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4 DR 662
Australian
War Memorial

Naval Engagement with "Emden"
written by L. Sgt Tojole, Owiets

580/2/771

H. M. & J. + 3 Owiets

The world

11. 14.

Dear Father & Mother

Long before you get this letter you will have heard of our exciting little naval engagement with "Emden" but I must tell you our view of it. We passed on the East side of the Cocos Island to mislead the enemy. The usual track being the west. At 5 a.m. the Owiets wireless caught a strange message which now proves to have been from the "Emden" (German Cruiser) to her coaling ship. Soon after another wireless came from Cocos Isd that a strange cruiser vessel was entering the harbour. The "Sydney" set out at full steam to cover that 50 miles in a couple of hours & soon signalled back "enemy in sight" - then again "Engaging the enemy travelling North" this would have taken them straight to us so the "Melbourne" and the "Jap" went through the water like big sharks to shepherd them off. Before they got there the "Sydney" signalled "Enemy beached to avoid sinking" am chasing collier."

(2)
She chased the collier & ^{sank} caught her. The "Emden" had
3 funnels & a mast blown out & the Sydney a couple of
men killed & several wounded. It was grand to know
we were beginning to ^{almost} take an active part & fun to notice
the fighting blood come up in every man on our ship.
It was a feeling I never had before & all were longing to
dip in the pie. We strained our necks & eyes in the direction
of the fight & the cheers would go up at every message.
The Emden had crossed our track a few hours before
ahead of us & the scouts went very slowly for a long time after
suspecting mines, but here we are safe & sound within a few
days sail of Ceylon. ^{part of second letter} While we were in Colombo the "Sydney"
brought in her German prisoners & mangled & such was the
state on board that they requested by wireless to be received
in silence. We heard the full account in a lecture a couple of
nights back by Mr. Bean war-correspondent for Melbourne diaries
on the "Orvieto" & we know as little of the horrors of war as
a pig does of Sunday. He spared the audience the worst details.
The duel was of the finest yet of all modern wars & both
sides deserve the highest praise for their gallantry.
But the poor "Emden & her crew" the fortune of war.
The fight will be recorded in the best of Australian history as a
stirring struggle & is a good example of a modern naval battle.
The "Emden" surprised the Sydney by the quickness of her fire.
But the gunnery was not so accurate and deadly. Her guns were
the 4 inch & the Sydney had the more powerful 6 inch of greater range
& weight. The duel took place about 50 miles from us, 50 miles is not
far to vessels that can travel 30 miles an hour. We could just hear
the faint roll of the cannon over the ocean. The two went straight
at it manoeuvring for positions, the faster pace of the "Sydney" helping
her to maintain the choice of places. For a quarter of an hour
honors were even, but then the Sydney got the upper hand & battered
the enemy so badly, that she was on fire in several places

hidden in volumes of smoke, her mast & 3 funnels blown
 out - and her decks almost unrecognisable as a ship at
 all, during the two hours which it lasted, The Sydney
 fired 650 shells, had 132 killed & scores wounded.
 When the Emden ran ashore to avoid sinking, The Sydney
 chased the collier & ^{sank} caught her, meanwhile the suffering on
 the "Emden" was awful - no food or water for 24 hours
 living dead & mangled huddled in the fore end of the
 deck which alone could be occupied. Many died several
 went mad & drank sea water. Sydney rescued remainders
 as soon as possible, picked up some swimmers who had
 been blown overboard & had been swimming 8 hours & brought
 them to Colombo. 45 of the German prisoners were transferred
 to the "Orizto", where they were received by an armed guard
 in silence. & are now kept in one corner of the ship by themselves.
 They are rather a smart looking lot, not so good a stamp
 as our troops, but not to be despised. Amongst them as a
 Lieutenant, a nephew of the Kaiser, rather an impudent chap
 he was stopped suddenly yesterday by a sentry's bayonet.
 The prisoners are treated better than our own troops. but
 are under a close watch. Some of them speak English fairly well
 they reckon the Sydney put up a fine performance and that
 they have been through ~~hell~~ worse than "hell".
 a guard, armed with fixed bayonets & ball cartridges is over
 them day & night. Our company was on guard last night.
 I was in charge of one relief & we now have the experience
 of which we ^{used to} reap. Our guard 3 reliefs of 13 men each.

(41)

220/67

2 hours on & four hours off, went on at six a.m. yesterday morning & came off this evening. At night the procedure is the same.

For instance - I was roused at 10 p.m. by the nearest sentry to the guard room (the whole guard sleep fully dressed, just lie down on the floor), awakened my relief, issued ball cartridges, 20 rounds per man, 10 in the rifle - fixed bayonets & took them round by lantern light through the sleeping ship to relieve the old guard at 10 different posts over the prisoners - took over each sentry's duties warned if found asleep at posts would be shot & marched the old guard back to lie down for several hrs sleep.

I sat up in the guard room till midnight. When the next relief was roused & we slept - till 4 a.m. when our relief went on again. It seems uneasy going the rounds & being pulled up suddenly with "Halt Who goes there" and a gleaming bayonet pointed at you. For the sentry is the boss of the position & will stop you for good if you don't stop at once - Officer or man.

The aeronaut Gulland (Frenchman) is on board here & one of ~~my~~ ^{my} sentries scalded all his feet off last night, in a dark passage.

The Germans are restless & uneasy they hear the screeching of the shells & cries of the wounded.

The weather is tropical, very hot - night & day, almost unbearable down in the troop decks - nearly all sleep on deck, wearing a happy smile & a cool appearance. We have several British warships with us & a dangerous looking Jap cruiser.

The sunsets in the tropics beat anything in the gum trees - love to all at home.

Your affectionate son

Frank J. Ollie

Capt J. Olle
to his parents

4/23

Lt/Col J. Olle.

5th Battalion

D.O.W 31-5-15.

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