



Address by

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

*for the Launch of the Cocos Keeling Islands Shire Sydney-Emden Gazebo  
and the Direction Island Interpretive Trails*

*8 November 2014*

*(4mins)*

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- Mr Luke Simkins MP, Federal Member for Cowan and representing the Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable Tony Abbot 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;
- Mr Aindil Minkom, President of the Cocos Keeling Islands Shire;

- Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great privilege for Lynne and me to be here to share the 'Weekend of Commemorations' of the Centenary of the Sydney-Emden battle.

Last night, we were honoured to meet some of the family and friends of the crews of HMAS Sydney and SMS Emden.

We heard the stories of your loved ones that have been carefully and proudly passed from one generation to the next—stories of mateship, camaraderie, daring nautical skill, and above all, a tenacious commitment to the task at hand.

In the weeks leading-up to the battle, the Emden, under the command of Captain von Muller, had captured or sunk almost 100,000 tons of merchant shipping.

Alone and creating havoc in the Indian Ocean, the Emden was posing a serious threat to allied shipping routes, at a time when the first ANZAC convoy had just departed Albany for the Middle East.

As the convoy came into the vicinity of the Cocos Islands, HMAS Sydney, under the command of Captain Glossop,

intercepted distress signals indicating that a 'strange warship' was threatening the islands.

Many of you are very familiar with the details of the battle—the loss of Australian lives early in the engagement and the decision by Captain von Muller to run the Emden onto the reef to preserve the lives of his surviving crew.

However, following an intense 40 minutes, and after the seas had settled, 140 sailors were lost—136 Germans and four from the Sydney.

It is these stories—that deeper understanding and appreciation of the Sydney-Emden battle one hundred years ago—that brings us here today.

Under this gazebo, along this interpretive trail, we honour the service and memory of those gallant men.

The descriptive panels around us give a detailed account of that day.

They also provide an insight into the human dimension of battle—the charged emotions of sailors in a young Australian navy seeing action for the first time—and the battle-hardened German crew that had already inflicted so much damage throughout the region.

Author Mike Carlton tells us in his recent book, 'First Victory', how an Emden sailor was taken to the wardroom of Sydney to be treated for a shrapnel wound in his back.

*In his diary, the German sailor wrote: "We were at once properly bandaged and well-treated as far as circumstances allowed. Next to me lay a sailor of the Sydney. He had his right foot blown away. He bent himself towards me and gave me his hand."*

In many ways, that simple action, a century ago, is emblematic of the spirit in which we gather this weekend—where we stand shoulder to shoulder, with outstretched hands, in friendship and in memory.

These men fought together, they died together, and it is right that we remember them together.

Shortly, it will be my privilege to cut the ribbon that officially opens this gazebo and interpretive trail, and in doing so, encourage a deeper understanding of this important chapter in our history.

Thank you.