

The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915



On the outbreak of war in August 1914, Vice-Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee, commanding the German Asiatic squadron based in Tsingtao, a port city now known as Qingdao in Shandong Province, which had been ceded to Germany in 1897, realised his vulnerability if Japan were to enter the war on the Allied side (which she did later that month). Von Spee's command consisted of two armoured cruisers, SMS *Scharnhorst* (the flagship) and SMS *Gneisenau*, and four light cruisers, *Emden*, *Dresden*, *Leipzig* and *Nürnberg*. It was balanced, and the ships were able to keep up with one another, and the squadron was supported by a number of colliers and supply vessels. He gathered his force together from the various parts of the Pacific in which they were operating and decided to head south to round the Horn and head for Germany, harassing Allied shipping on his way.

In the next few months, a substantial amount of Allied merchant shipping was sunk, the Royal Navy was defeated for the first time in over 100 years, and in turn the entire Asiatic squadron was destroyed either in the Pacific or the South Atlantic.

This display looks at the protagonists in these events using nearly contemporary postcards, and at the two battles fought in December 1914 which carried profound significance early in the War.

Plan:

Pages 2/6 The German Asiatic Squadron, including the fate of SMS *Emden*.

Pages 7/10 Cradock's squadron and the Battle of Coronel, 1 November 1914.

Pages 11/14 Sturdee's squadron and the Battle of the Falkland Islands, 8 December 1914.

Pages 15/16 The aftermath.

Sources: Wikipedia (various entries)

H. Spencer-Cooper, *The Battle of the Falkland Islands*, London, 1919



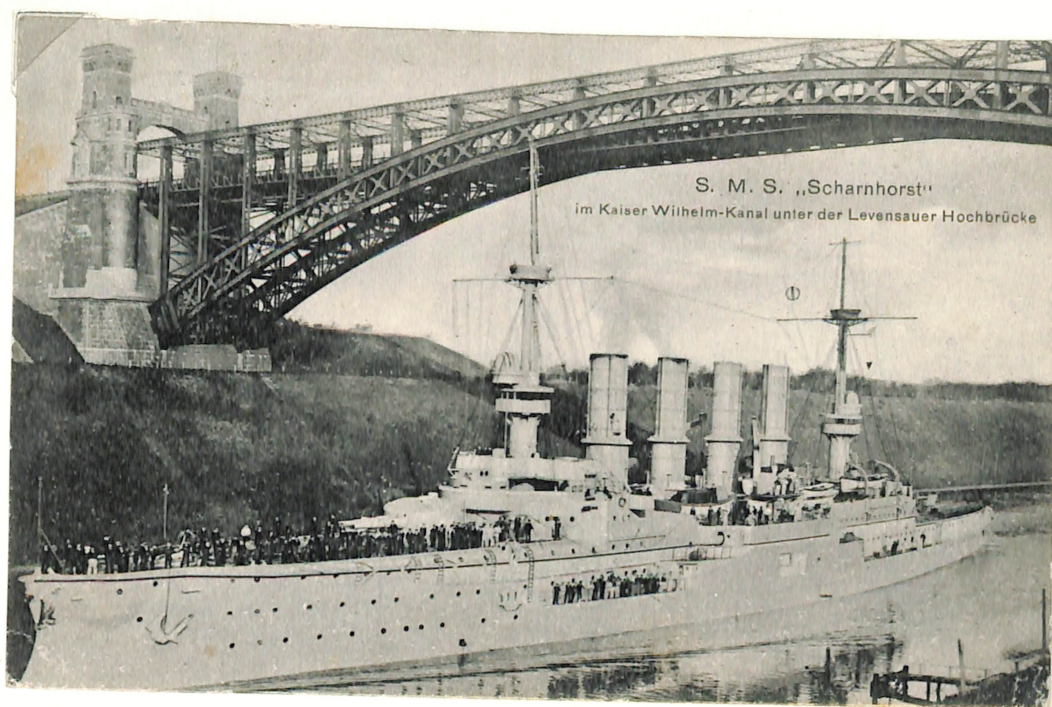
Feldpostkarte in Our Heroes series featuring Vice-Admiral von Spee. C.D.S. "K.D.

Feldpoststation no 95" dated 27/7 in black and purple double ring cancel of Rekruten-Depot 18 Res. Armeeekorps

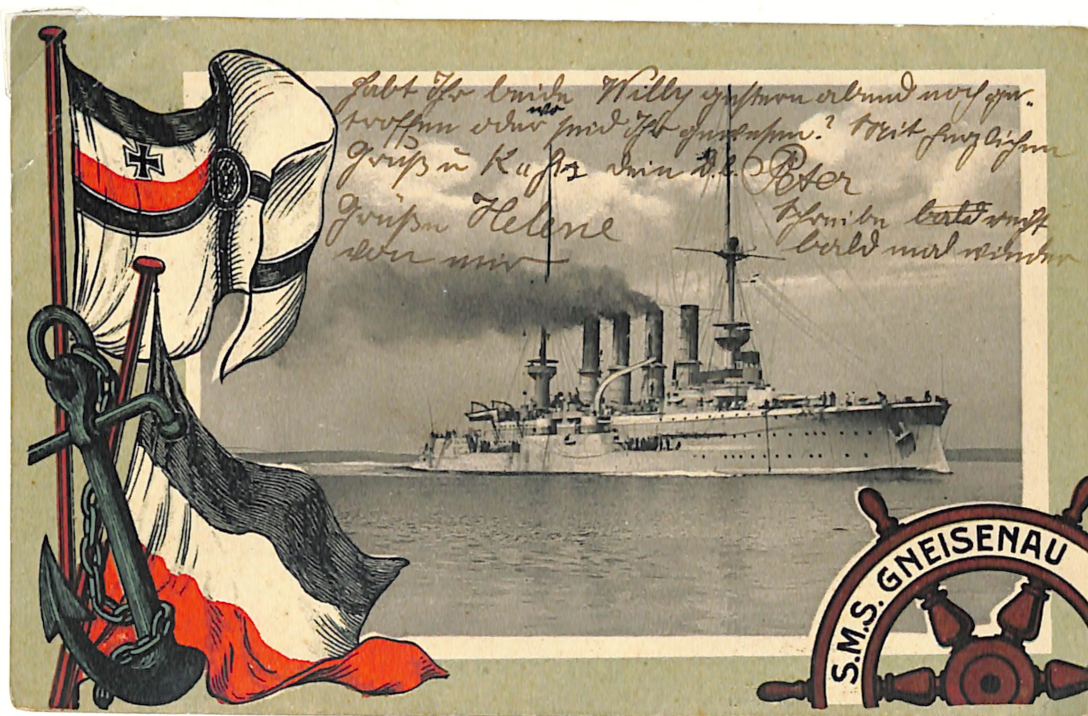
The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915



Von Spee's flagship was SMS *Scharnhorst*, an armoured cruiser. She was laid down at Blohm and Voss in Hamburg on 23 March 1905, launched on 23 March 1906 and commissioned in to the fleet on 24 October 1907. She had a top speed of 22.5 knots, and carried 8 x 21cm (8.3 inch) guns, 6 x 15cm (5.9 inch) guns, 18 x 8.8cm (3.5 inch) guns and four torpedo tubes. She had a complement of 52 officers and 788 men, which included the Vice-Admiral's staff. She was assigned to the Asiatic Squadron in 1909 after completing sea trials. *Gneisenau* was her sister ship built at A G Weser in Bremen, launched 14 June 1906 and commissioned 6 March 1908. With 38 officers and 726 men, she joined *Scharnhorst* in China in 1910. Both ships had a range of 5000 nautical miles at 10 knots, reducing to 2200 nm at 20 knots.

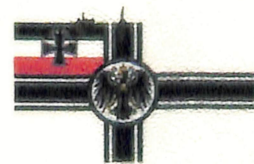


Used postcard cancelled at Kiel 26 April 1908 to Fechenheill bei Frankfurt. Published by Julius Salomon, Kiel.



