like a massive disadvantage, if not a deciding factor in battle. However, von Lettow understood that the minimal artillery he had—two 1873 artillery pieces and the guns taken from the *Königsberg* after it was trapped in the Rufiji River Delta by the British—would mean transportation could be faster and through the jungle.⁵¹ Porters would still be necessary, and it was hard for the *Schutztruppe* when many

⁴⁸ Maarten Couttenier, “The Museum as Rift Zone – The Construction and Representation of ‘East’ and ‘Central’ Africa in the (Belgian) Congo Museum/ Royal Museum for Central Africa,” *History in Africa* 46 (2019), 327-358; Ewout Frankema and Frans Buelens, *Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development: The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies Compared* (London, England: Routledge, 2013), 26.

⁴⁹ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 22.

⁵⁰ Pesek, “The War of Legs,” 111-3.

⁵¹ von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 41; Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 97.

deserted in 1918 during a brief return to GEA following months of guerilla war in foreign Mozambique, living off supplies given by sympathetic villages, or pillaged from native and imperialists alike. But the *Schutztruppe* never needed nearly as many porters as the heavily-equipped British and Belgian troops pursuing them.⁵² At the end of the war, the Allied forces had used between them six hundred thousand to one million porters, either through employment, conscription, or slavery, while the Germans had—although through not dissimilar means—only had forty-five thousand porters work for them.⁵³

It had been expected by the Allies that the *Schutztruppe* would finally be pushed into a winner-take-all fight at the GEA-Mozambique border by the end of 1917, given that the rest of the colony lay in Allied hands. However, von Lettow's decision to abandon GEA and cross into Portuguese Mozambique—Portugal having entered the war in early 1916—to continue causing trouble for the Allies showed what had always been more important for the General.⁵⁴ The Portuguese military was undisciplined and easily defeated by the battle-hardened *Schutztruppe*, and the Portuguese were so ruthless against their native populations that villages often gave supplies to the Germans out of spite.⁵⁵ The rest of the war was just as it had been at the start, with the Allies chasing ghosts in the jungle, who at that point used exclusively modern rifles that had all been captured from the Allied supply stations and defeated units.⁵⁶ Despite GEA having fallen entirely into the hands of the Allies, the *Schutztruppe* and von Lettow refused to give up—just as

⁵² Ibid., 282.

⁵³ "Tale of Mutilation: A German Record in German East Africa; Torture Inflicted on Natives," *The Shanghai Times (1914-1921)*, 10th August 1916, <https://search.proquest.com/hnpchinesecollection/docview/1324900317/FD7B3A2B23A04779PQ/1?accountid=14637> (accessed 25th October 2020).

⁵⁴ Buchan, *The First World War in Africa*, 153.

⁵⁵ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 188.

⁵⁶ von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 216-8 & 275.

von Mücke and the men of the *Ayasha* had during their trek to Berlin—and the Allies could not stop as long as towns and supplies continued to be raided and destroyed, so the war went on into 1918.

While the *Schutztruppe* was well-supplied by easily-defeated Portuguese troops during 1917 and 1918—with anti-malarial drugs estimated to last until mid-1919—the German officers, *Askari*, and porters continued to dwindle as desertion, Allied attacks, and disease stalked the them.⁵⁷ The *Schutztruppe* had gone from about 3,000 Europeans and 11,000 *Askari* in 1914 to “155 Europeans, comprising 30 officers, medical officers and higher officials, 1,168 *Askari*, and about 3,000 other natives” by November 1918.⁵⁸ With the colony abandoned, and a major conflict or pincer movement threatening the shrinking *Schutztruppe*, plans were devised to move through GEA to Rhodesia, and perhaps afterwards through the Congo to fight on the western coast and keep the Allies pinned in the African theater.⁵⁹

That is, until a message was brought to von Lettow from a captured British messenger on 12th November 1918, from which “he learnt of the Armistice in Europe... news conveyed by the British officers [confirmed] the state of turmoil in Germany, the mutiny of the German fleet, the Kaiser’s abdication, and Ludendorff’s flight to Sweden.”⁶⁰ The results of the conflict in Europe were still to be fully established, but the revolution, Armistice, and demand that the *Schutztruppe* surrender unconditionally at Abercorn, Rhodesia on 25th November 1918 in accordance with the seventeenth clause of the Armistice took the last members of the Imperial German military out of the world

⁵⁷ Ibid., 286.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 23 & 294.

