

**Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, AO, CSC, RAN, Chief of Navy**  
**Address to the Centenary Commemoration**  
**of the Battle of Cocos Island**  
**Between HMAS Sydney and SMS Emden**  
**9 November 2014**

- Your Excellency, Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia;
- Mr Luke Simkins, MP, Federal Member for Cowan and representing the Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable Tony Abbot, MP;
- Your Excellency, Dr Christoph Müller; Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- The Honourable Barry Haase, Administrator of Australia's Indian Ocean Territories;
- Ladies and Gentlemen, and in particular, family and friends of the crew of HMAS *Sydney* and SMS *Emden*.
  
- I would like to start by thanking everyone present today: the residents of Cocos Keeling Islands, the visitors from the eastern Australian islands (!!), and visitors from further afield.
- You all do the Royal Australian Navy a great honour by your presence and for that, on behalf of the Navy, I am most grateful.
- This battle, this engagement, was enormously significant for our Navy.
  - For the preceding months, Australian warships had been deployed, as individual ships and as task groups, arrayed for battle and as convoy escorts, from the archipelago to the Pacific, all around our coast and into the Indian Ocean.
  - The tasks were important, searching for the German East Asiatic Squadron and taking over Germany's Pacific possessions and communications network.
  - But a Navy is built on its ability to fight and win at sea.
  - And while we had inherited a great tradition of success from the Royal Navy, the Royal Australian Navy had not yet had an opportunity to make its own mark.
  - HMAS *Sydney's* defeat of SMS *Emden* was and remains an important achievement in our history – our first victory – our first demonstration of the ability to fight and win at sea.
- Of course such battles do not take place in a vacuum.
- Rather they are instances of frightening intensity in much larger military campaigns.
- For Germany, the maritime campaign in the Indian Ocean was aimed at reducing the ability of the widely dispersed elements of the British Empire to have an influence on the war in Europe – perhaps even to knock an element out of the war if a telling blow could be landed.
  - And there is no doubt the operations of the *Emden* had an impact far beyond what you might expect of a ship of her size and power.
  - Adroitly commanded and expertly fought, *Emden's* raiding activities seriously degraded the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean.
  - That *Emden* and her crew were recognised by one of only two Iron Crosses to be awarded to ships of the German navy is no surprise.

- The exchange during our International Fleet Review of an Australian Red Kangaroo and the Iron Cross worn by the most recent *Emden* was an act of great generosity and an honour the Royal Australian Navy holds dear.
- For Australia, the stakes were even higher – quite simply, without the ability to move troops, equipment and trading goods by sea, the country could not make any meaningful contribution to the war effort.
  - The first echelon of the Australian Imperial Force, embarked in the 1<sup>st</sup> Anzac convoy was the single most valuable Australian cargo in a sea of trade which connected us to the world.
  - The vaguest of threats from *Emden's* compatriots to the New Zealand portion of the convoy had delayed their sailing.
  - And given *Emden's* consistently effective conduct, there is little doubt she posed a serious threat to the 1<sup>st</sup> Anzac convoy.
  - Had she by chance found the convoy, she may well have done significant damage.
- As events transpired, *Emden* was unaware of the close proximity of the convoy and the potential for such a rapid reaction from the convoy escort when she put her landing party ashore to cut the cable and radio communications from Cocos Island.
- Remembering his duty to protect the convoy, the Captain of HMAS *Melbourne*, the escort commander, dispatched HMAS *Sydney* to seek out and destroy *Emden*.
- The two ships sighted each other around 9am and the engagement began about 30 minutes later.
  - Both ships fought to their strengths and the smaller less heavily armed *Emden* fought well, but unable to land a disabling blow early, she was soon badly damaged and then run aground on North Keeling Island.
  - Her destruction was hugely important for Australia's ability to support the war effort.
- The *Sydney-Emden* battle was brutal and the German casualties were particularly significant.
- What stands out for me, and for many, even a century on, is the manner in which both ships' companies conducted themselves once the battle was over.
  - The same strenuous efforts that had previously been directed towards each other's demise were now put towards the saving of life.
  - The Captains, Glossop of *Sydney* and von Müller of *Emden*, led by example with their respect for each other.
  - And the medical personnel, Australian and German, worked side-by-side to help the injured.
- As we remember the crews of HMAS *Sydney* and SMS *Emden*, we honour the best and the brightest, whose honour, courage and compassion are examples that will endure.
  - This Friendship Mast is a symbol of what these remarkable people achieved out of a conflict.
  - I believe we do well to remember them.
    - To remember them as sailors and to remember them as people, fathers, husbands, brothers, sons.
    - To remember their conduct and their sacrifice.
    - To remember the price they paid.
  - And in remembering them, we honour them.

- It is my wish that our friendship will endure with the memory of those who forged it amidst the terrors of war.
- Lest we forget.