



Address by

His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

*for the Centenary of the Battle of Cocos Island and the Dedication of the
Sydney-Emden Friendship Mast*

9 November 2014

(4m30s)

- Mr Luke Simkins MP, Federal Member for Cowan and representing the Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable Tony Abbott MP;
- His Excellency Dr Christoph Müller, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- The Honourable Barry Haase, Administrator of Australia's Indian Ocean Territories;
- The Honourable Warren Snowden MP, Federal Member for Lingiari
- Vice Admiral Tim Barrett AO CSC RAN, Chief of Navy;
- Ladies and Gentlemen—and in particular, family and friends of the crews of HMAS Sydney and SMS Emden.

A hundred years ago today, in this remote part of the Indian Ocean, HMAS Sydney and SMS Emden fought one of the first and most decisive naval battles of the Great War.

It was a fierce and ferocious battle.

When the seas had settled, 140 sailors were dead—136 from the sunken Emden and 4 from the Sydney.

It is this loss of life, on both sides, that we come here to remember and commemorate.

In particular, it is the coming together of the families and friends—from both sides of the battle—that is so important, as we remember, rebuild and move forward as one.

When all is said and done, these men fought together—they died together—and it is right that we remember them together.

In hindsight, we can see just how significant the battle between the Sydney and the Emden was.

This was a coming of age for Australia's fledgling navy.

It was our first victory at sea.

It proved to us that we could hold our own in the heat of a battle against an experienced adversary.

To successfully fight 'toe to toe', 'ship on ship', with such a distinguished and revered opponent was considered a great achievement.

This was a testing initiation for a young Navy and a young nation—and it was an initiation that was passed.

Indeed, much of the pride and passion we see in the Royal Australian Navy today can be traced to the endeavour and bravery shown by the crew of the Sydney.

And for a newly formed federation there was also a burgeoning sense of national pride and the genesis of the ANZAC spirit.

For its part the Emden had already proven its credentials.

Time and again, Captain Karl Von Muller and his crew had prevailed in foreign waters.

For months the Emden had patrolled this region, with a ruthless tactical nous and an unparalleled humanitarian spirit.

It had clinically sunk or captured 24 commercial vessels and destroyed Russian and French warships.

Yet it did all this whilst only inflicting one death.

Captain Von Muller achieved military success, but he did so with a great humanity and a genuine respect for the sanctity of human life.

To be remembered alongside his crew as the 'Last Gentlemen of War' is something he, his family, and the German people can be very proud of.

For Australia, the loss of the Emden signalled a turning point in our nation's evolving war effort.

Shipping and supply lines to Europe were no longer under immediate threat—and the passage of the thousands of troops who had only just set sail for Egypt was assured.

This was an early and pivotal battle in what was to be a long and protracted war.

By the war's end, over 215,000 Australians and more than six million Germans would be killed or wounded—an extraordinary human toll for both nations.

It is a measure of the respect and friendship that has grown between our countries that I stand here, 'shoulder to shoulder', with Germany's ambassador to Australia as we remember this sea battle together.

On behalf of all Australians I welcome you to this memorial.

Under this *Friendship Mast*, under the bells of both ships, we jointly pay our lasting respects to the sailors who fought and died together on these seas exactly a century ago.

Thank you.

-ends-