⁵⁹ Gaudi, *African Kaiser*, 385.

⁶⁰ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 386-7.

war.⁶¹ There were those members among the *Schutztruppe*'s officers that wanted, even after the surrender, to take up arms again and proceed across the continent—as the unconditional surrender of an undefeated enemy seemed wrong to them—and while von Lettow appreciated their vigor, he knew the war had ended.

After the war, von Lettow spoke with his English adversaries and estimated that “137 [Allied] Generals had been in the field, and in all about 300,000 men had been employed against us. The enemy’s losses in dead would not be put too high at 60,000.”⁶² The *Schutztruppe* was detained in Africa for several months as the cost of the Allied campaign was calculated in dollar amounts for future use, the *Askari* were repatriated to GEA, and the Germans colonists were rounded up to be sent to Germany. They returned to Berlin on 2nd March 1919 and were received by cheering crowds turned out to see the undefeated *Schutztruppe*.⁶³

The reception of the campaign in Europe was another matter, and was ultimately delayed by the British cutting communications to Africa and censoring the failure at Tanga as early as November 1914. It was only at the tail end of December 1914 that something appeared in the news, although in a South African paper rather than a British or east African paper, because “Prime Minister Asquith did not inform King George V until 11th November, three days after the shattered remains of IEF ‘B’ landed at Mombasa, by which time his government had decided that such a ‘grave set-back’ was best covered up.”⁶⁴ While the Germans were able to receive colonial news via the then-operational radio transmitters in GEA and GSWA—and cheered on von Lettow and the

⁶¹ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 201-3.

⁶² von Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 300.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 295-7.

⁶⁴ Paice, *Tip & Run*, 59.

Schutztruppe—the British government set about censoring Tanga across their Empire, and at the highest levels as well. British East Africa and Mombasa became aware by word of mouth, and immediately the British citizen’s clubs of each colony began to sing songs about the failure of their own men in Tanga, highlighting why the British government chose to keep this information from their domestic population.⁶⁵

As the war ground to a stalemate on the Western Front, the population of Britain became increasingly interested in east Africa, as by mid-1916 all other German colonies in Africa and east Asia had fallen to Allied forces, whether British, South African, Australian, Japanese or otherwise.⁶⁶ Unlike some of the accounts of enemy leaders that appeared in British newspapers in the early days of the war, such as von Müller or von Mücke, by late-1916 the war in Africa had cost so much in Allied time, resources, and lives that the depictions of von Lettow and the *Schutztruppe* were negative, not unlike some of the depictions of Count Felix von Luckner’s SMS *Seeadler* in 1917. The *Schutztruppe* was portrayed as a lawless group of African soldiers, with either disinterested or actively maniacal German officers, and newspapers referenced “photographs showing the cruelty inflicted on the harmless village people, male and female... Resentment is general throughout the Empire against German excesses, which presume quite rightly that England will never condescend to answer in kind.”⁶⁷ It was entirely true that by the end of 1916 and 1917, the Germans had begun to forcibly conscript members of the native population in GEA as porters, although the Belgian

⁶⁵ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 51-2.

⁶⁶ Charles Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtau; World War I in Asia* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1976), 181.

⁶⁷ “Tale of Mutilation,” 10th August 1916.

Congo was doing quite the same, and the British were similarly doing so from the colonies in Asia and across Africa to be sent to GEA.