Used postcard cancelled at Friedrichsort 29 March 1912 to Flusum. Published by Knackstedt & Näther Series 779 no.27

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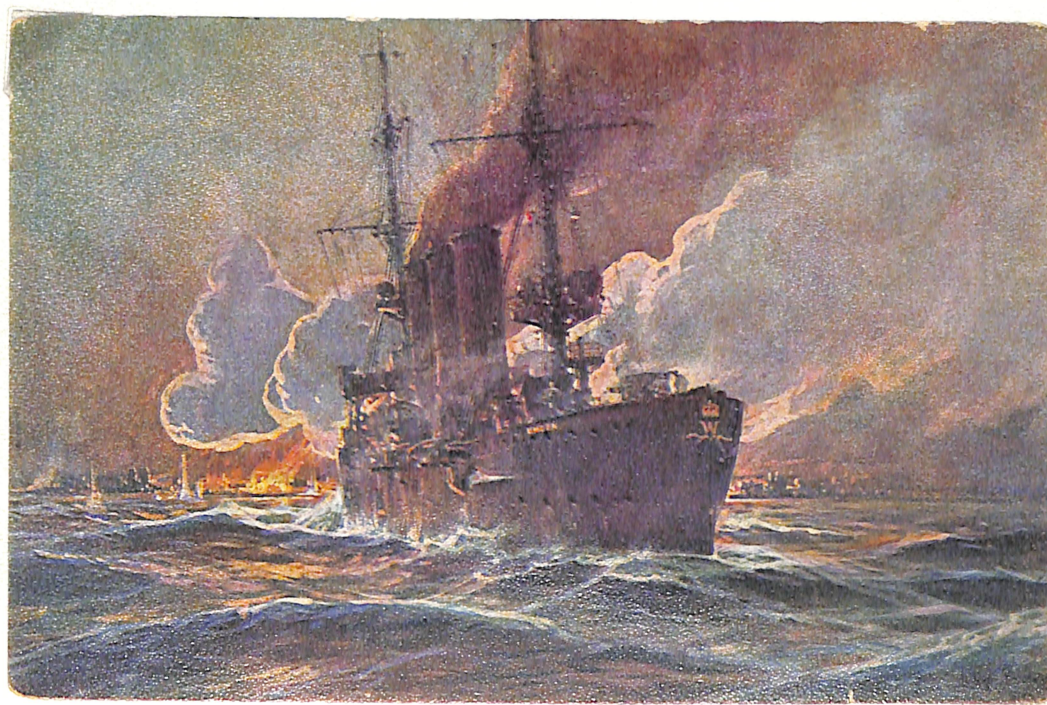


SMS *Emden* was built at Kaiserliche Werft Danzig, being laid down on 1 November 1906, launched 28 May 1908 and commissioned 10 July 1909, the second and last *Dresden* class cruiser. She had a top speed of 23.5 knots and a complement of 18 officers and 343 men. She carried 10 x 10.5cm (4.1 in) guns, 8 x 5.2 cm (2 in) guns and 2 torpedo tubes. She spent the majority of her career in the Asiatic squadron. At the start of the War she was captained by Fregattenkapitan Karl von Müller. On 14 August 1914 von Spee allowed Müller to detach himself from the squadron to go commerce raiding in the Indian Ocean, where over three months and 30,000 nautical miles she destroyed two Allied warships and sank or captured 23 other ships.



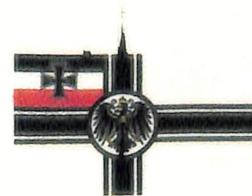
Der erfolgreiche
Kreuzer „Emden.“

Unposted postcard with undated greetings. No publisher given.



Unused postcard in Kolonialkriegerdank series. Publisher F.A. Brockhaus Leipzig. Features *Emden* bombarding Madras 22 September 1914.

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Müller eventually took *Emden* via Diego Garcia and Penang to attack the coaling and wireless station in the Cocos Islands (in the Indian Ocean close to Sumatra) where he arrived on 9 November 1914. He sent a landing party ashore but too late to prevent the wireless station raising the alarm which was picked up by the light cruiser H.M.A.S. *Sydney* 52 nautical miles away escorting a troop convoy. She put on full speed and at 0930 *Emden* saw a ship approaching at high speed. Too late to take off the landing party, *Emden* engaged with *Sydney*, whose more powerful guns inflicted heavy damage, and Müller was unable to close the range for a torpedo attack. Realising he was no longer able to fight, at 1115 Müller ran his ship on to the reef at North Keeling Island. 134 officers and men died on *Emden* and 69 were injured. *Sydney's* casualties were 4 dead and 12 wounded. The landing party escaped on a schooner to Padang in the Dutch East Indies and from there via Yemen to Constantinople. The *Emden's* injured were taken to Australia, while the uninjured captured crew were taken via Colombo to Malta from where they returned to Germany in 1920. *Emden* was the last active Central Powers warship in the Indian or Pacific Oceans, which meant that troopships from Australia and New Zealand could sail without an escort, and Allied naval vessels could be deployed elsewhere.

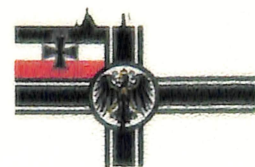


Unused postcard, photographer & publisher Gebr. Lempe, Kiel, Jupiter series.