By the end of the war in 1918, when the Eastern Front had collapsed to German control and the Americans had joined the Allies, there was little doubt that the public of the Allied nations were condemning the Germans in Africa, and their governments were planning to take the colonies after the war. The English speaking colonists in Hong Kong read that von Lettow was “no more than an outlaw and his escapades cannot have the slightest effect on the Allied occupation of German East Africa, where the natives after the brutal treatment meted out to them by their former taskmasters, have taken most kindly to the beneficent presence of the Allied army of occupation.”⁶⁸ Published on 10th September 1918, the full horrors of the war had become fully apparent, and unlike the days of the SMS *Emden*’s commerce raiding in compliance with the rules of war, or the international interest in the crew of the *Ayasha*’s journey, the public of both sides had turned fully against the other. On the same day that this was published in south-east Asia, another article was being published in New York City—by that point America was an Allied nation—which held that “knowing that [German] occupation of African ports and command of sea routes would be a permanent danger to peace, is the restoration to Germany of her colonies, let alone any extension of them, likely to commend itself to a free world?”⁶⁹ Germany no longer held the colonial territories it had at the start of the First World War, yet the newspapers and leaders of the Allied countries claimed in late 1918 that returning any land abroad to Germany would be a severe mistake.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “German East,” 10th September 1918.

⁶⁹ “German Colonial Dreams,” 10th September 1918.

⁷⁰ Moyd, *Tip & Run*, 346.

These perceptions of the colonial competition's importance in the First World War have evolved over time, becoming even comedic by the end of the twentieth century in Britain given the reality of the situation. The British comedy Television program *Blackadder*, whose final season aired in 1989 and was set in the trenches of the Great War, explained why this colonial thinking during the war was flawed, stating that "the British Empire at present covers a quarter of the globe, while the German Empire consists of a small sausage factory in Tanganyika. I hardly think that we can be absolved from blame on the imperialistic front."⁷¹ Just as the Allies overemphasized the importance of Germany's colonialism, so did Berlin to itself by the end of the war, as they had grand schemes to win the war and create a massive German colony containing most of sub-Saharan Africa, despite the little importance Germany's colonies played before the conflict.⁷² When the war ended and the Treaty of Versailles was signed, each colony was put under another nation's authority, and the German populations sent back to Europe, with the key exception of GSWA—modern Namibia—where the colonists were allowed to stay.⁷³

Germany was another matter entirely, with Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck seen as a national hero, being the only General during the war to evade a conventional defeat in the entire German Army. He and the German members of the *Schutztruppe* did not return to their homes until 1919, and when they did it was under new leadership as the revolution in 1918 had deposed the Kaiser and led to the signing of the Armistice.⁷⁴ Not every

⁷¹ Richard Boden, dir., *Blackadder*, season 4, episode 6, "Goodbye," aired 2nd November 1989, on the BBC.

⁷² Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, 225.

⁷³ Daniel Steinbach, "The End of Germany's Colonial Empire," *Historian*, no. 133 (2017), 30-33.

⁷⁴ "Armistice with Germany," opened for signature 11th November 1918.

German citizen was happy to have him back, and “after the parade through the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin’s mayor had planned a formal banquet to celebrate von Lettow’s campaigns in Africa. This he cancelled, fearing violent interruptions from gangs of anti-Imperialist, pro-Bolshevik revolutionaries.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, much like the men of the *Ayesha* and *Seeadler*, the stories of the *Schutztruppe*’s determination to continuously operate in Africa and keep as many Allied troops out of Europe as possible had intrigued and brought hope to many Germans during the war.

The hope and inspiration that the *Schutztruppe* and von Lettow brought to Germany came in the form of an army undefeated in battle, and was used by groups in Germany going forward to describe the problems with the end of the war and Treaty of Versailles. The German colonies were divided amongst the victors, but while they had been of little importance before the war, the grand schemes for *Mittelafrika* and *Mitteuropa* in 1918 had convinced many that colonies were a necessity for a modern nation. With the colonies taken away from Germany, no longer did the theory that enlightened nations had to bring civilization to the rest of the world work in Germany’s favor, rather it meant that Germany was no longer one of the civilized nations since they had no colonies.⁷⁶

Using the outrage to their advantage, Hitler and the NSDAP gained the support of the conservative Colonial Society by including the return of the African colonies as a foreign-policy objective, however “in actual policymaking... Hitler largely ignored the Colonial Society... In 1938, when offered the African colonies in return for passing up Czechoslovakia, Hitler had no reluctance in choosing continental expansion over

⁷⁵ Gaudi, *African Kaiser*, 411.