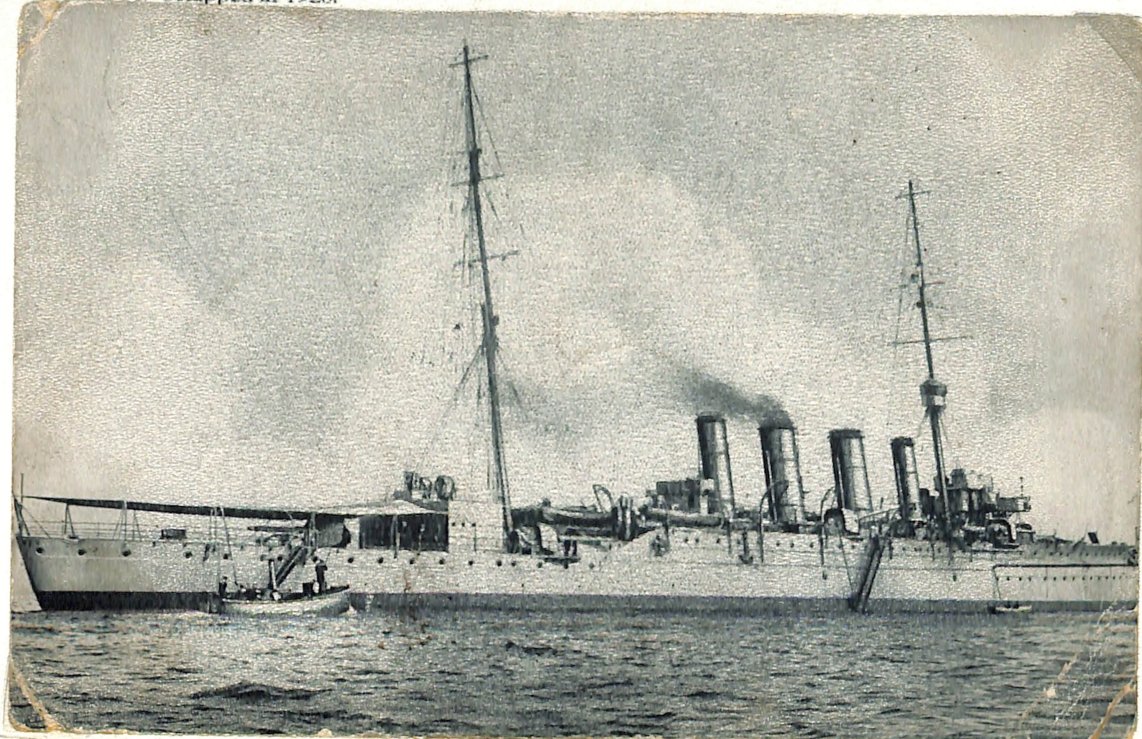


Unused postcard published by Stengel & Co. Dresden

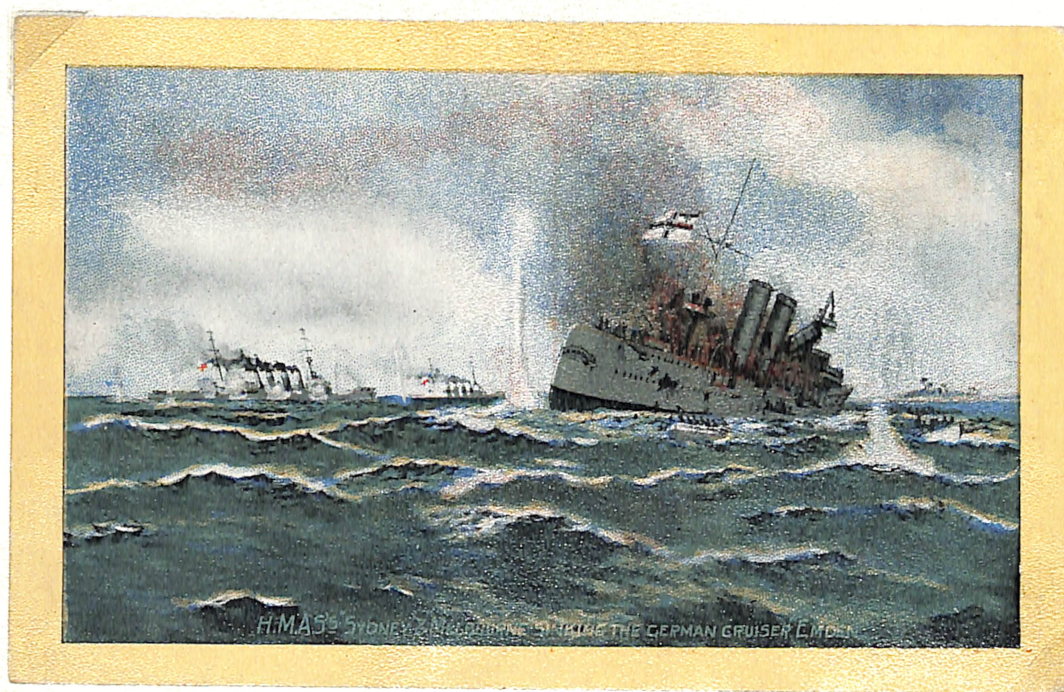
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H.M.A.S. *Sydney* was laid down at the Govan, Glasgow yard of the London and Glasgow Engineering and Iron Shipbuilding Company (later (1912) acquired by Harland & Wolff) on 11 February 1911, launched 29 August 1912 and commissioned in to the Royal Australian Navy on 26 June 1913. A *Chatham* class light cruiser, she had a top speed of 25 knots, and carried 31 officers and 454 men. She was armed with 8 x 6 in (15.2 cm) guns, 1 x 3 in (76mm) anti aircraft gun, 1 x 12 pounder field gun, 2 torpedo tubes and 2 depth charge chutes, and carried a Sopwith Pup. After the Cocos engagement she patrolled the American East Coast before joining the British fleet at Scapa Flow in 1916. Scrapped in 1928.

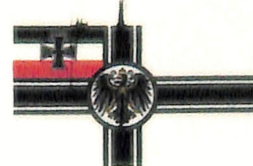


London County Council Reward Card. The reverse carries statistics about the ship, at variance with those recorded elsewhere.



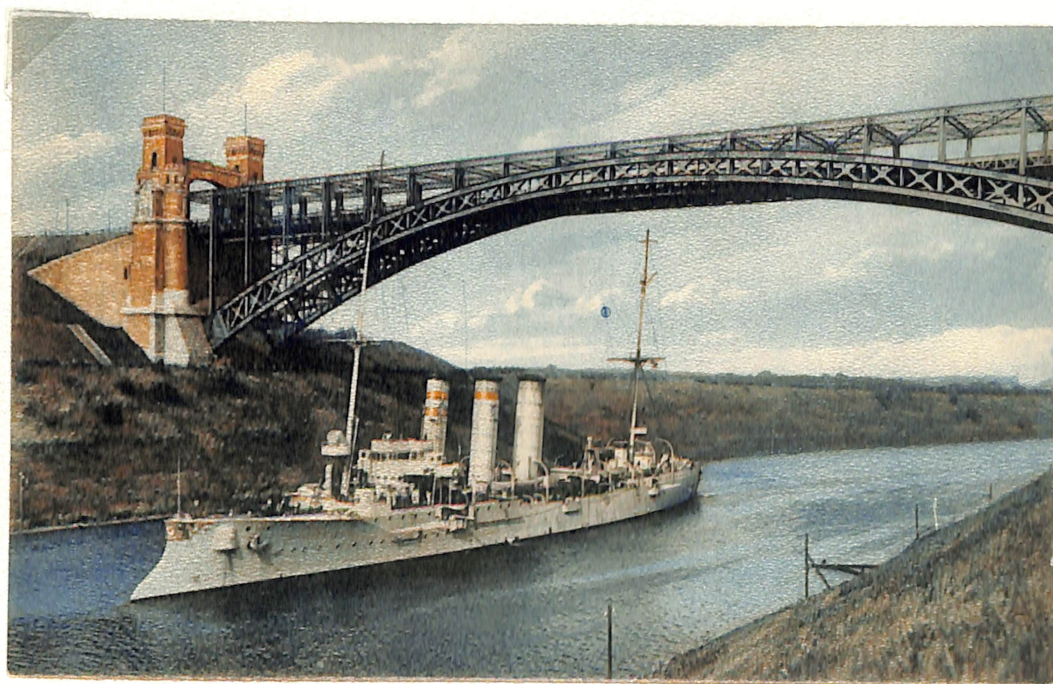
Unused postcard published by Abraham & Sons, Devonport, "Great Naval Deeds of the War, 1914, Series 1". Reverse has a printed account of the battle, leaving room only for an address to be added.

The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915

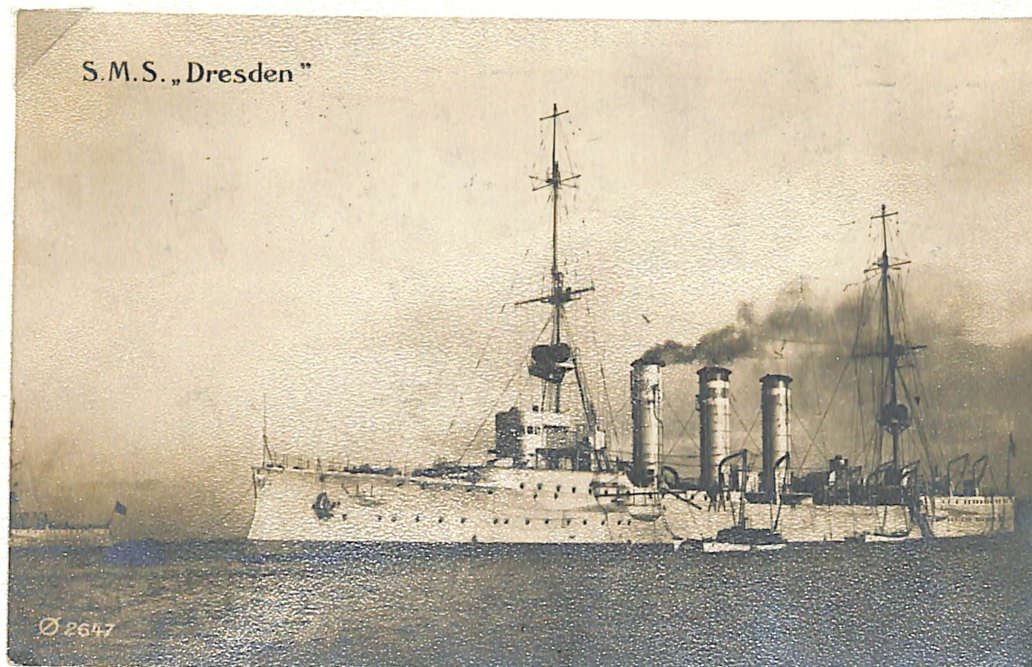


SMS *Leipzig* was the sixth of seven light cruisers of the *Bremen* class. Built at A G Weser in Bremen, she was laid down in 1904, launched on 21 March 1905, and commissioned on 20 April 1906. Top speed 22 knots with a range of 4690 nautical miles at 12 knots. Complement of 14 officers and 274 men. 10 x 10.5 cm (4.1 in) guns and two torpedo tubes. Assigned to the Asiatic squadron September 1906. Off Mexico at the outbreak of war, she joined the rest of the squadron at Easter Island in October 1914.

SMS *Dresden* was built at Blohm & Voss in Hamburg, laid down in 1906, launched 5 October 1907, and commissioned on 14 November 1908. Sister ship of *Emden*. At outbreak of war she was in the Caribbean protecting German nationals during the Mexican Revolution. Became a commerce raider at start of the war, then moved to the Pacific and joined Asiatic squadron at Easter Island in October 1914.