⁷⁶ Steinbach, “The End of Germany’s Colonial Empire,” 30-33.

colonial.”⁷⁷ The organization was mostly filled with former colonial officials when it was brought into the government in the mid-1930’s, including former GEA Governor Heinrich Schnee. Schnee became an ardent supporter of Hitler’s public policies on the African colonies, and was eventually elevated to the position of ‘administrator of colonies’, which would have made him leader of all Third Reich colonies had the Second World War gone in his favor.⁷⁸

As for the former *Schutztruppe* commander Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, the post-war era saw a variety of plans fall through, including a brief military career with the Weimar Republic, involvement in the Kapp Putsch, and an unsuccessful try at politics.⁷⁹ Still the only German General of the First World War to hold the dual honors of the *Pour le Mérite* award from the Kaiser and an undefeated record in battle, he was approached by the NSDAP to join, as the *Schutztruppe* was already used for propaganda purposes by the new government.⁸⁰ He unquestionably declined a position in the new government or party and instead decided to live in retirement, although he lost both of his sons during the Second World War.⁸¹

The legacy of the *Schutztruppe* in the former colony of German East Africa, later Tanganyika, and today Tanzania, was similarly complex. Many of the living *Askari* who had served in the *Schutztruppe* travelled to Dar-es-Salaam in 1953 when they heard word that the eighty three year old commander was returning for a visit, and he enjoyed

⁷⁷ Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, 232-3.

⁷⁸ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 202.

⁷⁹ Nigel Fountain, “Review: History: The Kaisers Jihad: The Story of the Clash of Western Empires in Early 20th-Cetnury Africa Impresses Nigel Fountain,” *The Guardian* (27th January 2007), 8.

⁸⁰ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 142-4; Allan Mallinson, “‘African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918’, by Robert Gaudi – Review,” *The Spectator* (12th August 2017).

⁸¹ Gaudi, *African Kaiser*, 414-5.

speaking with them and reminiscing on their shared history.⁸² However, the former *Askari* were largely forgotten immediately after the war—with the exception of von Lettow fighting to have their backpay upheld by new German governments—and did not reenter the Tanganyikan zeitgeist until the period of African nationalism in the 1950's and 1960's. At that point, they were seen as the former servants of the imperialists who had subjugated east Africa and were ostracized for it. Some modern scholars hold that they had only been living life in a fashion similar to how they had before German occupation, but with the ability to gain modern luxuries and increase their societal standings.⁸³

The odyssey of the *Schutztruppe* through the jungles of German East Africa, and later Mozambique as well, was only possible because of the conjunction of multiple factors on both sides. Cut off from material aid, and later fully isolated from contact with Berlin, the militarily weaker German colony lacked the modern weaponry and supplies of its Allied neighbors. While this meant that the *Schutztruppe* could not successfully defeat their enemies, they could slip through their enemy's fingers and avoid a decisive defeat instead. European style warfare did not suit the terrain and simple transportation methods of GEA, so blending *Askari* sharpshooting skill, knowledge of the area, and self-preservation with von Lettow's campaign goals meant guerilla hit-and-run tactics were ideal. The British and Belgian forces could have approached the issues similarly, yet only after Major-General Arthur Aitken's underestimation of the enemy at Tanga in 1914, and Commander-in-Chief Jan Smuts' steadfast use of the ineffective pincer movement until 1917, did a war of attrition that really threatened the *Schutztruppe* finally begin.

⁸² Ibid., 411.

⁸³ Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 6-9.

When the *Schutztruppe* left GEA in 1917, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck was entirely in charge, with Governor Schnee now outside of what had been his administration of GEA, and Captain Looff of the sunken *Königsberg* being left in the colony with the sick and wounded for the British to take to avoid any power dispute.⁸⁴ Through raids on local villages and towns, defeating enemies, and always moving ahead of the British' slow and overstretched supply lines, the *Schutztruppe* operated entirely independently for the better part of a year.⁸⁵ They brought hope to the people of Germany, were a thorn in the side of the Allied governments, and succeeded in carrying out von Lettow's goals. Their story became a myth used by later German leaders to claim that Germany had fought honorably during the First World War, and was used by the NSDAP as propaganda, despite von Lettow's refusal to ever join or support the NSDAP.

⁸⁴ Hoyt, *Guerilla*, 166-8.

⁸⁵ Moyd, *Tip & Run*, 343.

Conclusion

A war between the European superpowers at the start of the twentieth century was something that each nation prepared for, and that some suspected would happen again as it had in the seventeenth century (the Thirty Years War), eighteenth century (the Seven Years War), and nineteenth century (the Napoleonic wars). The creation of war plans by each European nation which relied on immediate mobilization of a trained-military, pinpoint accurate railroad timetables, and a collection of possible allies dependent on the adversary meant that a spark could easily set off a series of events that diplomacy may be unable to stop. Such was the case in the summer of 1914, when the Serbian-Russian alliance was activated to combat the Austro-Hungarian Empire after crown prince Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by Serbian nationalists.

To combat Russia, Austria-Hungary requested the German Empire stand with them as per the Triple Alliance with Italy, who would remain neutral if a war between Russia and the other two occurred. France and Russia had agreed to help the other if attacked by Germany, and a French-British-Russian agreement was reached where if any two were attacked, the other would intervene as well. On top of these alliances, economic, military, and colonial factors made a war more appealing to each nation, with the possibilities of gaining new colonies abroad, securing the status as global naval superpower, and gaining valuable territories in Europe within reach of either side. For many Europeans in the colonies abroad, regardless of what language they spoke, the problems on the continent during July 1914 seemed inconsequential, and so colonists

continued to intermingle with other Europeans over coffee, tea, and beers until the closing days of the month.

By 11th November 1918, the German Navy and people had revolted against the Kaiser and forced his resignation after he fled to Holland, the Russian Empire had fallen, millions of French and British soldiers—domestic and colonial subjects alike—had perished, Japan and the United States had entered the war, and Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy were on the verge of collapse or revolution. Over the period of August 1914 to November 1918, the perceptions of what a war between the ‘civilized’ European superpowers had been dismantled, with the ideas of a quick war composed of secret alliances and lightning-quick timetables looking more than just naïve. Examples of the chivalrous warfare that many had expected the war to look like in 1914 occurred throughout the conflict abroad from Europe, which received attention in the global press because of how they contrasted with the European theater’s barbarism. However, as the war dragged on, the growing hostility and global polarization was reflected in the media of the nations directly involved in the conflict, and even in the press of neutral nations, revealing the global corrosion of both international comradery and expectations of modern war.

Stationed at the German colony Kaiutschou in China, the SMS *Emden* was put on high alert by German East Asia Squadron leader Maximilian von Spee as the European situation escalated in July 1914. While ships of the Britain and Germany navies continued to meet for formal gatherings and fun competitions during this time, and the Europeans of the colony were all too happy to continue living in bliss as they had for years before, preparations were made for the Squadron since a war with Russia, France,

Japan, and especially the British would leave the colony entirely isolated. The days of inter-military comradeship during the siege of Peking in 1900 were coming to a close, and it became necessary for the Squadron to leave the colony to its fate as declarations of war appeared in August 1914.

Fregattenkapitän Karl von Müller of the *Emden* was able to convince the Squadron that his ship should be left to raid commerce in the Indian Ocean while the others moved across the Pacific towards the Americas, keeping the Allied navies busy abroad and damaging the confidence of the Allied colonies that their imperial masters could protect them. The *Emden*'s career was very successful, capturing around thirty Allied ships from August to November 1914, damaging the oil tanks at Madras, India, utterly destroying Russian and French naval ships at Penang, and putting up a respectable fight at Direction Island against the HMAS *Sydney*. The papers in Germany, neutral nations such as America and Norway, and even the Allied colonies praised the *Emden*'s crew and leadership at the time for their cunning, bravery, and achievement at commerce raiding in accordance with the rules of war. While the invasion of neutral Belgium in Europe harmed international opinion of Germany, the actions of von Müller succeeded in garnering praise from even Germany's enemies for their proper conduct towards prisoners and respectful compliance after being defeated, although the German General Staff cared little.