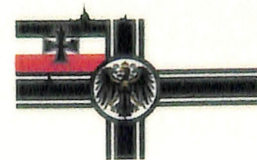


Unused postcard published by Graphische Gesellschaft A.G., Berlin shows Leipzig in the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal.



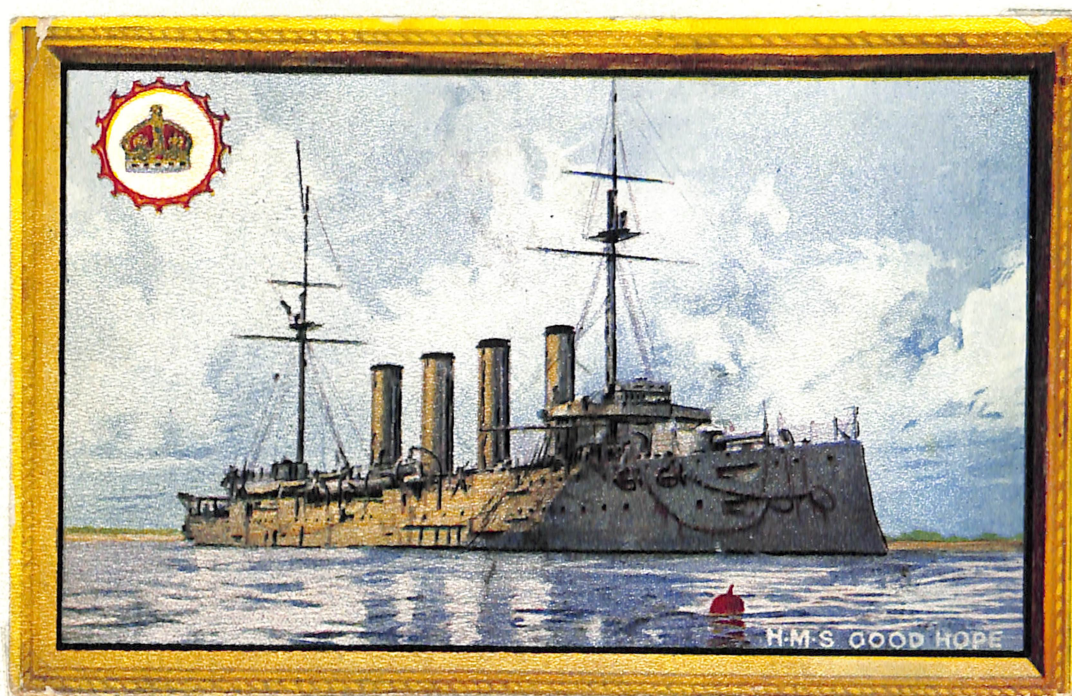
Used postcard, no publisher stated, machine cancelled at Leipzig 11 January 1915 to an address near Dresden.

The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915



The British Admiralty assumed von Spee was heading for the Falkland Islands and sent Rear Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock to intercept him, with loose instructions and a scratch and ill-matched squadron from around South America. Cradock flew his flag in HMS *Good Hope*, a *Drake* class armoured cruiser laid down at Fairfield in Govan in 1899 and placed in reserve in 1913 before being recommissioned in mid 1914. She had a maximum speed of 23 knots, a complement of 900 officers and men, and carried 2 x 9.2 in (23.4 cm) guns and 16 x 6 in guns, although half of these could only be used in calm conditions. Only the two big guns matched the 16 21cm guns carried by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*.

The rest of Cradock's squadron consisted of HMS *Monmouth*, HMS *Canopus*, HMS *Glasgow* and the armed Orient liner *Otranto*.

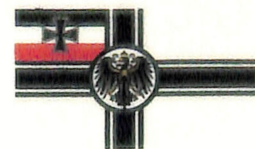


Used postcard, published by Wrench, addressed to Penzance and cancelled London 7 September 1908.



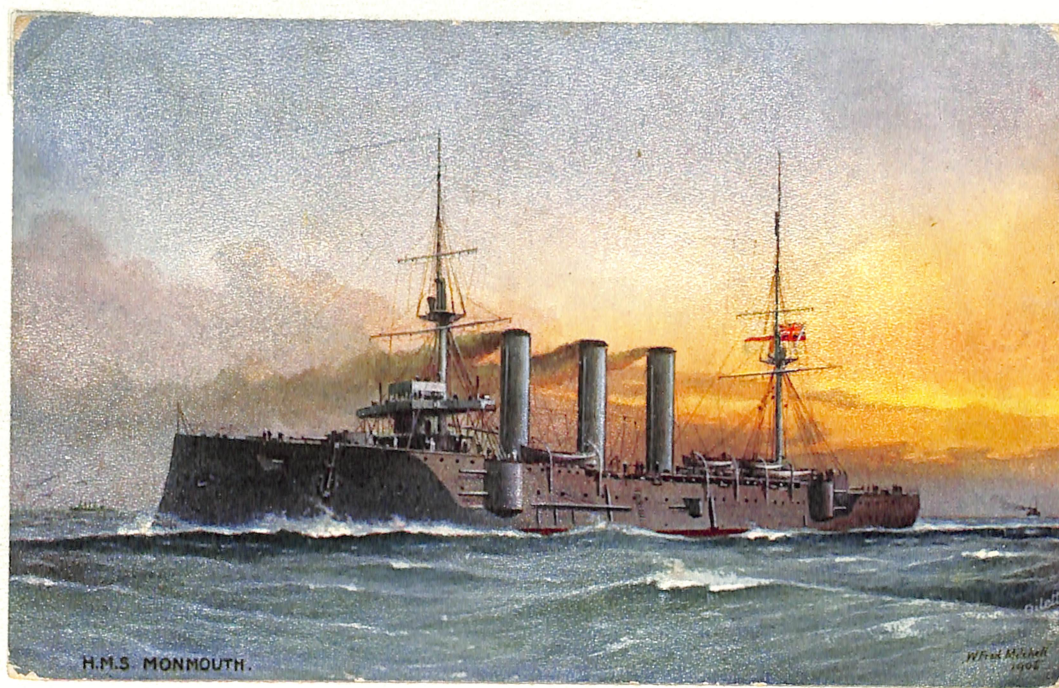
Scarce postcard of liberty men for *Good Hope* in Stanley on 20 October 1914. Not postally used but message on the back to "Nellie".

The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915

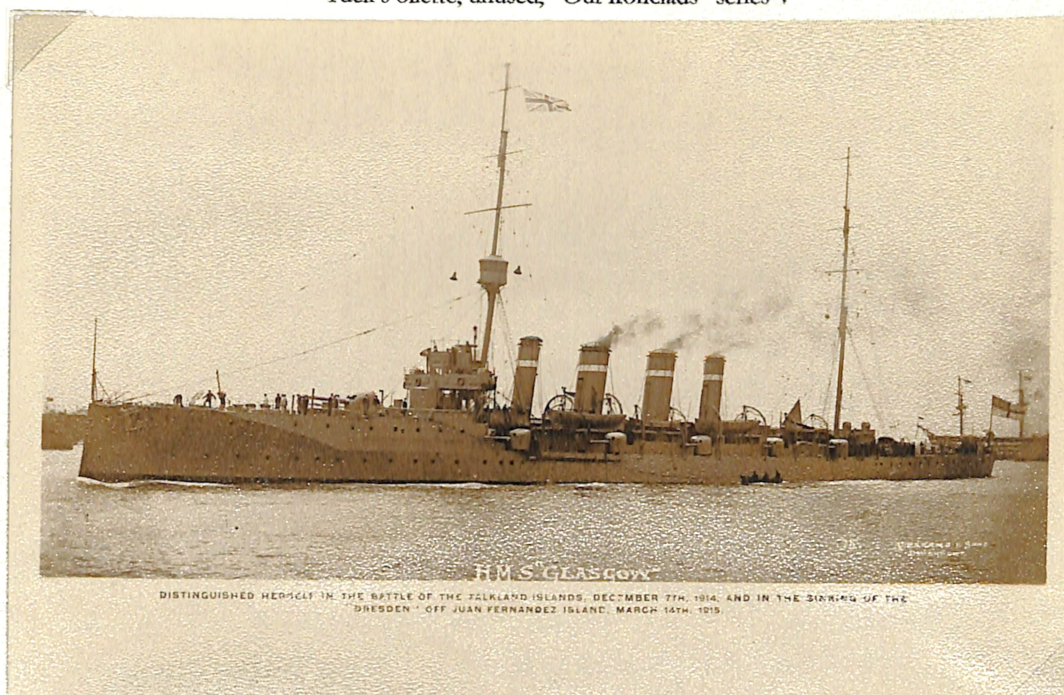


HMS *Monmouth* was the lead ship of her class of ten armoured cruisers. Laid down at London and Glasgow Shipbuilding at Govan in August 1899, launched November 1901, and commissioned December 1903 she was on the China station 1906 – 1913 before going to reserve. When recommissioned in 1914 she was sent to South America and joined Cradock's squadron.