While the *Emden* had been defeated while trying to destroy the British radio station on Direction Island, the landing crew that had not returned to the ship chose to leave in a captured three-masted schooner named the *Ayasha*, much to the amusement of the local British, who provided resources, luxuries, and weather information to the

Germans for their journey. Pretending to be an incompetent fishing vessel while in international waters, the men of the *Ayesha* under Hellmuth von Mücke reached the Dutch port of Pedang, where they raised their imperial colors and followed all the rules of a legitimate warship so they would be treated accordingly. After receiving a plan to meet the German ship *Choising* elsewhere, the *Ayesha* departed Pedang to avoid being trapped, and completed over one thousand seven hundred nautical miles before being scuttled in December once it reached the appointed meeting zone.

With German East Africa and the SMS *Königsberg* reportedly blocked off by the British Navy along east Africa, von Mücke chose to disguise the *Choising* as a neutral Italian ship and make for the Yemen region of the Ottoman Empire, which according to captured newspapers appeared to be at war with the British. They landed near Hodeida with the intention of taking the supposedly completed Hejaz railroad to Constantinople and then safely travel to Berlin, but discovered that the railway had never been completed, the British and French navies were patrolling the Red Sea, and their Turkish allies were a hindrance. Adapting to their surroundings, the landing crew of the *Emden*—which still had its four machine guns and a collection of German rifles and pistols from the raid on Direction Island—learned to ride camels, secretly barter with locals, and sail local zambuks slowly up the shores of the Red Sea to avoid detection.

By May 1915, nearly half of a year after the *Emden* had been defeated, the men had their final fight against a group of several hundred Bedouin raiders, managing to maintain a defensive perimeter and hold out until help arrived from a nearby Turkish city. While later than expected, the reception at the Hejaz railroad in Al Ula, and then at Damascus and Constantinople, resulted in international attention and admiration for an

odyssey well accomplished, with German and American newspaper articles hanging on every detail, and the French consul in Constantinople attending the reception in their honor as well. However, the war had gone on for nine months by that point, and British papers spoke little about their arrival, even explaining to readers just before it was completed that the German people had been fooled by their government and would soon have their hopes crushed.

The year and a half of war that followed the landing crew's famous accomplishment saw the increased use of brutal weapons and tactics by both sides, including gas attacks, the British blockade in the North Sea starting to starve the German people, and the resumption of unrestricted German U-Boat warfare that threatened to starve the British Isle in turn. When the inconclusive Battle of Jutland (or Skagerrak) resulted in both sides claiming victory at home, but neither having achieved their goals, the German Admiralty had to find new and cheaper methods of running the blockade and disrupting Allied trade abroad. The solution came in the form of the late nineteenth century windjammer *Pass of Balmaha*, which was renamed the SMS *Seeadler* and disguised as a neutral Norwegian timber transport captained by Count Felix von Luckner. His boisterous personality and years of experience on sailing ships made him the perfect fit, and the ship was fitted out to have room for twenty seven men who could speak Norwegian in an easily accessible area for inspection, while the rest of the sixty four man crew and room for four hundred prisoners were hidden below.

Leaving Germany at the end of December 1916, a run of good luck allowed the *Seeadler* to successfully pass through the British minefields, blockade, and inspections to begin her career raiding in the Atlantic in 1917. As a disguised sailing ship with two

secret diesel motors, the *Seeadler* moved towards sailing and steam ships as a Norwegian vessel, but would reveal herself as a ship of the Kaiser's Navy before firing across the bows of her prey. Count von Luckner understood that the first time he had to release the prisoners from the prize ships, or accidentally stopped a neutral ship that was free to leave under the rules of war, the ruse of the wooden commerce raider would be revealed—hence the continued use of the Norwegian disguise and room for four hundred prisoners—and worked cautiously for months. After accidentally capturing the Dutch ship *Viking*, the *Seeadler* could have sunk it, but this would have been a breach of the rules of war and could result in imprisonment or worse after the war ended, so they finally ran for Cape Horn. The prisoners were treated very well, although two female passengers had been terrified of the 'dangerous Huns' when they were first taken, and the French captains despised their German captors when the truth was revealed, with one breaking his parole to sketch the forward magazines for Allied use once he was released.

When it was time to release the prisoners, the sketches were taken and the French captain allowed to leave with the rest, although he complained of his treatment to the papers when they landed at Rio de Janeiro, even though the others said they had been treated with the utmost respect. Evading the British Navy, the *Seeadler* only caught three American ships in the Pacific—after the US had entered the war—adding another female passenger who told the papers that she was treated incredibly well by every German aboard when she returned home. Needing a rest and fresh food to prevent scurvy and agitation among the crew and prisoners, von Luckner set out for the French island Mopelia and arrived on 31st July 1917. Unfortunately for the raider, it was wrecked on the coral reefs on 2nd August, the third anniversary of the Russian declaration of war, and

had to be abandoned. The Americans and Germans worked together to make a small shantytown on the island and lived well, while the populations of Europe continued to be radicalized against one another as the rules of war were continuously broken.

Count von Luckner attempted to emulate the journey of the *Emden's* landing crew, and successfully traveled over two thousand miles in an open-deck sailing vessel, but was captured and imprisoned in New Zealand. When first imprisoned, his capture was kept secret by the New Zealand government from their own people to keep him safe, because they were furious over the rumors that the *Seeadler* had sunk a missing troop transport and let every man aboard drown—where in truth they had been captured by the SMS *Wolf*. It was only after successfully escaping imprisonment with several German Samoans for a few days that New Zealanders' opinions of him changed from anger to folk-legend status, and he was used by the press to exemplify their own military's incompetence. It was because of his determination and the chivalrous conduct with which the *Seeadler's* crew conducted itself towards their prisoners that they garnered as much attention from the international press as they did—although always qualified by the account of a discontent captain or two. By directing themselves fully within the rules of war and with proper tact, the story of the *Seeadler* stood out in 1917 as a relic of the expectations many in Europe had held for a war between the civilized European superpowers at the start of 1914, which had diminished significantly by then.

When the final days of the war were closing, polarized hatred and plans for revenge occupied the minds of many politicians and populations across the world, proven by the divisive figure Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and his racially mixed *Schutztruppe* in east Africa, which was never formally defeated before the signing of the Armistice.

Always aware of the fact that the German colonies' fates would be decided on the battlefields of Europe in a war between the imperial powers, von Lettow set to work in German East Africa establishing a force of German officers and African *Askari* that could live off the land and utilize guerilla tactics when needed. At the start of the war, German East Africa was surrounded to the north by British Uganda, west by the Belgian Congo, south by then neutral Portuguese Mozambique, and along the coast by the British Navy. Knowing this, von Lettow took the fight over the British and Belgian borders to force the Allies to send troops and materials away from Europe to stop him.

Hardly concerned about the war in Africa, the British Admiralty sent Indian troops to the city of Tanga in the north-west of the German colony under a racist leader, who held that Indian troops were superior to African ones due to a combination of race and colonial masters. The Indian forces had little experience and were treated terribly by their leaders, leading to an easy full repulsion by the *Schutztruppe's* smaller force and requiring the British to censor the matter as best they could across their Empire, made easier by the few German radio stations that existed in Africa at the time. As more troops and machinery poured into the east African conflict, von Lettow and his officers continued to evade or slip through pincer movements made for the battlefields of Europe, and adapted to new weaponry that was used against them when necessary. The *Schutztruppe* was finally chased to the southern border along Allied Portuguese Mozambique near the end of 1917, then crossed the divide to continue raiding and diverting Allied personnel and supplies from Europe outside their colony.