HMS *Glasgow*, the sixth ship of that name, was a Town class light cruiser built at Fairfield's in Govan, launched September 1909 and commissioned September 1910. Complement of 410 officers and men. Top speed 25 knots; range 5830 nm at 10 knots. Armed with 2 x 6 in (15.2 cm) and 10 x 4in guns and two torpedo tubes. Her first deployment was in South America and on the outbreak of war she joined Cradock's squadron there.

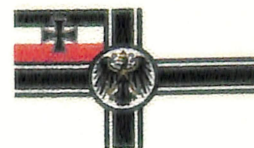


Tuck's oillette, unused, "Our ironclads" series V

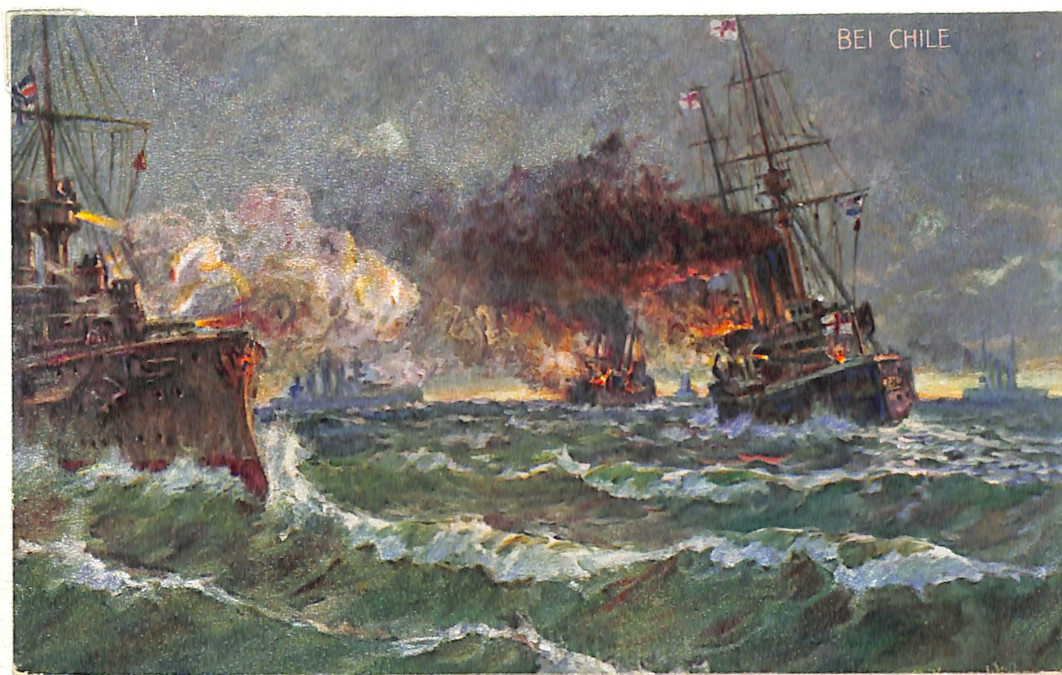


Painted by J. & Sons, Devonport. Note incorrect date of battle.

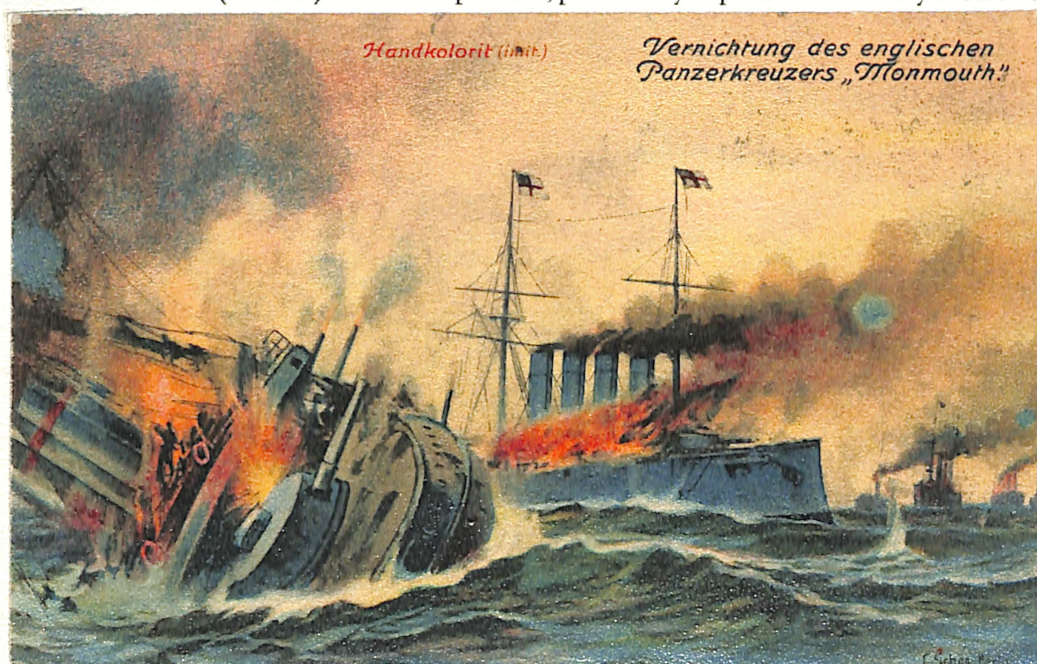
The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915



Steaming north in search of von Spee's squadron, or elements of it (the last reliable information was von Spee's bombardment of Papeete fully a month earlier) Cradock sent *Glasgow* to Coronel to send telegrams, where she was spotted by a German ship which alerted von Spee. *Leipzig* spotted *Glasgow* at 1617 on 1 November, and *Glasgow* spotted *Leipzig* moments later. Cradock closed on *Glasgow*, then formed line astern and headed straight for the German ships as he needed to close the distance to be able to bring more than his two 9 inch guns to bear. High winds and heavy seas meant that he could not use half his 6 inch guns. Von Spee kept his distance until the sun set, silhouetting the British ships and covering his own in the dark coast behind them. *Scharnhorst* then engaged *Good Hope*, inflicting heavy damage, and she sank in the darkness with the loss of all hands including Cradock at 1955 after an explosion in the forward magazine severed the bow. *Gneisenau* had engaged *Monmouth* and by 1940 she was badly damaged, listing and down at the bow. *Glasgow* could do little to assist and broke off, leading *Otranto* back to Port Stanley. *Monmouth* refused to surrender and, after attempting to engage *Nürnberg*, she capsized and sank with all hands at 2158.



The Battle of Coronel (Bei Chile) unused Feldpostkarte, published by Imperial Saxon Ministry of the Interior.



Unused postcard, no publisher given, "Destruction of the English Armoured Cruiser "Monmouth", with brief description of the battle on the reverse..

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Over 1600 officers and men were lost at Coronel. Britain took the defeat badly as it was the first battle lost in over a century. Various "In Memoriam" cards were privately produced for members of the crews of *Good Hope* and *Monmouth*.



IN MEMORIAM
G. Sherwin C. P. O.
H. M. S. Good Hope



Roll of Honour.