The newspapers of the Allied nations, which also included the United States then, were highly critical of the continued fighting in east Africa, claiming that all von Lettow

and the *Schutztruppe* were doing was wasting additional lives in a hopeless battle. However, his goal had not been to gain new territory in Africa or even to protect the colony until it was lost, but rather to continue acting as a thorn in the Allies' side and bleed it dry while Germany continued the fight in Europe. While moving around the east African colonies and picking off Allied soldiers and porters, the governments of the world were planning for reparations at the end of the war, with Allied papers reporting that not one inch of the German colonies could ever be returned for fear of a second war, and German politicians proposing the creation of the continent spanning colony of *Mittelafrika* after they defeated the Allies. When the Armistice went into effect, it included a section giving additional time to the Allies for finding and informing von Lettow that the war had ended, making him the only German General never to be defeated in the field during the war. While hated by the Allies, he and the *Schutztruppe* were celebrated as military heroes when they returned to Germany in 1919, demonstrating the stark difference of opinion that had opened between the two sides in Europe five years after the conflict had begun.

There were two main reasons why these groups received the widespread attention that they did throughout the war: first, they were examples of the war outside of the European theater; second, they showed the type of warfare that many had expected from the European superpowers before August 1914. When the war on the Western Front ground to a halt in 1914 and 1915, and the Eastern Front was moving slowly and brutally, news of the fighting in the rest of the world caught many people's attention. The larger naval conflicts, such as the German Navy's East Asia Squadron being sunk off the Falklands at the end of 1914, showed that the world war was truly global, and the SMS

Emden's raiding in the Indian Ocean beforehand emphasized this point. The success of the landing party in taking the *Aysha* and *Choising* across the hostile Indian Ocean after the *Emden*'s defeat solidified the story of their daring, cunning, and courtesy. Although Germany, their allies, and the neutral nations took great interest in their journey, by the time of their arrival in Constantinople the unchanging and inconclusive nature of the war in Europe had begun to demonstrate the growing divide between the people of the two sides involved.

By 1917, the use of less humane weaponry and tactics that targeted civilian lives—including tanks, flamethrowers, poison gas, starvation blockades, and U-Boat attacks without thought of saving survivors afterwards—resulted in few press releases praising chivalrous actions by members of the other side in Europe, or by many neutral papers either. The use of the old windjammer SMS *Seeadler* for raiding in the Atlantic and Pacific was conceived by the German Admiralty for cost and espionage reasons, but the conduct of the Captain and crew aboard towards their surprised prisoners, despite initial reservations, worked as a mostly positive propaganda tool for the German Empire abroad. The attention the *Seeadler* received was in part because of its romanticized status as a sailing raider, its gentlemanly conduct, and the success story that many people had expected to come out of a modern European war in 1914, during an era when Europeans were supposedly spreading the ideas of civilization and humanity to the people of the world, instead of killing each other by the millions.

The *Schutztruppe* showed how deep the hatred ran by the end of the war, despite having begun fighting at about the same time the conflict in Europe had begun. The news in Europe from Africa was heavily slanted in the Allies' favor because of their ability to

disrupt German communications and support from reaching the colonies, which was what allowed the failure at Tanga to be censored so well. When the stalemate in the North Sea and on the fields of Europe led to the British government spreading the news of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's forces being pushed out of the final German colony in Africa, there was little interest in the Allied press for praising the *Schutztruppe's* successes from 1914 through November 1917. Although no longer in German East Africa, the *Schutztruppe* did not surrender, but continued to fight to the dismay and agitation of the Allies, while giving confidence to the people of Germany that their men were still fighting strong—the same people who threw a parade for their return to Berlin in 1919.

The actions of the *Emden*, the landing crew that took the *Aysha*, and the *Seeadler* and her Captain were recognized at the time for their success in combat, evasion, and kindness which were in increasingly short supply elsewhere in the war. The focus they received from the international press highlights the type of warfare that many had been expecting, and were intrigued by the longer the war stretched on, even months and years after their journeys had ended. Part of the reason why the *Schutztruppe* had not received any praise in 1914 was because its successes were largely censored by the Allies that surrounded it, although the disclosure of their actions in 1917 and 1918 demonstrate how polarized the two sides had become against one another during the final year of the conflict. The deep-rooted anger that permeated European society after the war and peace treaty is often studied in the buildup to the Second World War, but how it escalated during the First World War contextualizes the thoughts of those who lived through it, and the internationally recognized odysseys of the war help to reveal their pride, anger, and aspirations for the future.

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