H.M.S. Good Hope

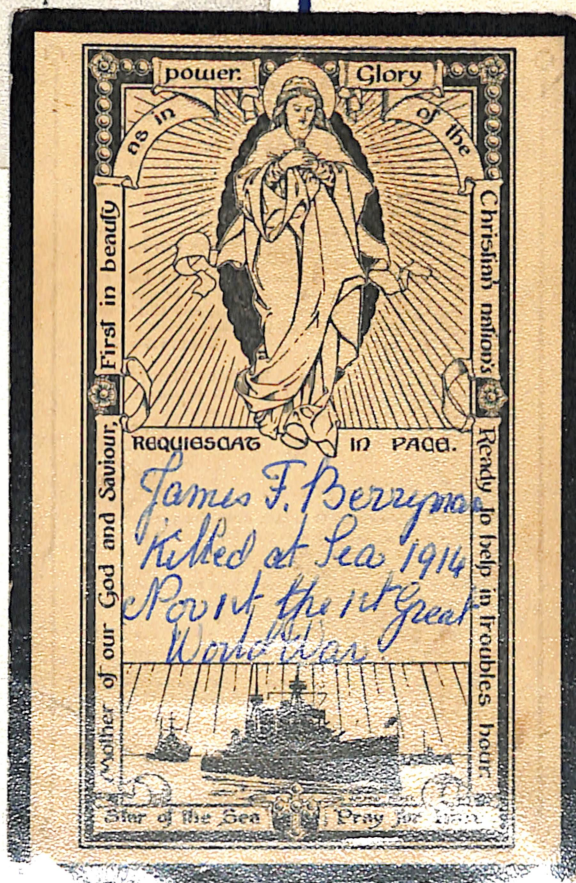
All Saints' Day, November 1st, 1914.

Robert A. Sanderson

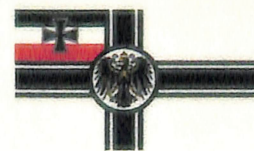
"Greater love hath no man than
this; that he lay down his life
for his friends."

With deepest sympathy in our
common loss.

Wm. Sanderson
Good Hope



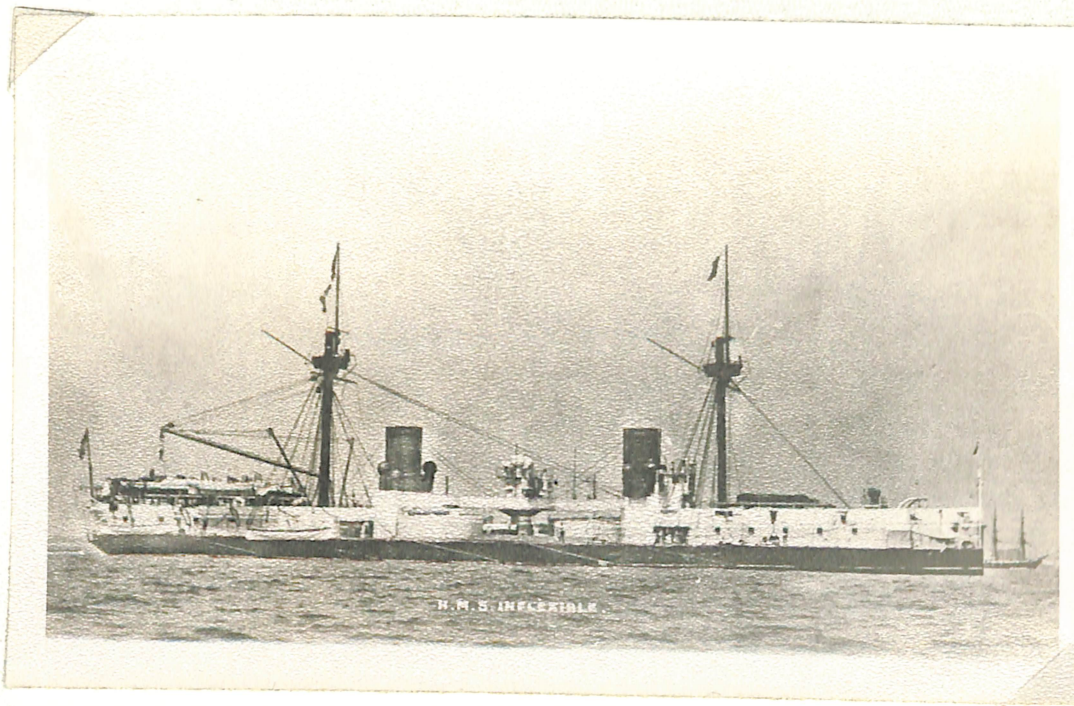
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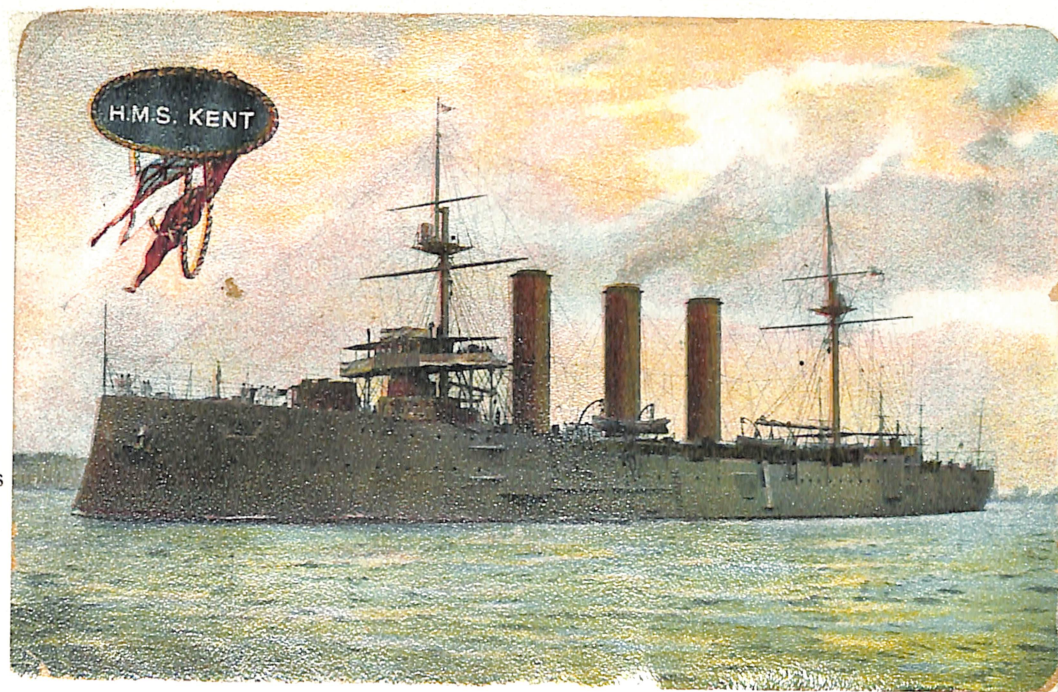
After the battle von Spee and his ships returned to Valparaiso to report to the German High Command, and to bunker. In Britain, the late Admiral Cradock was unfairly blamed for the result. The Admiralty persuaded Sir John Jellicoe, commanding the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, to part with *Invincible* and *Inflexible*, and Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty prevailed over Sir Jackie Fisher as First Sea Lord, to have Vice-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee appointed to lead another squadron south to meet the threat from von Spee.

Sturdee raised his flag in *Invincible* and headed south gathering other ships for his squadron as he went. HMS *Kent* and HMS *Cornwall* were *Monmouth* class armoured cruisers. *Kent* had been launched at Portsmouth Dockyard in March 1901, commissioned October 1903, and had been sent to join Cradock but did not arrive at Stanley until after Coronel. HMS *Carnarvon* was a *Devonshire* class armoured cruiser built at William Beardmore in Dalmuir launched in October 1903 and commissioned May 1905. Top speed 22 knots, complement 610, she carried 4 x 7.5 in and 6 x 6 in guns and two torpedo tubes. *Cornwall* had been on the Cape Verde station with HMS *Bristol*, which had been built at John Brown in Clydebank. Launched and commissioned in 1910, she was a sub class of the Town class cruisers. At Stanley, the squadron was joined by *Glasgow* and *Canopus*, which had been too slow to be able to support Cradock at Coronel, and was now beached and some of her guns removed to bolster the defences of Stanley

Invincible and *Inflexible* were built at Armstrong Whitworth, Elswick and John Brown & Co, Clydebank respectively, and along with the third in the class *Indomitable* were laid down in 1906, launched in 1907, and commissioned in 1908 and 1909. Top speed 25 knots, range 3000 nautical miles at 10 knots. Complement 784 men. Armament 4 twin 12 inch (30.5 cm) guns, 16 x 4 in (10.2 cm) guns, 7 Maxim guns and 5 torpedo tubes.

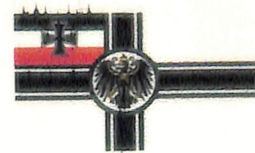


Unused postcard,
rubber stamp
"Copyright P.A.
Vicay....(rest
indecipherable)

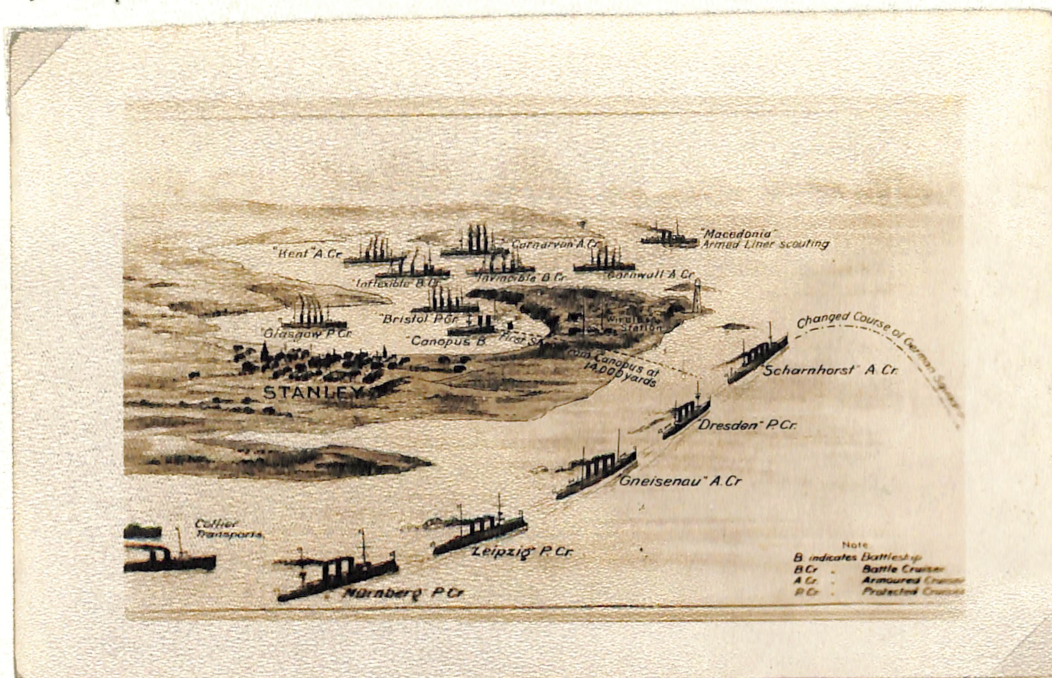


Unused postcard,
printed in Saxony,
and marked "Series
No. 63 B.B.
London"

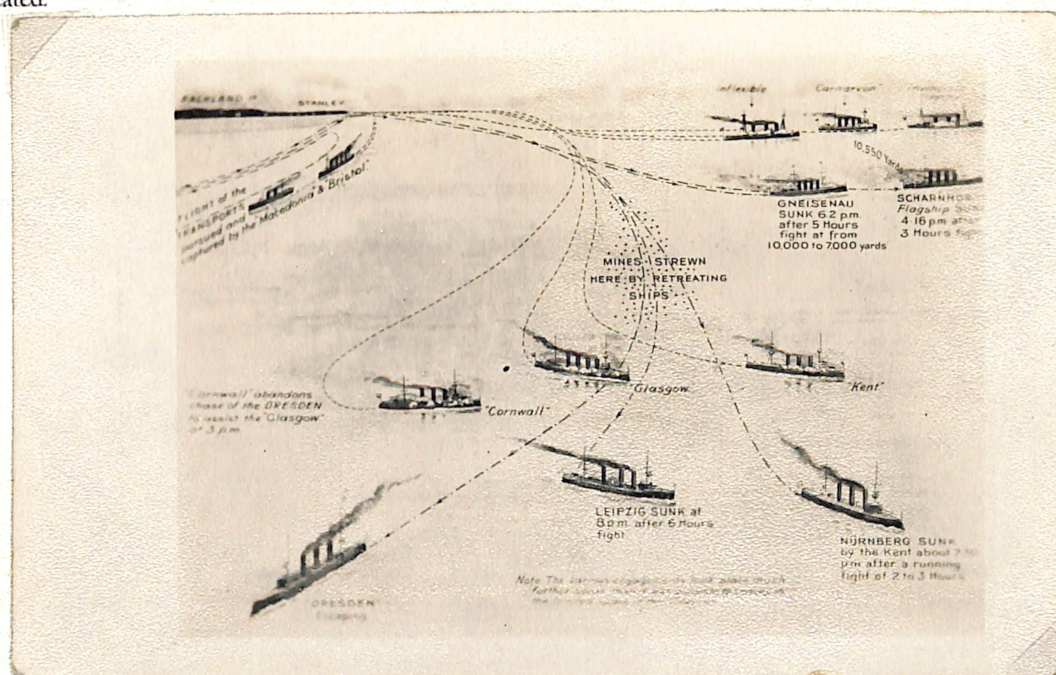
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It is not clear why von Spee delayed for about a month before once again heading south, but he used the time to effect minor repairs and to bunker as well as to gather as much intelligence as he could about British movements. On his way south he met and forced the surrender of one of Cradock's colliers, and again topped up his coal supplies. Just before 0800 on 8 December, *Canopus* signalled reporting smoke to the south. At 0815 the flagship signalled to raise steam for full speed. Although the fleet was coaling and some ships had put their boilers out, all were readied for action as fast as possible. The leading German ships, intent on a landing to put the wireless station out of action, were fired upon by *Canopus* at long range over the hills, and a surprised von Spee then ordered his ships to turn eastwards in an effort to escape. By 1030 the British had cleared the harbour and *Invincible* signalled "General Chase". At 1247 Sturdee signalled "Open fire". At 1320 von Spee decided that *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* would engage with *Invincible* and *Inflexible*, and ordered his light cruisers to try to escape.

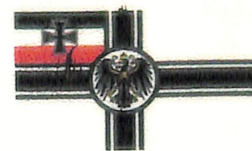


The approaching German squadron surprised by the strong British Naval presence anchored at Port Stanley. Unused postcard no publisher indicated.



The pursuit by the British squadron resulting in the sinking of the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, *Leipzig* and *Nürnberg*. Unused postcard no publisher indicated.

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Invincible and *Inflesible* engaged with the two German armoured cruisers and Sturdee ordered his light cruisers to chase the German light cruisers. The wind caused smoke to obscure the German ships and initially the British guns had little effect. Gradually however the tide turned and the two British ships pounded their opponents with broadsides. *Scharnhorst* took heavy damage with funnels flattened, fires and a list which became worse and at 1617 she capsized with the loss of all hands. *Gneisenau* continued to fight and evade until with her ammunition exhausted her crew allowed her to sink at 1802. 190 of her crew were rescued from the water.

Meanwhile *Kent* had pushed her boilers and engines to the limit in pursuing *Nürnberg*, which turned for battle at 1730. *Kent* had the advantage in shell weight and armour and, after a long chase, *Nürnberg* suffered two boiler explosions at 1830 and then rolled over and sank at 1927. *Cornwall* and *Glasgow* chased down *Leipzig*, which ran out of ammunition. She eventually also rolled over and sank at 2123 about 80- miles south-east of the Falklands. Nine men were picked up from *Nürnberg* and eighteen from *Leipzig*.

The German losses were some 2,260 men, which included von Spee and his two sons (Otto von Spee was on board *Nürnberg* and Heinrich von Spee on board *Gneisenau*), were disproportionate in relation to the British who had only a few casualties.

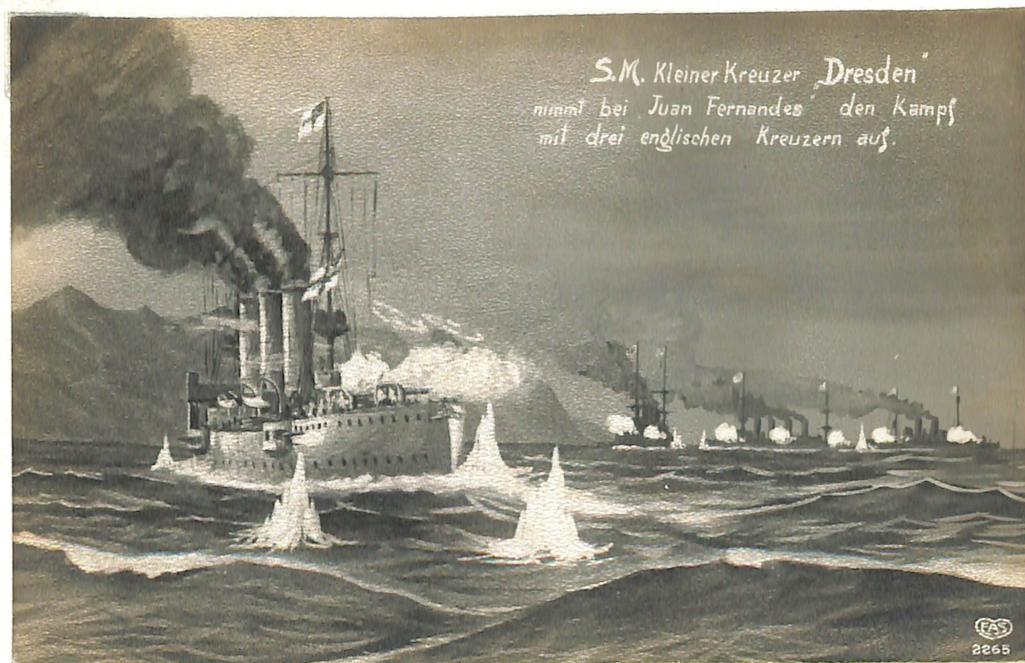


Unused mourning card for von Spee's sons by F Urbahns, Kiel.

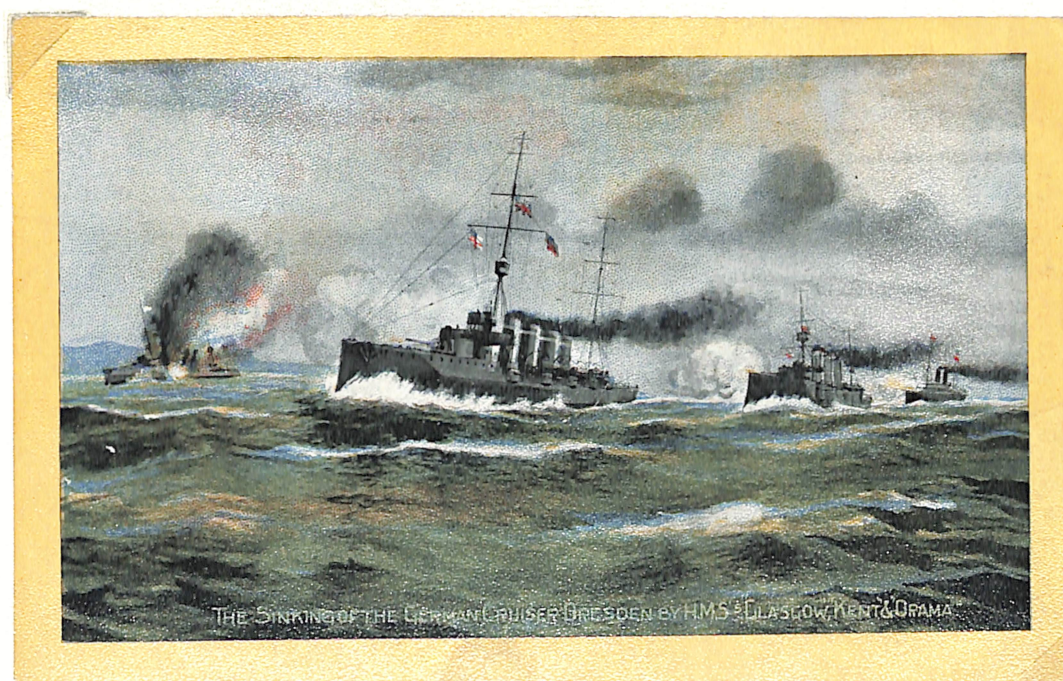
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Dresden managed to evade being brought to battle at the Falklands and returned to the Pacific. Even in December, the German ships had been suffering from a lengthy period at sea without repairs or overhaul, and these problems were compounded for a single ship trying to avoid detection. *Kent*, *Glasgow* and *Orama* (an armed merchantman) were sent in pursuit and eventually found *Dresden* off the Juan Fernandez Islands on 14 March 1915. There is some controversy about the events and whether the German captain scuttled his ship whilst conducting negotiations to surrender her, but, trapped by the British force, and after a short battle, *Dresden* was evacuated and the main ammunition magazine blown up resulting in her sinking in the bay in which she had been trapped. A pig was later found in the water, christened "Tirpitz" and became the mascot of HMS *Glasgow* for a year before living out her days at Whale Island Gunnery School in Portsmouth.



Unused postcard, E.A. Schwerdtfeger & Co. A. G. Berlin



Unused postcard, Abraham & Sons, Devonport, "Great Naval Deeds of the War, 1914" series 1

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Sturdee's squadron returned to Port Stanley having avenged Cradock and the loss of *Good Hope* and *Monmouth*. Funerals were held, and ships patched up to face the long journey back to Britain. Time was allowed for rest and recreation among a population grateful for not having been invaded by von Spee's force. The local Boy Scout Troop was named "Sturdee's Own" after the victorious commander, and in due time a Monument to the Battle would be erected on Ross Road which fronts Stanley Harbour, to be joined in the 1980s by other monuments to British arms.



Unused postcard, no publisher, showing members of *Invincible*'s crew with survivors from the *Gneisenau*.



Photograph, unattributed, of HMS *Kent* coaling at Port Stanley following the battle.

The German Asiatic Squadron 1914 - 1915



The Battle of the Falkland Islands restored Britain's sense of pride in the Royal Navy which had been dented at Coronel. More importantly, it destroyed the German Asiatic Squadron, which had been Germany's only permanent overseas naval formation, and ended commerce raiding by regular warships of the Imperial German Navy. *Dresden* was so hard pressed in the three months after escaping the Falklands that she was unable to harass Allied shipping. Meanwhile German propaganda postcards began to appear, improbably extolling the Last Man. His chances of survival in the bitterly cold southern seas and at night were slim. The British did search for survivors but found very few who survived the sinking of their ships and subsequent immersion. Various stories circulated about seamen going down with their ship whilst holding aloft a battle flag, and these were somewhat freely interpreted in a painting by Hans Bohrdt, the original of which though much reproduced had been lost by 1916. It was often accompanied, as here, by a poem entitled "The Last Man" by an obscure poet named Heinrich Röser.



Unused postcard, D.G. Zehrfeld, Leipzig, with poem "Der Letzte Mann" printed on reverse.



Der letzte Mann.

Aus dem Heldenkampf in der Seeschlacht bei den Falklandinseln am 8. Dezember 1914. Nach dem Gemälde von Professor Hans Bohrdt

Sie haben gefochten eins zu vier,
Nun zieht sie der Tod ins kühle Revier.
Sie haben gefochten vier zu eins,
Die Helden im Strahl des Ewigenscheins.
Nun brennt das Schiff an Bug und Heck,
Die Mannschaft steht auf Vorderdeck.
Und wie sie in die Tiefe sinkt,
Greift sie zur Mühe und grüßt und schwingt,
Bis daß von Fluten begraben die Hand,
Hurra dem Kaiser und Vaterland!
Als sich vollendet das Geschick,
Kieloben treibt's einen Augenblick
Und reckt noch einmal den wunden Rumpf
Und gurgelt hohl und gurgelt dumpf.
Da plötzlich aus der Meeresflut
Taucht ein Matrose, ein junges Blut,
Der hält über See in höchster Not
In der Rechten die Flagge schwarz-weiß-rot.
Mit ihr erklimmt er das brodelnde Brack,
Fest steht er, ein Fels, standhaft und strack,
Er schwingt mit kräftiger Seemannshand
Noch einmal die Flagge fürs Vaterland.
Und als der Rumpf in der Flut versinkt,
Mit beiden Händen die Fahne er schwingt.
Nur als die Welle den Kopf bedeckt,
Aus dem Wasser ein Arm noch die Fahne streckt.
Er läßt sie nicht, er nimmt sie hinein;
Sie soll auch im Tod sein Begleiter fein.

Heinrich Röser.

Feldpostkarte written in pencil to Cologne, undated, no postal markings

D. Zehrfeld, Verlag, Leipzig.